"Honour" based abuse, violence and killings

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Introduction to the special issue on honour-based abuse, violence and killings

In acknowledgement of the many efforts made to increase our knowledge on honour crimes, the Journal of Aggression, Conflict, and Peace Research (JACPR) is publishing this special edition on honour-based abuse, violence and killings.

In the past two decades, a series of high-profile honour killings has raised awareness of an archaic form of abuse occurring not only behind closed doors but also within closed community walls. Despite their historic and ubiquitous occurrence, honour crimes are now more commonly associated with Middle Eastern or South Asian families living in patriarchal collectivist cultures in countries of origin and diasporic communities worldwide. Honour abuse victims – mostly young females – are reportedly controlled, coerced, forced into marriage, humiliated, beaten, tortured and even murdered by close relatives in the name of so-called “honour”. This cultural conceptualisation of honour is both powerful and pervasive. Built upon rigid gender-based hierarchies, it is often used to promote and excuse aggressive hypermasculinity and female dehumanisation. It is in this context that an influential first wave of scholarly research has been articulately produced, dismantling honour-based abuse using a gendered lens.

Due to their focus on peripheral topics, this collection of papers perhaps reflects the beginning of a second wave of research, adding new dimensions to our empirical knowledge on honour abuse. These papers, submitted from across Asia, Europe and North America, reflect two broad themes. First, topics that relate to obstacles in formal help-seeking responses include the police treatment of vulnerable “at risk” adults (Aplin, 2018), victims’ concerns about reporting to police (Gangoli et al., 2018) and the professional management of collective violence (Lidman and Hong, 2018). Second, novel issues that explicitly broaden current knowledge include comparisons with anti-LGBTQ homicides (Henry et al., 2018), perceptions of abuse from multiple nations (Lowe et al., 2018) and female perpetrators (Bates, 2018). As a collection, these papers indicate avenues for future research. Therefore, I would like to use them as a starting point to offer suggestions for how research in this area may best advance.

As a psychologist, I am eager for empirical research to use established, social psychological theories to explain honour-based abuse. Since first proposed by Nisbett and Cohen (1996), a plethora of research has examined males’ readiness to aggress in “cultures of honour”, yet reference to this is uncommon despite its clear relevance. Psychologically oriented motivational models of honour violence (based on theory of planned behaviour, e.g. Roberts, 2014) are also likely to be valuable.

Applying alternate perspectives permits a more holistic examination of questions such as “why do some males in collectivistic honour cultures use or justify extreme honour-based violence or coercion against female kin, while others do not?” It would also be useful if empirical attention focused not only on why some people aggress but also the nuances in their attitudes and motivations for doing so. This would help us understand why some males oppose or desist honour-based abuse, despite the powerful force of social expectations. Other questions include “why do some females endorse or perpetrate honour abuse against other females in collectivistic cultures of honour?” This topic is often overlooked even though it conflicts with traditional gender role expectations of women as non-aggressive and protective of close kin. In the broader aggression literature, contemporary knowledge on female abusers indicates that honour abuse by women will not be satisfactorily explained by forcefully extrapolating from research on male aggression. This view is amplified by recent empirical research that
challenges traditional views with reports of mothers, in particular, using extreme methods of honour abuse, often against their own daughters, that cannot always be explained by male coercion (Aplin, 2017; Bates, 2018; Khan, 2018).

To aid the myriad challenges faced by safeguarding practitioners and emergency services, I am also keen for evidence-based research to bridge the gap between knowledge and practice. For perpetrators, effective violence management ought to be both culturally aware and based on validated methods. A good example is the PATRIARCH (Belfrage et al., 2012), developed specifically to guide professionals on the assessment of honour-based crime. Empirically rooted psychological theories, currently used in interventions to promote prosocial attitudes and victim empathy in comparable violent offender groups, provide a framework for designing effective perpetrator programmes. If the goal of our collective efforts is a change in how “honour” is misconstrued (e.g. “Sharaf Heroes” programme, Rexvid and Schlytter, 2012), then adopting robust models of attitudinal change seem a good place to start.

My final words are of gratitude to those involved in the production of this special issue. I thank all authors who submitted their work to JACPR, the expert reviewers for their meticulous and thoughtful comments, the publishing team for ensuring a quality and timely publication and finally, Editor in Chief, Jane Ireland, for the opportunity to act as Guest Editor on what I believe is a laudable first special edition on this topic.

References


Honour based abuse: the response by professionals to vulnerable adult investigations

Rachael L. Aplin

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine responses by police and Adult Social Care to honour based abuse (HBA) victims who have a diagnosed or perceived vulnerability, such as a physical disability or mental health issue. The aim is to improve professional practice in ensuring vulnerable victims are safeguarded.

Design/methodology/approach – Findings are drawn from 100 HBA investigations (2012-2014) derived from classified police electronic records and interviews with 15, predominantly specialist, public protection police officers in one UK force.

Findings – HBA against vulnerable adults is an obscure crime area. In cases of diagnosed vulnerability (3 per cent), police officers wrongly attributed “freewill” and choice to vulnerable adults who legally lacked the capacity to consent to marriage. Conversely, in 9 per cent of cases where victims were depressed and/or self-harming, perpetrators exaggerated the poor mental health of victims in order to discredit them to law enforcement. Professionals illogically latched onto perpetrator explanations and in turn undermined and problematised the victims.

Research limitations/implications – There is limited access to data on vulnerable adult abuse, making this an under researched area of crime.

Practical implications – Failing to undertake risk assessments, or record whether the victim is legally vulnerable should lead to a review of police practice. An evaluation of joint working arrangements is necessary concerning which agency (police or Adult Social Care) should take primacy.

Social implications – Vulnerable adult victims were retained in risk predicaments alongside perpetrating family members.

Originality/value – Police officers suggesting vulnerable adults can “consent” to marriage is a new concept, along with issues of goal displacement which illustrates avoidance behaviours by professionals and under protection by the state.

Keywords Mental health, Disability, Policing, Honour based abuse, Self-harming, Vulnerable adult abuse

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

This paper focuses largely on vulnerable adult experiences of honour based abuse (HBA). It explores the treatment of victims by perpetrating relatives, and the interactions between perpetrators, victims and professionals (police and social services).

Extant research suggests that vulnerable mentally ill and/or disabled people are at particular risk of being forced into a marriage (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC, 2015); Home Office: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2016; Lakhani, 2008; Valios, 2008). The National UK figures for forced marriages of vulnerable adults in 2015 stood at 12 per cent (141 cases) (Home Office: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2016).

Under section 16 of Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act (1999), those legally defined as “vulnerable” are children under the age of 18 years, those with a mental disorder (defined under...
the Mental Health Act, 1983), those with impaired social functioning (such as a learning difficulty), i.e. Asperger’s syndrome; and those with a physical disability (e.g. blindness, diabetes or multiple sclerosis).

It must be stressed that legally, vulnerable victims lack the capacity to make decisions, such as getting married and consenting to sexual relations. Neither can such decisions be made by others on behalf of the victims (Mental Capacity Act Codes of Practice, 2013, p. 17). Legislation currently imposes responsibilities on local authorities to make enquiries when vulnerable adults are at risk of being abused or neglected, in an effort to prevent harm before it occurs (Department of Health, 2016). The findings indicate that these safeguarding precepts fall short in practice.

Methodology

Findings are derived from a PhD study researching discretionary police practices when investigating HBA. The research design involved a dual phase methodology, whereby 100 incidents of HBA (2012-2014) reported to one police force were examined in detail. The police force itself was a large urban police force containing sizeable populations of South-East Asians. The researcher sought access from the chief constable of that force. These cases constituted archived classified electronic police records. In each case, the researcher examined a host of related electronic documentary records (i.e. initial incident report; the domestic abuse, stalking and honour based (DASH) risk assessment; crime report; intelligence report; a Public Protection Investigation (PPI) log which documents the secondary investigation undertaken by professionals; other agency reports; police interview records; and final results) in order to obtain a holistic, “richer picture” (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008, p. 72) of interactions between victims, perpetrators and professionals.

In all, 15 semi-structured interviews also took place (2016) with predominantly detective officers working within the public protection division. The qualifying criterion was that all officers required operational or strategic experience in HBA investigations. Of the officers, 14 had worked or were currently operational within public protection, only two of these were employed at strategic level. One uniformed officer from a neighbourhood unit took part in the study. Officers had a combined experience of 228 years policing service.

The mixed method design, focusing on case comparison, allowed the researcher to obtain a stronger more “complete” and holistic understanding of the research problem (Bryman, 2012; Cresswell, 2014). Using both data sets confirmed and corroborated ideas via triangulation. Consequently, mixed methods are said to provide greater validity (Bryman, 2012; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Incident cases are identified by case number, and police interviews are delineated by letter.

Findings

The findings indicated that HBA against vulnerable adults was a relatively obscure and specialist area of crime. As one specialist public protection officer stated:

I’ve never dealt with any and I don’t know of anybody in our office who has dealt with any (police officer p).

Only 9 per cent of the incident sample (9/100) were categorised by the researcher as vulnerable due to a mental disorder, learning difficulty or physical disability. Of these, only 3 per cent (3/100) had a recognised and long standing medical condition, which pre-existed separately from the long-term effects of HBA, such as a learning difficulty (case 12), mental and physical disability of blindness (case 46), and a combined mental disorder and learning difficulty (case 61) (Figure 1).

The other 6 per cent[1] of victims were identified as “vulnerable” by the researcher because of the long-term mental trauma of HBA, which led victims to serious self-injury. These low numbers rationalise why half of the specialist officers interviewed (8/15) (53 per cent)[2] had no experience of investigating vulnerable victim cases. Despite evidence of some “vulnerability” logged within the police records, only one victim (1/100) was formally categorised by the attendant officer as a “vulnerable adult” (case 46). This either suggests that officers are poor at recognising vulnerability, or alternatively that officers recognise vulnerability but make a decision not to formally record it.
Exploitation of the vulnerable

The practice of marrying vulnerable victims appears to be effected to ensure that vulnerable offspring were cared for, due to their perceived limited options and because their parents were ageing. Furthermore, exploiting vulnerability provides visas for foreigners wanting to reside in the UK (Lakhani, 2008; Shaw, 2001). This was evident when a 19-year-old adult female on a hospital mental health ward showed staff photographs of a “party” on her mobile phone, which was later established to be her wedding. The victim had been married without her understanding. Since that time her husband had two UK visa rejections, because she lacked capacity to be his surety. Police were proactive in ensuring that her and her siblings were subjects of forced marriage protection orders (FMPO). Although officers sought to annul the marriage, this could not be achieved until she was mentally well; and currently the victim attests she is “happy to be married”. Due to the visa rejections, parents persevered, telling staff:

We are going to take our daughter back to Pakistan so she can get pregnant by her husband so then he can get a visa because he’s got a dependent (police officer j).

Rather than considering this a reciprocal arrangement, deception is employed by the family of the vulnerable adult, because the individual is perceived as being “damaged goods” (police officer h). This was apparent when a female was brought over from Pakistan and was unwittingly duped by the suitor’s family into marrying a UK male with learning difficulties. It was only after the marriage and realising that her husband attended a special day care centre, that the female began to fathom that her husband had learning difficulties (case 30). Such a practice is evident in wider academic discourse and is termed a “double” forced marriage (Shaw, 2001; Sanghera, as cited in Valios, 2008).

However, of deeper concern is the lack of effective intervention by professionals, with vulnerable adults sometimes being left in the care of perpetrators. To illustrate, a 14-year-old had severe learning difficulties and physical disabilities, and was deemed by her family as poor marriage material and “damaged goods” (police officer h). Her parents facilitated her sexual abuse to an older male living with them and she became pregnant. Such was her disability that the police were unable to interview her. Although an abortion was arranged by the authorities, she was not removed from the family home by any agency, despite her having no capacity to consent to the abuse due to her age and her disability. The mysterious male was “spirited” away by the family, who, in turn, denied their involvement in facilitating the pregnancy, both factors scuppering any potential police investigation (police officer h). In a different case, one Sikh girl was violently attacked with a ceremonial sword for becoming pregnant to her Muslim boyfriend and was left permanently disabled by the attack. Yet post incident, the social services left the victim in the care of perpetrating family members because it could not be established who inflicted the injuries (police officer h).

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Freewill and “choice” ascribed to vulnerable victims

Some cases illustrated how professionals downplayed or entirely denied victim vulnerability, suggesting that victims had the capacity and freewill to stop a forced marriage of their own volition. This approach was effected by officers avoiding investigation or omitting information from documents, in several cases abrogating responsibility to the specialist public protection department. In all three cases of HBA vulnerable adult (case 12, 46 and 61) officers recorded minimal information, with no officer completing a DASH risk assessment, which was concerning given that lack of capacity to consent under the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act, 1999 (special measures procedures) legislation constitutes grounds for enhanced safeguarding. None of the victims were formally video interviewed, or statemented, to obtain an account. In two of the cases, vulnerable adults were forced into marriages abroad (case 12 and 46), with professionals forewarned of the marriages in both cases prior to the ceremonies taking place. In one case, a father reported to the police that his wife was sending their daughter with learning difficulties abroad to be married. The attendant officer suggested the victim consented to the treatment meted out by relatives and abrogated the case, via e-mail, to a Public Protection Investigation Unit sergeant, suggesting the victim was in:

Good spirits. There was no evidence of coercion and she could walk away from this if she wanted to. Regardless if her father suspects the future husband to be a drug dealer, she is an adult and able to make her own decisions (case 12).

Unfortunately, that supervisor was on leave for two days. Consequently, the victim was taken to Pakistan and forced to marry, with no action taken and no safeguarding or rescue (case 12).

What was notable, within the “freewill” argument, was the way professionals overlooked protestations by the victim and unquestioningly accepted explanations proffered by perpetrating relatives. For instance, a mentally disabled and blind victim had, according to the victims’ sister, threatened to harm herself unless she was permitted to marry her first cousin (case 46). This explanation was accepted and consequently neither police or Adult Social Care took action to rescue the vulnerable victim from Pakistan[3]. The social worker updated the police who consequently documented the results on their records:

(Victim) made threats to harm herself if she was not allowed to marry her first cousin. Victim is expected back in UK by end of June, however there are concerns that she could be pregnant by then. We are still unsure about her level of capacity to consent to marriage. A FMPO may be difficult to obtain[4] due to the marriage already taken place and unable to prove capacity at the time. However, if (victim) states in any way that she was coerced or pressured unduly (which does not appear to be the case at present), then we should apply for an FMPO immediately. We are still working on hearsay and we do not want to alienate the family or appear heavy handed at all. If (victim) does not return to UK by end of June we need to arrange a meeting. /.../ It is worth noting that the victim at this stage seems to have persuaded her parents to allow her to marry, which would actually be the polar opposite to a forced marriage. Hopefully this will become clear at the end of the month (case 46).

There are many points gleaned from this extract. First, the lack of investigation was evident. Under HBA force policy, specialist officers are obligated to make enquiries with the High Commission and Forced Marriage Unit to precipitate a rescue. Yet in this case, front line police officers left responsibility for the incident to Adult Social Care to manage and did not flag the case to specialist officers. Neither did officers obtain details of the suitor she was forced to marry. The fact that the spouse could seek residency to come to the UK was also not considered[5]. As argued by Roberts et al. (2014) police must take primacy in such situations, but instead they played a grey, almost invisible role. Second, the case showed how professionals latched onto the sisters account as bona fide, which lay at polar extremes with the victims’ testimony. On her return to the UK, the newly married victim was “distressed, angry and hostile” at the “control” and “bullying” she was subjected to by family members, and consequently she:

“Stopped taking her own medication” /.../ [and was] /... “refusing treatment and all medical appointments” (case 46).

Professionals accepted that the victim, by choice, “stopped taking her medication” (case 46), without considering whether this could be her way of “protesting” to the marriage, as explored by
Rasool and Payton (2014) concerning self-harming and suicidal victims. Alternatively, the family may have denied the victim medication, in order to make her more compliant; evident in a US study, in which caregivers coercively used medication both to sedate and to withhold from vulnerable adults with disabilities, as a form of controlling punishment (Erwin, 2000). Denying medical services is specifically alluded to in the new UK offence of controlling or coercive behaviour (Serious Crime Act, 2015).

Third, the extract reflects inertia by public bodies, in which the only actionable item was to have a “meeting” had the victim not returned by June. The extract illustrates how the classified record appears to perform a function (Prior, 2011) and is purely “recipient designed” (Atkinson and Coffey, 2011, p. 89), acting as a discursive device to persuade the audience (management) that no action is required. Fourth, although there was scant evidence of reverse racism/race anxiety in the incident data findings (4/100), use of the term “heavy handed” implied that professionals feared that accusations of racism may be levelled, were they to allege that the vulnerable victim was coerced into marriage. Such race anxiety by practitioners results in a failure to proactively tackle the abuse (Burman et al., 2004; Siddiqui, 2003). In effect, it dilutes the professional response to the abuse, in which victims remain under-protected.

It is significant to note that the “freewill” theme was similarly apparent within child cases and non-vulnerable adults. For example, a victim had become pregnant with her love choice boyfriend, and there were three separate incidents reporting threats to kill involving the same victim. In the final report, the daughter under “house arrest” by family members had allegedly had a “miscarriage” at a private clinic (case 65 and 67, one case outside the sample). According to police reports, the victim “made her own decisions to go back into the house” and return to perpetrating family members of her “own freewill” (case 65 and 67 linked). By officers asserting that the victim made her “own choices” (case 67), it appears to absolve officers from criticism, should anything subsequently “happen” to the victim. The notion that victims “consent” and make their own choices appears to place onus for a course of action squarely on victims, thereby negating the need for police action. It also functions as a means of self-preservation, should anything subsequently “happen” to victims and officers be held accountable. Yet in the case of vulnerable victims, the freewill argument cannot be applied to vulnerable victims who legally lack the capacity to consent. Principle 4 of the Mental Capacity Act legally obliges authorities to make decisions which are in the best interests of the individuals that lack capacity (Mental Capacity Act Codes of Practice, 2013, p. 65), rather than following the victims alleged “wishes”. The contention is that to admit victim vulnerability would inevitably make inaction by the authorities untenable, which, it is argued, is precisely why professionals denied victim vulnerability. Given that this freewill argument was evident across all victim types (vulnerable victims, adults and children) suggests this is a patterned discretionary police practice.

The key risks “age”, depression and self-injurious behaviour

The key spike of self-injuring HBA victims were aged 18-22 years in this sample, with the average age of victims established at 22.6 years. This research correlates entirely with Chesler’s (2010) worldwide study of 230 honour killings and also Chesler and Bloom’s (2012) findings regarding the highest risk age, which averages at 22.5 years[6]. These risk periods dovetail with the depression and self-injury findings, in which 74 per cent (29/39) of those victims suffering depression were aged 24 years or under, including children (10/39), with severe cases of self-injury aged between 18 and 24 years (6/9).

Findings showed 29 per cent (29/100) of victims self-injured, had suicidal ideation and/or attempted suicide, of which overdosing was the most prominent method. Three of the eight overdose victims were children (case 26, 45 and 93). Of this subset, 62 per cent (18/29) originated from Pakistan, 14 per cent (4/29) from Bangladesh, followed by India (10 per cent) (3/29), Kurdistan (7 per cent) (2/29) and Libya (7 per cent) (2/29). Only one of the self-harming victims was male. Of the 29 cases, 27.5 per cent (8/29) were children. One child attempted to jump from a first-floor window because her father discovered she owned a mobile phone (case 62) (Figure 2).
Poor mental health appeared to be a consequence of HBA, related to the pressure of forced marriage, rather than indicative of victims having a pre-existing mental health condition. For example, three women threatened to kill themselves based on a refusal to succumb to forced marriage (case 11, 81, 27); one male victim threatened to throw himself from a bridge when, after a forced marriage, the family discovered he was in a long-term relationship with a white girlfriend (case 77). Two victims took overdoses as “stalling” mechanisms to prevent a forced marriage, with one stating that she had “to try and make herself poorly to stop the wedding” (case 56, also 35). A third overdose victim had already been forced to marry and took the overdose fearing “they may make her go back there” (Pakistan) (case 28). Immediately following the death of her mother abroad, one victim was told by her brother that she would be “married off” and this caused her to drink bleach. Since that time, she had been cutting her wrists and arms (case 37).

One young victim had slashed her wrists twice the previous month in front of her stepmother, due to a wedding being planned, and was derided for being “too westernised” (case 34). Another victim experienced chronic depression and panic attacks and had been placed in an unhappy arranged marriage ten-years earlier, which she had just fled from (case 2). Extant research also supports the contention that self-injury is a consequence of HBA and forced marriage amongst young Asian women, rather than symptomatic of problematic victims (Rasool and Payton, 2014; Shahid and Hyder, 2008; Siddiqui and Patel, 2003). Young Asian women, aged between 15 and 34 years, are two to three times more likely than white counterparts in the general populous to commit or attempt suicide (Ahmed et al., 2007; Rasool and Payton, 2014; Siddiqui, 2003). As the pressure to marry and conform to parental expectation intensifies, the risks to victim’s increases, impacting on self-injury and suicide rates. Such acts appeared to be a means of protest or coping strategies for victims (Rasool and Payton, 2014).

Of the 39 cases of depression (39/100), 26 per cent were children (10/39). A further 26 per cent (10/39) were aged 25-33 years. Almost half the sample subset suffering depression (48 per cent) (19/39) were aged between 18 and 24 years, which was delineated as key risk “age” for HBA victims. Victims symptoms ranged from chronic depression and panic attacks to feeling “very depressed” “low” and “isolated” from friends.

Even though victims were labelled as unstable within the electronic police record, due to perpetrator influence, none were formally categorised as “vulnerable” within the incident report or crime by attendant officers. Some could suggest that had officers been convinced of genuine vulnerability, this would have been recorded. Although as noted in the physical disabilities section, there were numerous omissions in data recording and therefore this pattern of non-recording is entirely consistent.
Perpetrators ascribe a “mental” label to victims

In 9 per cent of incident cases (9/100) perpetrators exaggerated the poor mental health of victims. This undermined the competency, credibility and reliability of vulnerable victims. Such demonising was often inflicted by the wider collective and not solely the perpetrators:

A male cousin, told police “he believes she doesn’t really know what she is doing” that “she is not all there” and “may not tell officers the truth if other people are present” (case 14).

A brother stated he had “no idea what (the victim) was going on about” and that she was in an “emotionally distressed state” (case 82).

An 18-year-old victim was “not all there” and had been “kidnapped” by her brother-in-law. Despite the family claiming she had a learning difficulty, none was evident. It was ascertained the victim willingly eloped with her brother-in-law lover (case 1).

Parents tried to persuade the authorities the victim was “In a bad way with depression.../...was under the care of a psychiatrist and had threatened suicide but has not been known to self-harm” (case 2).

In the latter case, the mental health nurse confirmed to police that despite her depression, the victim had no pre-existing psychiatric disorder and did have the capacity to make decisions (case 2). The more astute officers recognised that the perpetrator tried to influence officers:

(Mother) was also saying that (victim) had mental health problems; but there was no sign of this whatsoever (case 86).

Furthermore, many perpetrators and supporters disguised the control exerted as acting in the victims “best interests”. One father tried to influence authorities that he was overprotective with his 19-year-old daughter because she had the mental capacity of a 10 to 13-year-old and had an alleged physical incapacity to her right leg. The victim allegedly:

Cannot think for herself and has been protected by him and his wife all of her life.../...he worries about her crossing the road never mind running away from home.../...He said (victim) cannot care for herself and she is very protected by the family, she needs to be (case 33).

Despite the family claiming the victim was vulnerable and the sisters discrediting her as a “nutcase”, research across all police systems (DASH risk assessment document, crime and intelligence reports, etc.) revealed no formal diagnosis of any condition (case 33).

Mental health labels were also used to undermine the victims’ child safeguarding skills. Perpetrators suggested victims represented a physical danger to their children (case 23) that they were unable to financially support their children (case 40) or that mothers were negligent and children should be immediately removed (case 92):

Female has left the house on foot and hasn’t taken her mobile and any baby food and informant is worried for the welfare of these children. Husband claiming that (wife) has assaulted him tonight and that he says she is mentally unstable and claims she cannot cope with the children on her own (case 92).

To summarise, in stark contrast to the findings regarding vulnerable victims with defined learning and physical disabilities; in the case of depression and self-injury, perpetrators often overstated the poor mental health of victims during interactions with professionals. These findings align with the academic assertion that women were “deliberately labelled” by partners and extended family as mentally ill, both to exert control and delegitimise the woman’s claim to freedom when seeking help from agencies (Siddiqui and Patel, 2003, p. 109).

Professionals align with perpetrators, problematise and medicalise victims

Two interrelated points are apparent. First, the ease by which professionals, at face value, accepted the perpetrators assessment of victims. Second, the real or perceived vulnerability of the victim becomes the central “problem” and focus for professionals. This served to deflect attention from criminal behaviours and medicalised, under-policed and under-protected victims. For instance, despite overdosing on three separate occasions and going missing from
home, the attendant officer accepted the family’s assessment that the 16-year-old victim was “attention seeking”:

Honour based issues (are) causing a seemingly normal, very clever young lady to try and kill herself rather than stay at home with what appears at first to be a very happy, clean household. The other children at (address) all spoke freely to me and did not show the same unhappiness and reluctance to be there as (victim) did...the family were all spoken to and seem to be of the opinion she was attention seeking (case 45).

This extract not only problematises the victim, but shows how police officers in trying to predict HBA, erroneously, used traditional indicators of child abuse to negate neglect (a clean home, with other siblings not showing signs of abuse). In another case, rather than address the cause, which was an impending forced marriage, the authorities dealt with the “effect” by sectioning a depressed gay male victim under the mental health act (police officer a). Similarly, a further case showed how the family, and even the estranged husband, portrayed the female victim as mentally ill, resulting in officers aligning with this perspective, even though all related police documentation showed that the victim possessed mental capacity:

She may be suffering a breakdown (that they needed to establish)...what her mental state is...she needs to be spoken to, to establish why she is making these allegations (case 82).

Implicit within the subtext was that the victim was mentally unstable and had fabricated the allegations. These extracts confirm extant research that police, social workers and other professionals often collude with perpetrators in accepting their interpretation of a situation (HMIC, 2014; Siddiqui and Patel, 2003).

In some instances, the disability itself is used by professionals as a tool to discredit and doubt the reliability of the victims’ testimony, thereby justify no further professional action. This was evident when a victim was so traumatised by her husband’s abuse that, like any other victim of serious crime, she was “a bit haphazard in jumping from topic to topic”. The officers write up stated she was:

Struggling to provide a coherent account and was erratic in the information provided. She was clearly upset and also defensive about certain situations. (Victim) openly admitted she was very tired as she had not slept properly for 3-4 weeks and was struggling remembering things due to her medication (case 2).

The victim was traumatised, possibly bordering on PTSD, yet the officer appeared to exploit her use of medication by suggesting her account was unreliable, evident in the repeated word “struggling”. Moreover, the police officer “write up” reflected signs of a rationale being constructed to justify no further action. In this case, the police permitted the perpetrating husband to retain custody of the children, which was a poor decision given that he threatened to “kill her and kill himself” if she tried to abandon the arranged marriage. Having reported the incident, the victim waited patiently for his arrest and for her to undertake a police video interview. Fourteen days later there was no crime report, video interview or arrest. Worry over the children, combined with the perpetrator refusals to leave the family home, led the victim to return back home to the abuse. The victim complained to high ranking officers that the police were “very slow to take any actions or make any progress”. She expressed her feelings as being let down as a “tax payer” and by “the system” (case 2). In a further illustration of this, one adult victim reported having been raped by her uncle in Pakistan and raped by her brother in the UK. Although officers investigated the cases, the alleged impairment of the victim, rather than the necessity to prosecute perpetrators, became the overriding focus by professionals. The victims perceived vulnerabilities, “which had not been defined” (police officer o), were used as rationale to drop the prosecution case, rather than used as grounds to investigate and provide an enhanced service. This was also apparent in the case of the blind and mentally ill victim who had been sent abroad for marriage (case 46). On her return, the victim expressed feeling “cheated or tricked” by family members into a forced marriage. Yet Adult Social Care used the condition of the victim as a means to doubt her account, negating the control and bullying she experienced as a figment of her own “delusional beliefs” (case 46). Aligning with perpetrators and discrediting those suffering from poor mental health was evident in Cockram’s (2003) research where a husband told officers “she’s crazy-look at the medication she takes, and they [police] left” (p. 25; see also HMIC, 2015).
This construction of the victim as a central problem to be “resolved” was also evident in a case involving victims with profound learning difficulties. An officer recounted how a female complained that her family were trying to force her into a marriage. She had a “secret boyfriend” and was adamant she “didn’t want to live their way”. The victim divulged that several of her female relatives were profoundly disabled and were being financially exploited by relatives. She attested to the police officer that they are:

All going to get married off to their cousins. None of them are going to object (police officer d).

Yet the informant was reluctant to formally complain. The officer described the frustrating situation in which Adult Social Care was simply “waiting” for a disclosure from vulnerable victims, who neither had the capacity to consent, nor the capacity to divulge the abuse. The officer stated that services had no opportunity to move victims to safety on the basis “you had the perpetrator on your shoulder” (police officer d). The case was ultimately “left” with Adult Social Care, who instead of addressing the matter in partnership with police, merely identified some health matters that the victims had, which ended up being “the bigger portion of that enquiry” (police officer d). The forced marriage concerns remained unaddressed and the health matters took primacy. Indeed, like many other cases, the extract illustrates not only how professionals were transfixed in inertia, but victims were left in the “care” of perpetrators.

Goal displacement

All these cases illustrate how, rather than address the causal factor of honour abuse, professional attention deflected towards the problematising of victims, focusing their gaze on the alleged or real “impairment”. Work conducted by Manning (1978), Lipsky (1980/2010) and Knott and Miller (1987) assists in theorising why this occurs. Rather than consider this an issue of poor or absent training, they highlight the way professionals within some organisations work, alluding to a bureaucratic dysfunction termed “goal displacement”. This involves professionals that “lose track of their goals and engage in ritualistic behaviour substituting means for ends.../...their objective is forgotten” (Manning, 1978, p. 21). Practitioners, certainly within this sample, appear to focus on problems that are easier to resolve, such as having a meeting, managing a teenager’s perceived problematic behaviour or a victim “impairment”, “waiting” for a disclosure, dealing with ancillary health issues, rather than dealing with the allegation of HBA. It is argued that professionals retreated behind the process of rules and regulations as an “avoidance strategy” (Knott and Miller, 1987, p. 110), which allowed them to disengage from the victims’ needs.

Conclusions

To conclude, albeit this is an obscure and specialist area of crime, HBA is perpetrated against vulnerable adults, with forced marriage as the “resolution” in many situations.

Particularly in cases of mental health, perpetrators amplified the poor mental health of victims during interactions with professionals. Perpetrators packaged control as a necessity, that victims needed protecting from themselves and lacked the capacity to make coherent decisions, thereby justifying the controls in place. In 9 per cent of incidents analysed, relatives stigmatised victims as mentally unstable, presenting victims as “not all there” (case 14 and 1) or a “nutcase” (case 33). Yet in all these cases there was no evidence of any diagnosed condition, with victims having the capacity to make decisions. Such victims simply manifested the long-term effects of HBA. It seems that such ploys were designed to deflect blame and informally resolve the allegation, with perpetrators using the authorities to ensure fleeing victims were returned to the “protective” home. The perpetrators aim was to undermine the competency, credibility and reliability of victims and thereby avoid outside interference by the authorities.

Navigating vulnerability is a highly complex arena for public bodies. Victims who genuinely suffer poor mental health or have learning difficulties provide credence to family members to suggest that those potentially controlling actions are justifiable, necessary and effected in the
“best interests” of vulnerable victims. Furthermore, if a complaint is made, professionals often have to seek consent from such perpetrating family members[8] in order to have vulnerable people examined or formally interviewed. As prior social work studies have established, disabled children were often overlooked by professionals, with parents becoming the “proxies for the voice of the child” (Oliver, 2010, p. 16). However, not all families exploit vulnerability. Practitioners must recognise the distinction between those family members who genuinely protect and those who control, yet establishing this with certainty is difficult. However, surely this must be strived for if we are to protect vulnerable adults from long-term abuse.

The mental health label, whether genuine or contrived, served to disadvantage and stigmatise victims. Professionals sometimes paradoxically cultivated the mental illness labels advanced by perpetrators, undermining victims as unreliable, irrational, unhinged and in need of protection from perpetrating relatives, as opposed to enhancing safeguarding provision because of the perceived impairment. Perpetrator explanations, however illogical, were often not challenged by professionals. Aligning with perpetrators and victim blaming was evident in 22 per cent (17/78) of the adult cases within the incident data findings. Victims were portrayed as precipitating problems due to their own poor mental health and this was evident in vulnerable adult, child and non-vulnerable adult cases, suggesting this is a discretionary police practice. There appears sparse academic literature exploring the concept of professionals using a manufactured vulnerability as a means of discrediting victims in order to expedite enquiries. However, a government report suggests that officers often justified “no-crime” decisions on the basis of “mental health or similar issues of vulnerability” to avoid having undetected offences on the system (House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee, 2014, p. 15).

In 3 per cent of cases where victims had a diagnosed physical and mental vulnerability, professionals either withheld information from documentary records, such as the non-recording of victim vulnerability and missing data in DASH risk assessments, or completely denied victim vulnerability, suggesting victims had capacity and freewill to “consent” to marriages. Such devices were used to justify inaction by professionals. As noted by Lipsky (1980/2010), “withholding information depresses service demand” (p. 91). It is argued that in deciding a course of action, professionals sometimes took the path of least resistance by “accepting” perpetrator explanations, because it fitted their self-interested preferences to do so. In achieving this the practice of “goal displacement” was used, which deflected the focus onto the alleged or real impairment of the problematised victim. Outcomes, resulted in under protection by the state, with professionals (police and social care) being unresponsive to the needs (Knott and Miller, 1987) of vulnerable, traumatised, depressed and suicidal victims. Some vulnerable victims were retained in the direct “care” of perpetrators. The implications of this are that if perpetrator discourses are so readily advanced by professionals, this raises concerns not only about safeguarding practices, but it adversely impacts on crime recording, prosecutions and notions of deterrence. This paper highlights that further research in the underexplored arena of vulnerable adult abuse in a HBA context is certainly necessary.

Notes

1. Cases 2, 28, 34, 35, 37 and 56.
2. Police officers b, c, f, g, m, i, p and n.
3. It was the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that contacted police to alert them, and at the time the victim was still in the UK, thus a forced marriage could have been avoided.
4. Authorities failed to consider that a FMPO could have led to the victim being swiftly returned to the UK.
5. Officer should have contacted the Forced Marriage Unit to ascertain whether there had been a spouse visa application (HM Government, 2010, p. 23).
6. In 2012, Chesler and Blooms’ average age of Honour killing victim was 22 years, in 2010 Chesler’s average age of honour killing victim was 23 years.
7. Cases 1, 2, 9, 14, 33, 78, 82, 86 and 92.
8. As is currently the case with child victims of HBA.
References


Further reading


About the author

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Perception and barriers: reporting female genital mutilation

Geetanjali Gangoli, Aisha Gill, Natasha Mulvihill and Marianne Hester

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the perceptions of and barriers to reporting female genital mutilation (FGM) by victims and survivors of FGM to the police in England and Wales.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper is based on 14 interviews conducted with adult survivors and victims of FGM. A combination of 1:1 and group interviews were used, based on the preference of the respondents. Respondents were recruited in collaboration with specialist non-governmental organisations and major stakeholders in the area of honour-based violence and black and minority ethnic communities.

Findings – A key finding in this research was that all victims/survivors the authors interviewed stated that they did not support the practice of FGM, and that they would not follow it for younger women in their own family. Second, the authors found that none of the respondents had reported their experience to the police. Third, they identified key barriers to reporting, which included: their belief that reporting their own experience would not serve any purpose because they had experienced FGM as children, and in another country; and that they did not feel able to report new incidents of FGM in the community because of a lack of trust in the police due to previous negative experiences. Finally, they believed that FGM could be prevented only by work within the community, and not through engagement with the criminal justice system.

Originality/value – This is, to our knowledge, one of the first papers that is based on victims and survivors’ perceptions that explores barriers to reporting cases of FGM to the police, and offers levers for change.

Keywords Police, Female genital mutilation, England and Wales, Experiences and perceptions, Honour-based violence, Victims/survivors

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

This paper explores the perceptions of victim-survivors of female genital mutilation (FGM) living in the UK towards reporting their experience to the police in England and Wales. FGM has been illegal in the UK since the mid-1980s and this includes cases where the procedure may have taken place outside the UK. However, to date, there have been no successful convictions. Drawing on interviews with 14 adult women, we consider what the experience of FGM means to victim-survivors who are living in England and Wales, and who have experienced FGM as a child overseas; how they understand the impact of criminalisation of FGM, whether and how they would seek justice for what happened; and how they believe the police (and policymakers) could best engage with communities on this issue.

Definitions

FGM is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2008) as follows:

FGM comprises all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons, with an increasing severity from partial clitoridectomy to removal and appositioning of the labia minora and/or majora, or other ways of damaging female genitals through e.g. pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterization.
We identify FGM as a form of “honour”-based violence. While the definitions of “honour” and “honour”-based violence are contested (Chantler and Gangoli, 2011), for the purpose of this paper, we adopt the definition provided by the UK Crown Prosecution Service:

Honour-based violence (HBV) can be described as a collection of practices, which are used to control behaviour within families or other social groups to protect perceived cultural and religious beliefs and/or honour (CPS, n.d.).

The concept of honour acts as a justification for gender-based violence and abuse. Previous research indicates that victims of HBV can experience inequalities linked to wider structures, for example, insecure immigration status or language barriers that further complicate their experience of HBV (Hester et al., 2008; Chantler and Gangoli, 2011).

Commonly stated reasons for carrying out FGM are: tradition, religion, protecting virginity and familial honour, aesthetics and hygiene, although these vary according to country and area. In some cultures, girls are circumcised during a rite of passage, in which FGM may symbolise their transition from childhood to adulthood (UNICEF, 2005, 2010; Berg and Denison, 2013). In several parts of the world, FGM is an accepted social expectation and families who do not follow this custom may be stigmatised and isolated (Bradley, 2011). It may also be difficult for girls and women who have not experienced FGM to get married (UNICEF, 2010). In this way, FGM, not unlike forced marriage, is in many instances clearly aligned to codes of honour, particularly because non-adherence can have serious consequences for the family (see Gill, 2016).

FGM is thus considered a form of gender-based violence and a human rights violation; further, because it is primarily perpetuated against young girls, it can also be considered a gendered form of child abuse (WHO, 2008). FGM is known to be most routinely carried out in specific populations in Africa and the Middle East, and less so in parts of Asia (WHO, 2008). There is recent evidence that forms of FGM are also prevalent in other parts of the world (World Bank, n.d.). An estimated 137,000 women and girls who have migrated to England and Wales are FGM survivors, (HSCIC, 2016). Between April 2015 and March 2016, 5,702 new cases of FGM were recorded in England, just 18 of these are reported to have been undertaken within the UK (HSCIC, 2016). However, there are concerns about the reliability of FGM statistics, as health practitioners can often only record historic cases of adult survivors of FGM that have surfaced as a result of a victim receiving medical treatment, and very few new FGM offences come to police attention (HSCIC, 2016).

Legal and policy interventions

Much recent academic literature on FGM is international, and focusses on its serious health effects for women and girls, including its long-term effects on sexuality, pregnancy and reproductive health (Kaplan et al., 2011) and the severe psychological trauma it causes in victim-survivors (WHO, 2008; Shell-Duncan et al., 2016). For instance, it has been suggested that there could be associations between FGM and adult women’s maternal morbidity in Gambia (Morison et al., 2001). Some studies have also examined attitudes towards FGM, particularly among community practitioners and midwives (Kaplan et al., 2011), and others have investigated barriers to adequately preventing FGM faced by professionals in other sectors – for example, health and social workers (Costello, 2015). These include awareness of different types of FGM, lack of confidence about how to respond to FGM victim-survivors in culturally sensitive and respectful ways and effective procedures for monitoring and screening girls and women who may be at risk of experiencing FGM. However, to our knowledge, there is little information about how victim-survivors conceptualise barriers to reporting.

The UK Government recognises that FGM is a violation of different human rights provisions and acts to which the UK is a signatory, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1990), the European Convention on Human Rights (Art. 2 and 14), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Art. 1 and 3) and the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (See Gill, 2016). Several studies have addressed the legal implications of FGM (Gill, 2016; Jefferson, 2015). In the UK, FGM is treated as a criminal offence, and is prohibited under the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 (which replaced the
Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act 1985). Any person found guilty of an offence under the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 is liable to fine or imprisonment of up to 14 years, or both. The FGM 2003 Act was further amended under the Serious Crime Act 2015 to insert new provisions to: extend extra-territorial jurisdiction for FGM, provide anonymity for victims of FGM, create a new offence of failure to protect a girl from FGM, introduce FGM Protection Orders and introduce a mandatory reporting duty requiring regulated health and social care professionals to report known cases of FGM in under 18s to the police (see Gill, 2016).

However, there have been no successful prosecutions against FGM in the UK. This is a situation that criminal justice agencies are working hard to address at both national and local level (Gill, 2016). In February 2015, the UK’s first prosecution of a medical professional for undertaking a FGM procedure collapsed amid accusations against the Crown Prosecution Service for staging a “show trial in response to political pressure” (Gill, 2016, p. 7). On 4 February 2015, Dr Dhanuson Dharmasena (together with another defendant) was found not guilty of performing FGM on a patient at the Whittington Hospital in North London. Dr Dharmasena, an obstetrics and gynaecology registrar, was alleged to have performed reinfibulation on a woman after she had given birth. Dr Dharmasena said that he had never before treated a woman who had previously undergone FGM, nor had he received any relevant training. He performed a single suture to stop postpartum bleeding. The woman herself made no request for Dr Dharmasena to be prosecuted (Gill, 2016; McCartney, 2015). Against the background of apparent inaction in view of the original 1985 legislation, the case represented something of a milestone and the Crown Prosecution Service at the time reported that it had many other potential cases under review (see Gill, 2016, p. 7; Jefferson, 2015).

A House of Commons Home Affairs Committee inquiry into FGM described it as “beyond belief” that 30 years after introducing legislation against FGM, no successful prosecution had been brought, and expressed fears that this would deter victims from reporting (Home Affairs Committee on FGM, 2016). The failure to convict perpetrators of FGM in the UK has often been associated with lack of political will, the collusion within communities where these practices take place and the stigma and shame associated with talking about female sexuality and related practices (Dailly and Mulcahy-Bowman, 2014).

In terms of the perceptions of, and barriers to, reporting gender-based violence to the police in England and Wales, there is a developing body of research on police attitudes towards domestic abuse (DA) and sexual violence (SV), but not on FGM. Reports on policing DA and SV including critiques of what is perceived as a masculine ethos or “cop culture” within the police force (Loftus, 2009; Reiner, 2010). This culture may encompass attitudes about how women should behave in general, and particularly during instances of DA and SV (Loftus, 2009). For example, police may ask women in relation to SV, “Why didn’t you say no?” or “Why didn’t you fight back?” (see Patterson, 2011). This is consistent with research from Myhill and Johnson (2016). As for low DA and SV reporting rates in England and Wales reasons vary between individuals, and include finding reporting “embarrassing”, thinking the police will not do much to help and believing that the incident is “too trivial or not worth reporting” (Harrison and Gill, 2018, p. 3). Others may view the offence as a “private/family matter and not police business” (Ministry of Justice, Home Office and ONS, 2013, p. 6).

To our knowledge, therefore, there is no study that explores the views and experiences of victims-survivors of FGM on seeking justice through the criminal justice system, how victims/ survivors of FGM conceptualise the effectiveness of criminalising FGM and the role of the police in this process. This paper aims to address this gap in the literature by focussing on a recent study involving FGM victim-survivors’ experiences, their perceptions and any previous contact with the police. We explore the extent to which both are impacted by women’s positionality as first-generation immigrant women, and the intersections of race, faith and inequality. The paper draws on data from research conducted by Hester et al. (2015) to identify and interview victims of honour-based violence, and included forced marriage and other forms of honour-based violence, including domestic and sexual abuse committed in the name of honour (see Mulvihill et al., 2018). This paper focusses on the UK resident victims-survivors of FGM, which we believe is a group that has received less attention than forced marriage and domestic violence-related HBV in the criminology, social policy and gender-based violence literature in the UK.
The paper is divided into the following sections. First, a brief description of the research methodology and sample; analysis and discussion of key themes, including what FGM means for victims/survivors; barriers to reporting to the police; and levers for change identified by victims/survivors. Finally, we end with conclusions, and recommendations for policy and practice.

Methodology

Due to the well documented issues of working with survivors of GBV and HBV (Hester et al., 2008; Skinner et al., 2004), we worked in collaboration with specialist non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and major stakeholders to access participants, and to ensure that participants were being supported during and after the interview. We also identified a small number of (supported) participants through recommendation: this is an approach to building (or adding to) a sample of research participants known as “snowball sampling” and is commonly used where potential participants are hard to reach.

For the wider project, we contacted 32 NGOs and were able to organise interviews through 9 of these organisations with 50 women who had experienced HBV, including 14 who had experienced FGM. Participants were offered the choice, where possible, of an individual interview or group interview. We are aware that the results of group interviews may be different from individual interviews, for instance, all members of group interviews may not participate equally, and more dominant respondents may take over the interview. Further, survivors of GBV may worry about loss of confidentiality in group interviews. However, we know also from our previous work that some survivors of GBV prefer group interviews, as they derive comfort and solidarity from shared experiences, and given the sensitive nature of the study, we were led by survivors as to the form our interactions would take.

From the sample of 14 FGM victim-survivors, four were one-to-one interviews, and ten were in group interviews (two groups with five participants each). Individuals were initially contacted by the NGO and provided with information about the aims and objectives of the project and an outline of the interview question schedule. Those who agreed to participate then signed a consent form, which included their right to withdraw from the research within seven days (which none exercised). The research project was granted ethical approval by the University of Bristol School for Policy Studies Ethics Committee.

The interview schedule was semi-structured, and questions were organised around the themes identified for the main inspection report, namely Awareness and Understanding, Protection, Enforcement and Prevention. Participants were also given the opportunity to share details of their experience and any other issues that they felt relevant to police practice in this area. Survivors of FGM were more difficult to recruit than the other survivors of HBV. In part, this was because we were commissioned by the funder to interview survivors who were adult (over 18 years of age) at the time of interview, and had experienced the HBV or had contact with the police in the past three years. Ethical constraints meant we were unable to interview young women aged 17 or under. However, on speaking to NGOs working with survivors of FGM, we found that most of their client base were adult women who had experienced FGM as children, and that none had made contact with the police regarding this experience.

The characteristics of the FGM sub-sample, therefore, required us to shift our focus from the reporting experiences of FGM by participants to their perceptions of, and barriers to, contact with the police on FGM in principle. The 14 women interviewed were from Sierra Leone, Somalia, Somalliland and Nigeria and had experienced FGM as children in their countries of origin between the ages of 5 and 14, mostly before they had come to reside in the UK. The majority of participants in this sub-sample were first-generation immigrant women from working-class backgrounds who were not fluent in English – therefore, we employed interpreters who were used regularly by the NGOs that enabled the interviews. The women shared personal and visceral accounts of their experiences, and some were passionately articulate about how police (and policymakers) could better facilitate justice. The interview transcripts were coded through NVivo, using the inspection report themes outlined above.
Findings and discussion

Meaning of FGM to victims/survivors

A key finding in this research was that all victims/survivors we interviewed stated that they did not support the practice of FGM, and that they would not and did not follow it for younger women in their own family. This was the case in both one-to-one and individual interviews. This is in line with other research that found low acceptance of FGM amongst adult survivors of FGM (Dailly and Mulcahy-Bowman, 2014) and it may well be because the sample we interviewed were through community and feminist organisations that work towards eradicating FGM, and against GBV in general. However, respondents found the legal and wider societal discourse around FGM in the UK at odds with the ways in which it was perceived in their own communities and families:

To be circumcised, yes it is a pride [for family] Even I am having a lot of problems with my family, because I did not take my children [to be circumcised] [...] This is our culture.

This participant was circumcised at the age of 14, and believed that the terminology around FGM was an issue for her, as it made her feel that she was at war with her family and culture:

[When she heard the term mutilation] I felt like a knife had gone in to my heart, to be honest. Because I think up until that point, I was living with my body quite freely, maybe naively. Until I heard that term. And that’s when that intrusion of what happened to me became very raw. [...] I was reading this information and thinking so I am a freak, and my parents are the worst people ever, and my culture is disgusting, you know? And I felt that this doesn’t ring true to me: I don’t feel that my parents or my culture are bad but what I do feel is that my human rights have been taken away from me. My body was altered without my consent. [...] So those were the times when I felt like I was the “mutilated” lady. All power to survivors, but I don’t know why they want to align themselves to those labels. [...] [But I would term it] “genital alteration” – to alter another person’s body without their consent.

This discomfort may well be felt by survivors of other forms of gender-based violence, in terms of the emotional pain of recognising and “naming” their experience as abuse. However, we suggest that with survivors of FGM, this is further complicated by the othering of FGM as a cultural practice that is associated with certain demographics. Previous research on forced marriage suggests that when certain forms of GBV are associated with particular communities, they can be exoticised, and not seen as variant within wider experiences of gender-based violence (Chantler et al., 2009). Some of the participants who had experienced FGM questioned its separate treatment in law and practice, arguing that rather than being treated as a specific offence, it should be considered child abuse. They felt it fuelled a preoccupation with “culture” and was seen as being prevalent in “certain communities”, which distracted from the central task of protecting all children from all types of harm. Participants also alluded to how the criminalisation of FGM had driven the practice underground:

You know in Somalia, a long time ago, they used to know that this person was going to have the FGM – they used to have a celebration […] but now, we can’t [...].

These interventions in the group interviews were contradicted by statements that FGM did not take place any more in families in the UK, and assertions that communities now understood the harms of FGM:

Interviewer: Was there any case where the police has helped in a FGM case?

Participant: No, because most Somalis has stopped doing it now.

It is possible that the dynamics of the group interview played a role here, where lack of support for the practice amongst the more confident participants may have impacted responses of other participants. More broadly, it demonstrates the conflict around practices and values which might arise when individuals have to negotiate the demands of ethnicity, cultural heritage, gender, immigration status and so on.

Barriers to reporting

The key stated reason by participants for not reporting their experience of FGM to the UK authorities was because the incident happened many years ago in their childhood and in another country:

Interviewer: Was the police involved? Did anyone contact the police?
Respondent: Which police? In Somalia or here in the UK? No, because we already have done it. […] Everybody knew and was doing it in Somalia.

There are interesting parallels with the ongoing and current increase in reporting of cases of historic child sex abuse in the UK, where the police and CPS are actively pursuing these cases (CPS, n.d.; Dean, 2014), and victims are increasingly being urged to come forward to report incidents of sexual abuse that may have taken place in the past. In contrast, victims of FGM are not encouraged, to our knowledge, to report historic cases. The reasons for this may well be because the perpetration took place in a different country, in the past and on victims/survivors who were not British residents or citizens at the time. Further, there is a possibility that survivors do not consider the criminal justice system as a valid route for justice. We have noted that in the case of forced marriage, criminalisation is seen as problematic for some survivors (Gangoli and McCarr, 2008), and indeed there is a wider body of literature (Menon, 2012; Smart, 1989) that suggests that legal or adversarial justice may not be always be conceived as justice by survivors.

Barriers to reporting new cases were twofold: fears of retribution from the wider community and concerns about interference in private family life:

Yes, but we cannot report to the police because I don’t want to interfere with other people’s lives. If I see someone is doing FGM, I don’t want to interfere with other people. That’s not fair. [...] If someone does FGM and I report to the police that family will come to me and I get into trouble.

While the study indicated that forced marriage and HBV cases are often well known to the community and wider family, in contrast, FGM was presented by participants as something that wider family members may be unaware of. Within the FGM cases, it was suggested by interviewees that this is a very private affair between the child and the parents. Participants said it would be very hard to speak to the police, unless they knew “for sure” that FGM had taken or would take place, in case, for example, it meant that the children were removed from the family. Overlaying the cultural code of protecting the family and community, was this extra level of secrecy. Interview participants recognised that this combination may make it particularly difficult to facilitate reporting of FGM:

You know, I’m not sure if you agree with me or not, but it’s hard to know if they have done it or if they were going to do it [Murmur of agreement within the group]. Even my sister, I wouldn’t know what she was going to do. We are a very close family but we don’t talk about those kinds of subjects. Am I right? It’s hard to know […] until, when they come back, and you overhear them with the children […] […]

“Overhear” or “overhearing” is a very broad term and one that would imply particular difficulties for reporting — in order to be in a position to report something that one had overheard one would need to be in close enough proximity that it would be hard to maintain anonymity. Further, there are difficulties in trusting such accounts. We suggest that respondents felt that such “overheard” comments may not be taken seriously by the police, as they are unreliable; and that respondents were concerned that they may suffer retribution within the community if they were seen as reporting on these practices.

As noted above, the secrecy concerning FGM meant that traditional celebrations of FGM as a rite of passage for girls are no longer held in the UK, and therefore wider family, and community members may be unaware of FGM having taking place, or lacking concrete evidence it has. In contrast, with forced marriage, the community is often complicit, as they are invited to celebrate the marriage, and are often privy to discussions within the family (Hester et al., 2008, 2009).

Research indicates that professionals working on FGM are paralysed by what has been called “race anxiety” (Burman et al., 2004) because of fears of being labelled “racist” (Kwateng-Kluvitse, 2004). Burman et al. (2004) suggests “race anxiety” emerges from notions of “cultural privacy” and produces particular barriers to intervention and provision. These may include cultural and language barriers, or more commonly “they feel themselves to be insufficiently culturally equipped to work with minoritised women” (Burman et al., 2004, p. 301). However, with regard to FGM, our respondents believed far from displaying “race anxiety”, that the police were insensitive to cultural and ethnic norms. In general, BME women often do not report experiences of domestic violence because they have previously witnessed or been subjected to racist interactions with the police (Mama, 1995; Thiara and Gill, 2010), and
this was supported by our interviews. Both group interviews with victims of FGM revealed negative experiences with the police. The first was a case where one family had made a false allegation to the police of FGM within another family, as part of an ongoing feud. Participants felt that the police had taken the report at face value and had searched the family’s property without first establishing the “facts”. This incident may well have fed into wider fears within the community that the police treats allegations of FGM insensitively.

In the second group, two participants-related experiences of police or social workers coming to the house, either to remove young girls temporarily to “check them” after a holiday to Somalia, or to question the children about FGM. Again, our research participants stated that this approach was disrespectful, not based in evidence and possibly unlawful police action.

Levers for change

Respondents were united in their opinion that change could be brought about only through community engagement, and not through increased policing, or criminal justice engagement on FGM. Separately interviewed participants stated that FGM could be prevented, not by an increase in reporting, but by working within and through the community, in a relationship of trust, preferably alongside “community sponsors” and NGOs working in these areas. Education for older women was also identified as particularly important, as participants felt that they were instrumental in the continued practice of FGM, and perhaps in colluding to hide it from the authorities. Clarifying the nature and consequences of FGM, the legal position in the UK, and how to report to police were highlighted as key areas by interviewees. One group described how this information was already being delivered effectively through a local NGO:

That’s why we need the community raising awareness. […] Not just the professional sitting in a big room talking about FGM. We need to take it outside, to the community areas, like parks, we talk about it. Some people don’t know it is illegal in this country. Because they don’t know what is FGM. [We need to explain] it to them the way they are calling it, in their own language, or in their own country. When you educate one woman properly in the community with strong awareness, then that woman will educate ten or fifteen in that same community.

Respondents further indicated that men often were unaware of the consequences of FGM for women in the community. This may well have to do with apparent male disengagement with women’s reproductive and sexual life, while maintaining power and control over it through older women in the family (Gangoli and Rew, 2011). Younger men in particular had little information about FGM:

Because when you talk about FGM people don’t know what FGM is. [and] Let’s raise more awareness for the boys as well. Because for me, my children, my boys they know exactly, and they say “No way!” [laughs].

Yeah, we need to start with the young men.

Respondents also indicated that religious and faith leaders had an important role in educating the community about the dangers of FGM:

[…] We should work with the mosque more because the men are there – telling them how forbidden it is, how dangerous for the children.

It was notable that some respondents clarified (rightly) that FGM is a cultural and not a religious requirement in Islam. This important distinction could be seen as part of the ongoing “repair work” that Muslims can feel required to fulfil, given the prevailing currents of Islamophobia in British society.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to explore the perceptions of and barriers to reporting FGM by victims and survivors of FGM to the police in England and Wales. From our research, we found that immigration women’s experiences of FGM may be mediated by the law, their previous experiences with the police and their marginality as first-generation immigrant women in the UK.
While we found that there was a generalised lack of support for FGM amongst the women we interviewed, it is impossible to conclude whether this was a consequence of our sample, or the fact that FGM was a criminal offence, and they were fearful of the consequences of any stated support for this practice. This was complicated by assertions that survivors accepted that FGM was being practiced (either within the UK, or by taking children to their countries of origin), but that these incidents were not talked about within the wider community.

FGM was conceptualised by some participants as a private matter between parents and child, even though a private matter that had tacit approval from the wider community. The lack of fit between the community perceptions of FGM – as a cultural practice, and a rite of passage for females from childhood to adulthood – and state perceptions – as a violation of child rights, a form of HBV and a form of gender-based violence – further complicated women survivors’ experiences. In the light of similar concerns raised with regard to criminalising other forms of abuse associated with BME communities, for example, forced marriage (Gangoli and McCary, 2008; Gangoli and Chantler, 2009; Gill and Hamid, 2016), we suggest that survivors of FGM may feel less conflicted about their experiences of abuse if it were considered within law and policy as generic gender-based violence, and perhaps treated as a form of gender-based child abuse, where it is perpetrated on children.

Based on our interview findings, we conclude that adult survivors of FGM did not consider reporting childhood experiences, and this was explained as being due to it happening in their country of origin. While the current law applied to cases of FGM that may have occurred outside the UK (as long as the victim is a British citizen or resident), we suggest that this decision – not to report – is not merely pragmatic, but may also be that survivors feel that the police are uninterested in abuse that may have occurred in their childhood. This, as stated above, is in contrast with ongoing media and state interest in highlighting and encouraging survivors to report historic cases sexual abuse. It may also be because survivors do not believe that the police or the criminal system can offer them the justice they seek.

Survivors of FGM also report distrust of the police and wider criminal justice system, because they feel that their communities are being targeted by the police and wider society. This is based on experiences where they – or someone close to them – have felt unfairly treated, and links to wider marginalisation of immigrant women in the UK. In general, respondents believed that the way forward was to engage, and educate communities on the law and more importantly on the dangers of conducting FGM on young girls and women. This included working with older women – who might be perpetrators, or at the very least, colluders in the act, and with young men – as future husbands and fathers. They also suggested that faith leaders needed to be engaged further with this process, but did not offer suggestions on how this may happen.

Finally, we suggest that the research indicates adult survivors of FGM do not consider the criminal justice system as the most feasible route to justice. For FGM victim-survivors who are first-generation immigrant women, these perceptions are often linked to their multiple marginalisations, including poor English language skills and previous negative experiences with the police. Others held in tension the horror of what they have endured with feelings of loyalty towards their family and/or community, and found the law unable to attend to their more pressing needs and desires – for example, to have a smear test without interrogation, gasps from the medical staff or attitudinal changes within their community. Their experiences offer an important insight into the intersections of gender, race, immigration status and religious faith that FGM victim-survivors must negotiate in their encounters with the state. To improve their access to justice, participants wanted police (and policymakers) to better understand the dynamics of “honour” and how it exerts psychological and physical control over the victim; how the wider family and community may be implicated in its perpetration; and the multiple barriers to reporting FGM, including the high risk of shame, personal conflict, ostracism and abuse for those who decide to approach the police. These could be achieved through more community engagement by the police and effective multiagency working on FGM (particularly with social services and the health and education sectors, which are likely to encounter with new cases of FGM, and may be subjected to mandatory reporting). Finally, we suggest that the police approach to FGM could move towards partnership, working for “prevention” rather than “prosecution”.

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Further reading


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“Collective violence” and honour in Finland: a survey for professionals

Satu Lidman and Tuuli Hong

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to report on how honour-related violence (HRV) is understood and managed by professionals in Finland, emphasising the need to consider collectivity as an influential factor. Therefore, this paper introduces the concept of “collective violence”. By investigating the level of awareness and recognition of these violence phenomena, this paper discusses both preventative and punitive measures that Finnish authorities are able to work with.

Design/methodology/approach – A total of 111 Finnish anti-violence professionals completed a survey that aimed to qualitatively investigate their perceptions of HRV and collectivity.

Findings – The findings of this study indicated that collective violence is generally poorly recognised among professionals in Finland. At present, both victim services and criminal justice system lack adequate structures to deal with issues of collective violence. These findings indicate that authorities need further education on HRV and collectivity, as well as debates on whether the criminal code should be amended to meet international requirements.

Originality/value – As this violence has been researched only sporadically in the Finnish context, this study provides new insight to under-researched area of honour-related and collective violence in Finland. These findings may assist other European countries dealing with similar issues as well as guiding preventative and punitive measures within the Finnish context.

Keywords Collective violence, Female genital mutilation (FGM), Forced marriage (FM), Honour-related violence (HRV), Violence against women (VAW), Violence prevention

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Finland is generally perceived as a country with high standards in gender equality, yet the rates of violence against women (VAW) reflect a dark reality (Nousiainen, 2016). Recent figures indicate that 47 per cent of Finnish women have encountered physical and/or sexual violence by a partner or a non-partner since the age of 15 (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014). From the early 1990s, the state and several non-governmental organisations (NGO) have undertaken various efforts to increase the recognition of VAW and to create a more credible policy for violence prevention and victim services. Overall, development in this field has been slow, and in some areas, the work is only just beginning. This paper focuses on honour-related violence (HRV) or honour-based VAW in Finland, a phenomenon poorly recognised at present.

HRV is a topical issue in Finland. The rapid increase of asylum seekers since 2015 has brought HRV into the media headlines, heating up discussions on forced marriage (FM) in particular. However, it is obvious that honour-related abuse in Finland is not restricted to FM and is expressed in multiple ways. In Finland, unlike in Sweden, HRV is still considered to be quite a recent problem. For instance, there has not been a single homicide identified as an “honour killing”, neither have there been any charges of female genital mutilation (FGM) (Hansen et al., 2016; Hong, 2017).

This research paper reports on current efforts to combat HRV in Finland, with emphasis on the role of collectivity as a defining feature for this type of violence. This paper introduces the concept...
of “collective violence” to better describe the characteristics of the phenomenon. It is proposed that while HRV is closely linked with cultural perceptions of honour and gender norms, collectivity ought to be perceived as an equally important part of this context.

To better understand this type of violence requires a fuller grasp of the power structures in the communities at risk; for example, when individual choices are restricted in the name of collective values, there is a danger that conflicting interpretations of acceptable behaviour may escalate into violence (Lidman 2015; Hansen et al., 2016).

**Collectivity vs honour as a defining factor for violence**

This paper is based on the understanding that while HRV includes elements of collectivity, collective violence does not take place solely in honour contexts. The concepts of HRV and collective violence overlap and are interdependent but not synonymous. Therefore, HRV should be studied within the framework of collectivity. The risk of family conflict escalating into violence is not merely a product of perceptions of honour; it is rather the social implications of such perceptions that play a decisive role in these situations. For example, the control of unmarried women is in the interest of both the women’s immediate family and the wider community that protects that community’s reputation (Hansen et al., 2016). In this paper, collective violence refers to the attempts – both criminalised and non-criminalised acts – to prevent and punish the behaviour that conflicts with the collectivist moral norms.

For most part, collective violence consists of VAW and domestic abuse. In addition, it has specific characteristics. The key to understanding these nuances is to emphasise the link between violence and gendered perceptions of desirable behaviour: what an individual may or may not do, and the ways in which they are responsible for their community. In the context of collective violence, the desirable behaviour code for girls and women consists mainly of chastity and loyalty to male members of the family, whereas an honourable man lives under the social pressure forcing him to guard the women that are under his control and, if necessary, to punish them for breaking social norms. In the eyes of the community, this system is largely justified (Lidman, 2015; see also Grans, 2016).

The types of violence studied in this paper are perpetrated in communities that identify themselves, or are identified, as not being fully integrated into the wider society. Acts of violence and control may be accepted, or even encouraged, if they are seen as a means for restoring honour, fighting shame and valuing shared social norms. In the media, as well as in policy making, this type of violence is usually linked with Muslim immigrant communities, which is problematic (Hong, 2014). First of all, different Muslim communities do not unanimously agree with the meaning and contents of honour. Second, honour is an essential concept for many other cultural groups as well. The concept of collective violence is largely based on, but not limited to, its honour-related dimensions.

Associating honour, culture and violence with each other raises sensitivities, leading to the labelling of minorities which is likely to endanger peaceful societal dialogues (Hansen et al., 2016; Keskinen, 2009). Likewise, the fear of being perceived as racist may also lead to exaggerated sensitivity, even reluctance, to admit the reality of violence (Lidman, 2015). Therefore, it is crucial to articulate clearly that comparable dynamics of violence may occur among Christian minorities, such as the Conservative Laestadians and the Roma community. The risk of violence increases when the decisions and behaviour of an individual conflict with collectivist norms (Hong, 2017; Lidman, 2015). In this paper, collectivity is understood as both the context and one of the causes of HRV.

Like HRV, collective violence is not a religious but a cultural construction. Members of collectivist cultures may disagree with at least some collectivist values. Thus, it is impossible to estimate a person’s opinion on justification of violence according to presumptions of their cultural background. There are different elements in different cultural contexts upholding gendered violence. However, they do not define the whole culture (Lidman, 2015). More precisely, the emphasis on collectivity redirects the focus from the mere Muslim-honour-context to a more fruitful composition of power dynamics within various collectivist communities.
Study aims

This paper outlines the findings of a questionnaire-based survey conducted by researchers at the Faculty of Law, University of Turku (Lidman and Hong, 2016). The online survey was distributed to a selected group of Finnish anti-violence professionals including curators, mediators, police officers, public servants, researchers, shelter personnel and NGO volunteers, among others. The aims of this paper are two-fold. First, to report on these participants’ level of awareness and recognition of collective violence. Second, to discuss the limitations and possibilities of violence prevention, as well as the Finnish criminal justice system. Apart from a report published by the Finnish League for Human Rights (Hansen et al., 2016), this topic has not been examined in the present-day Finnish context. Earlier studies are few and more general in nature (see e.g. Tauro and van Dijken, 2009). Therefore, this study provides a novel contribution to the existing literature on HRV.

Methods

Design

An online questionnaire was sent to a heterogeneous group of anti-violence professionals in Finland. This questionnaire was designed to collate ideas and suggestions on how criminal law and policies should be developed in order to combat HRV and collective violence in Finland. The aim of the survey was not to produce large quantitative data, but to qualitatively explore the level of awareness and different views held by professionals.

Participants

A total of 111 respondents participated, nearly three-quarters (72 per cent) of whom were women. This gender division reflects the reality of anti-violence work in Finland. The survey respondents were recruited via professional networks such as mailing lists. Some had participated symposiums held at the Faculty of Law, University of Turku, conducted by the research project “Collective Gendered Violence in Preventative and Punitive Perspective” (see www.lidman.fi/project.html). One-third of the respondents were invited as a result of their participation in workshops on gender, violence and criminal law held in various parts of the country, and based on Lidman’s (2015) monograph[1]. The questionnaire, symposiums and workshops were designed to raise awareness, increase discussion on related violence issues and enhance co-operation between and among professionals acting in different fields of anti-violence work.

The majority of participants identified themselves as NGO staff, mediators and prison personnel. The majority (60 per cent) of the respondents reported that they encountered violence issues daily, or at least weekly (24 per cent), and therefore, were regarded as a valuable source group for this study. Only two respondents claimed to deal with violence less than once a month.

Materials and measures

In addition to background information, the survey included 14 questions out of which 6 are analysed in this paper. The questionnaire was divided in three thematic sections that dealt with a variety of preventative and punitive aspects of violence. After each group of questions, the respondents were given the opportunity to provide comments in their own words. To analyse the themes for the qualitative parts of the survey, a thematic analysis was used to find patterns of perceptions.

This paper focuses on analysing the survey data regarding the following questions:

- Question 1. How the risks of justifying violence based on collectivist understanding of individual rights are recognised (a) within victim services, and (b) in the justice system?
- Question 2. What level of skills the mediators possess to equip them to face the challenges of collective violence?
Question 3. How sufficient the Finnish criminal justice system is in creating justice in cases of collective violence?

Question 4. How necessary it would be to broaden the crime descriptions to make them applicable in cases of collective violence?

Question 5. In what ways authorities and NGOs should co-operate in order to prevent collective violence efficiently?

Question 6. According to your own estimate, how well do you recognise the following forms of collective violence in your work?

Results

Findings I: on justifying and conciliating collective violence

According to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating VAW and domestic violence, contracting states “shall ensure that culture, custom, religion, tradition or so-called ‘honour’ shall not be considered as justification for any acts of violence”. The convention clearly states that cultural perceptions of honour are not acceptable grounds for more lenient punishments (Istanbul Convention, 2011, §12 and §42). In the same manner, collectivity cannot justify violence. Instead, it is an element that should be understood when developing preventative and punitive measures.

Finland ratified the Istanbul Convention in 2015, yet neither the Finnish justice system nor victim services are prepared to tackle the related violence issues. There is no separate criminalisation of HRV or any other form of collective violence, and there are no nationwide structures for its prevention. Relying on this background information, the survey respondents were asked to evaluate the risks of communities justifying violence as a reaction to unwanted individual behaviour, and authorities not recognising this pattern.

In response to question 1, respondents were asked:

How the risks of justifying violence based on collectivist understanding of individual rights are recognised (a) within victim services, and (b) in the justice system? Choose the relevant level from 1 (recognised adequately) to 5 (recognised poorly).

According to participants’ estimations, these risks are recognised slightly better within the victim services than they were in the justice system. Nevertheless, the state of readiness is worryingly low in both cases. As for the victim services, 31 per cent of the respondents described the level of recognition as average, in the case of the justice system, it was 25 per cent. The majority, however, marked “poorly” or “fairly poorly”. In their comments, some respondents described the challenges victim services are facing, and claimed that not even professionals have the courage to face collective violence. Others pointed out that even when HRV is adequately recognised, the means to deal with it are insufficient.

The second question aimed at critically analysing the conciliation system, which can be seen as problematic even in the context of “regular” domestic violence (Qvist, 2012). When it comes to collective violence, there is no guarantee that the mediators are capable of dealing with the gendered, asymmetric power dynamics that weaken the victim’s position. Mediators should possess knowledge of the various ways that cultural perceptions of honour and collectivity may affect the risks and continuity of violence. When a family conflict becomes public in the community, it may, for instance, endanger the safety of several individuals, and hinder further reporting to authorities (Hansen et al., 2016).

In response to question 2, respondents were asked to estimate the capability of mediators in dealing with collective violence. The question read:

What level of skills the mediators possess to equip them to face the challenges of collective violence? Choose the relevant level from 1 (good skills) to 5 (no skills).

The vast majority of the respondents, many of whom were mediators themselves, agreed that mediators in general do not have adequate skills to function as mediators in such cases. They do
not have enough information on how collectivity, social pressure and perceptions of honour may influence victims and perpetrators. Only according to 4 per cent of the respondents do mediators possess "good skills", whereas 20 per cent thought that they have "no skills". Medium level of skills and poor skills got the most hits, altogether 66 per cent.

Some respondents discussed the applicability of conciliation as violence intervention, and emphasised that conciliation should only take place if the mediators are experienced and skillful enough to differentiate between individual cases that are suitable for conciliation, from those that are not. Others were ready to categorically abandon conciliation in all cases of domestic abuse, including collective violence. It was also held likely that conciliation is sometimes used to reduce the workload of the police, which does not, per se, function in favour of victim’s rights.

Like other forms of domestic violence, collective violence typically includes psychological controlling and use of various forms of coercion that may take place over a long period of time, as well as acts causing sexual and economical damage (Finnish League for Human Rights, 2017). These incidents tend to escape judicial attention, whereas physical abuse and homicide are more likely to be charged. Furthermore, whether operating with the concept of honour-related or collective violence, it would be an error to define all domestic abuse that takes place in certain minority contexts as such. And yet the police, like other professionals, are not well enough educated in recognising these differences (Hansen et al., 2016; Lidman, 2017). The findings based on questions 1 and 2 supported this view.

**Findings II: creating justice by developing the criminal code**

Indisputably, HRV and other kinds of collective violence pose challenges to the Finnish criminal justice system which is founded on individualistic basis. One of the main reasons for this is the way in which criminal offences are conceptualised. In accordance with the core principles of the Finnish criminal justice system, offences are examined in a tightly limited timeframe and as distinct from their contexts. However, there are number of reasons why this kind of approach does not meet the characteristics of VAW in general, nor collective violence.

VAW in close relationships typically consists of repeated and/or continuous victimisation, in which lenient and more grave offences form a continuum (van der Aa, 2014). This is also true in cases of HRV and collective violence. If authorities learn about these incidents, it is usually because of the gravity of an individual offence (Hansen et al., 2016). Different kinds of controlling behaviour, threatening and menace, even though inseparable from the graver acts, remain outside the focus of crime report and thus are seen as insignificant for the criminal investigation, possible criminal charge and eventual sentence (Hong, 2017; see also Kaldal and Kankaanpää, 2015).

From the victim perspective, gradually evolving offences of integrity appear as one process and experience (Niemi-Kiesiläinen, 2004). Even though there have been some efforts, for example in the section of stalking, to expand the scope of application to cover some contextual issues as well, most of the more lenient acts of collective violence remain uncovered by the criminal code.

The second issue that needs to be reconsidered is the assessment of the scope of individuals that might have implication in certain honour-related offence. The idea of personal criminal liability is one of the integral elements of the Finnish criminal justice system (Tapani and Tolvanen, 2013). This basis may lead to difficulties when integrated into the characteristics of HRV, typically committed by a number of perpetrators. The issues of context and personal scope were also pointed out in the questionnaire, as will be elaborated by the following scrutiny of the next two survey questions.

In the questionnaire, questions 3 and 4 were directly connected to issues of the criminal justice system and criminal code from the point of view of HRV. As an introduction, the respondents were introduced to the basic principles of Finnish criminal justice system and prevailing understanding of criminal liability as described above. It was pointed out that in collective violence, it is common that several members of the extended family or community are implicated
in the planning, preparation and actual perpetration of the honour-related crime (Hansen et al., 2016; see also Khan, 2018). For example, ambitions to preserve family honour by killing a woman who allegedly behaved in an indecent way may have the support and acceptance of some community members.

In question 3 the respondents were asked:

How sufficient the Finnish criminal justice system is in creating justice in cases of collective violence? Choose the relevant level from 1 (sufficient, because it is justified to only sentence the one who committed the crime) to 5 (insufficient, because the impact of collectivity is disregarded).

A majority of the respondents were of the opinion that there are major deficiencies in this field. Only 5 per cent of the respondents believed that the Finnish criminal justice system adapts well in the cases of collective violence, as it is sufficient only to sentence the person who has committed the concrete criminal act. However, 44 per cent of the respondents indicated that there are fairly significant problems in applying the apparatus in cases of collective violence, and 20 per cent expressed the view that the system does not adapt to given cases:

The Finnish criminal legislation is outdated in most questions concerning violence. The ongoing societal change, especially regarding the cultural issues, is disregarded. If the society does not endeavour to “understand” the violence connected to cultural perceptions, the possibilities to influence such phenomenon are almost non-existent. The legislation should undergo major revisions.

This respondent’s quote is worrying as it represents a view that is shared by many anti-violence professionals. Ultimately, these professionals are aware of the real circumstances and problems that concern the work against collective violence in Finland.

The fourth question focused on the elements of certain crimes. It was stated that collective violence is commonly manifested by different kinds of controlling behaviour, restrictions, intimidation and menace targeted at the victim. The more lenient violations may escalate into severe physical violence. However, the threshold to apply the sections of crimes against personal freedom (e.g. the section on deprivation of freedom and menace) is high. Thus, these sections are not applicable in most of the cases of more lenient collective violence. The aim of this question was to find out whether the respondents found it necessary to extend the elements of crime of certain criminal code criminalisations to better respond to cases of collective violence.

In question 4 they were asked:

How necessary it would be to broaden the crime descriptions to make them applicable in cases of collective violence? Choose the relevant level from 1 (not necessary, because the existing criminal code is compatible with Finnish conditions) to 5 (necessary, because the criminal justice system should also cover collective violence).

Most of the respondents emphasised the need to amend the criminal code as “fairly necessary” (43 per cent) or “necessary” (35 per cent). Only 3 per cent of the respondents indicated that this would be “not necessary”. These results might reflect the reality of different anti-violence professionals in regard to their insufficient “toolkit”. As many NGO workers expressed in the anti-violence workshops preceding the survey, it “feels terrible” to tell the victim that actually there is nothing we could do to bring a charge against your perpetrator.

As exemplified above, it is clear that the valid legislation does not cover for example different kinds of controlling, menace and threatening behaviour, that from victim’s perspective are at the heart of collective violence. Furthermore, since the criminal code does not cover these violations, most of the acts of collective violence remain unrecognised by the criminal legal system. However, it may be stated that since collective violence in essence restricts victims’ self-determination and violates her/his integrity, it is justified to expect the criminal code to cover these violations. This requirement is also clear from the international human rights conventions, as will be demonstrated in the next section.

**Findings III: international requirements for recognising and preventing violence**

Finland faces several challenges in reaching the minimum standards in combating and eliminating VAW, as required in international obligations (Nousiainen, 2016). Indeed, most of the legislative
amendments concerning gendered violence have been adopted due to the pressure of the international community, and as an attempt to “normalise” the legislation to correspond with international standards. The slow adoption of these standards is not well suited to Finland’s efforts to be profiled as a pioneer of equality issues, and as an advocate of women’s rights (Lidman, 2017).

In the past few years, international pressure to address the problems of HRV has intensified (Grans, 2016). In Finland, this development became apparent in the process of national ratification of the Istanbul Convention. The convention was ratified with only minimum legislative changes, which eventually led to an ongoing debate concerning the fulfilment of the given requirements (Nousiainen, 2016). The Istanbul Convention obliges the contracting states to prevent all forms of VAW and domestic violence. These include violations such as FGM and FM, as well as violence in the name of “honour”. Other than that, it does not address collective violence or specified expressions of it.

With these issues in mind, the survey respondents were then asked to indicate NGO or state-initiated practices that in their experience would efficiently prevent incidents of collective violence. They were given a list that contained nine alternatives.

Question 5 read:

In what ways authorities and NGOs should co-operate in order to prevent collective violence efficiently? Mark three most relevant options.

Most of the respondents (59 per cent) highlighted the need to amend the criminal code and application procedure to cover collective violence. A total of 53 per cent of the respondents opted for investing in non-violence and equality education as a part of immigrants’ integration programmes, and almost as many respondents (50 per cent) relied on informing targeted groups at risk of collective violence perpetration on matters of human rights and criminal law issues.

Respondents’ comments on this topic contained a considerable amount of critique on immigrants’ integration into Finnish society. It was stated that “it is a shame not to have an adequate integration programme” and highlighted how “harmful traditional practices, services for the victims of these traditions and the contents of the criminal code should be discussed already in the very beginning of the integration process”.

The most selected option, the need for criminal code amendments, reflects to a degree the debate concerning the national ratification of the Istanbul Convention. NGOs especially have been critical of the outcome and continued the lobbying for more effective execution of the convention requirements (Hansen et al., 2016). Certainly, the recently drafted preliminary report on the need of FM criminalisation is a step forward in these discussions (Toivonen, 2017). Striving for the concrete measures was also considered important by the survey respondents:

It is good that the question of violence and its connections to culture is raised. Moreover, it is great to shift the battle against culture-related violence to the level of concrete measures.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, while the Finnish authorities did not consider FM to be a pressing issue that required immediate attention, it was thought of as a peripheral issue that may become more of a concern in the future (Keskinen, 2009). The conception of FM that became visible during the ratification process may still reflect these attitudes. During the ratification process, the applicability of the existing legislation in cases of FM was emphasised, but the claim raised doubts, since the sentence for forcing someone to get married is at present possible only when forcing constitutes elements of the crime of human trafficking or intimidation. In both scenarios, the scope of application is such that most of the typical cases of FM fall short of the constitutive elements (Lidman, 2015). It remains to be seen whether the new report will lead to further measures or not.

The last survey question to be discussed concerns the various expressions of HRV and collective violence. These may constitute psychological, religious, sexual, economical and physical violence, of which the criminal code covers only the most obvious offences, leaving more discreet acts of violence outside the scope of application. The respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they are capable of identifying various forms of violence in their daily work.
Question 6 read:

According to your own estimate, how well do you recognise the following forms of collective violence in your work? Mark all relevant options.

Even 84 per cent of the respondents reported that they were capable of recognising psychological pressure used to ensure compliance with the community norms, which set the limits for acceptable behaviour. Assaults arising from the need to protect family honour were indicated as recognisable by 80 per cent, whereas 76 per cent of the respondents were of the opinion that they would identify cases in which perpetration of violence targeted at a spouse, siblings or children is perceived as justified in the name of tradition, religion or culture. The less recognised forms of violence were, among others, non-consent sexual acts based on gender inequality, social control over young girls and collective pressure on men to commit violent acts such as vendetta, silencing the victim in the name of community’s reputation, as well as FGM. Nevertheless, question 6 resulted in promisingly high figures, delivering a positive although likely illusive message of the Finnish anti-violence know-how.

The findings of the survey imply that anti-violence professionals are confident regarding their personal professional abilities in recognising collective violence. At the same time, as the answers to question 1 indicated, the capability of victim services and justice system to recognise and handle these violence phenomena were estimated to be low. This refers more to structural deficiencies than issues with professionality of individual anti-violence workers. In the interpretation of the findings, it is important to bear in mind, however, that the answers reflect the respondents’ own perceptions and that one of the largest groups of respondents was NGO workers, who are usually well aware of the challenges of the given violence. This may increase the given rates of recognition.

Furthermore, the mere identification is not enough; there should be actual means to deal with the issues preventatively and within the victim services. Also, the existing legislation and application procedure are not adjustable to the processing of collective violence. As noted earlier, for the authorities acting within the judicial system, the main challenges of HRV and collective violence are posed by its specific characteristics: they lack knowledge and understanding on collectivist gendered structures that do not only uphold but also help to conceal acts of violence.

Discussion

Conclusions and future challenges

International human rights bodies have criticised Finland for failing to implement necessary measures to combat VAW. The critique has focused on the defects both in the legislation and in service system (UN, 2014 (2014 CEDAW/C/FIN/CO/7); see also UN, 2011 (2011 CAT/C/FIN/ CO/5-6)). The CEDAW-committee has been particularly concerned about the situation of women belonging to different minorities.

The findings of the survey demonstrate that HRV and collective violence, which in most cases refer to a specific type of VAW with repeated victimisation over a long period of time, are poorly recognised in Finland and there is a lack of adequate structures to deal with these issues both within victim services and criminal justice system. This result is in line with other research on the subject such as the report of the Finnish League for Human Rights. Some forms of HRV and collective violence are, of course, better recognised than others. In practise, the level of knowledge and experience also varies between the professions and individual professionals. This variance is problematic from the perspective of victim’s rights as it does not guarantee equal opportunities for individuals exposed to violence in gaining assistance.

It is noteworthy that even though many survey respondents felt capable of identifying different types of collective violence, at the same time, they estimated the general level of recognition among anti-violence professionals to be low. Nevertheless, it can be argued that all Finnish anti-violence workers need more education in the matter. The education should be regular, nationwide and mandatory, or at least easy to access.
The question remains whether the criminal code should be amended as the majority of the survey respondents indicated. This challenge relates to the problems of conceptualising the specific characteristics of collective violence and honour context. In Finland, as in other European countries, physical violence is punishable by criminal code. Obviously, these sections also cover honour-related and collective violence, as long as the acts threaten the victim’s life or wellbeing. However, they ignore the specific circumstances these violations take place in. Furthermore, it is difficult to deal with mere controlling behaviour and menace with the tools currently provided by the Finnish criminal code.

The application of the criminal code is focused on punishing the one perpetrator who committed the actual, concrete violation. Even when this one individual would be sentenced, from the victim’s perspective, the threat of violence will not disappear unless the community perceives the honour restored (Elden and Westerstrand, 2004; Hansen et al., 2016). There is a risk that the victim is a target for new violations, perpetrated either by the same perpetrator (after serving the possible sentence), or by other members of the community.

There are a number of challenges to overcome if the Finnish criminal code is to be amended in a way that all (or even most) of the acts of collective violence would be covered. How, for example, to record the elements of the crime accurately enough in writing? Or how to allow the context of an individual violation to be considered in the application of a certain section? (Hong, 2017). Even though these questions are essential, they could not be answered in the framework of this paper. It remains clear, however, that a just legal system should be able to provide an equal level of justice for all victims of crime. In the case of HRV and collective violence, this cannot be guaranteed at the moment.

Considering the obligations of the Finnish state, for instance those imposed by the Istanbul Convention, the lack of preventative and punitive measures that would resonate with the international and national research on the subject is striking. This can only result in inequality and an inadequate level of justice, and contribute to the fact that collective violence remains a hidden crime. At present, the Finnish criminal justice system is not sufficient in creating justice for all victims of violence.

It is evident that Finland has to improve its efforts in dealing with HRV and collective violence, both in terms of preventative and punitive aspects. New and more efficient measures to tackle different kinds of collective violence must be developed. This includes creating a reliable system of collecting statistics of honour-related crime and collective violence occurring in Finland. There is certainly a need to discuss whether the criminal code should be amended, or how it could be implemented in the contexts of FM, FGM and other forms of collective violence. As it is likely that the risk of violence remains even after the perpetrator has been sentenced, it is necessary to reconsider not only the means of prevention in general, but also the ways to treat recidivists and protect victims.

In conclusion, this paper encourages policy makers and legal authorities, in particular, to discuss the connections between cultural perceptions and violence openly, and without labelling. With this in mind, it is important to note that the elements of collectivity are relevant not only in cases of HRV, but should be taken into account in other cultural contexts as well. Multi-professional co-operation between the police, different NGOs, as well as social and health sector and education needs to be developed to better meet the requirements of collective violence and to distinguish it from other types of violence. Finland now has the opportunity to learn from the experiences of other nations, such as Sweden and the UK, when it takes initiatives in designing policies for violence prevention and sanctioning.

Note
1. An English language version of the monograph is currently being prepared for Routledge.

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Comparison of honor killings to anti-LGBTQ homicides

Tri Keah Henry, Brittany E. Hayes, Joshua D. Freilich and Steven Chermak

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to compare the role honor and shame play in honor killings and anti-LGBTQ homicides by identifying similarities and differences across these two homicide types.

Design/methodology/approach – This study uses data from the US Extremist Crime Database (ECDB). Data for each of the incidents included in the ECDB are gathered from various open sources through a multi-stage process. A total of 16 honor killings and 21 anti-LGBTQ cases (i.e. the universe for both groups) are examined in this analysis. A closed-coded analysis technique is utilized to assess each case for evidence of shame and honor as well as an iterative coding process to identify sub-categories within these broader themes.

Findings – Results indicate that shame and honor play important roles in both honor killings and anti-LGBTQ homicides, although their influence manifests differently across these two types of homicide. Perceived shame to the family is most closely related to honor killings, while suppressing homosexual urges underlines anti-LGBTQ homicides. Violations of religious tenets, protection of masculinity, and protection of honor are evidenced in both types of homicide.

Originality/value – This study uses a unique database to examine the ideological motivations of individuals who perpetrate extremist crimes in comparison to those who commit honor killings. Findings may inform forensic practices, including rehabilitation and prevention programs.

Keywords LGBTQ, Intimate partner violence, Extremism, Hate homicide, Honor killings, Violence against women

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Since September 11, bias-motivated crimes and extremism have received increased attention. Researchers have paid attention to extremist offending, notably left-wing, far-right, and homegrown Islamist jihadists. While left-wing and single issue groups were dominant in the 1960s and 1980s, they were less active in the 1990s and 2000s. During this period, left-wing extremists rarely engaged in violent acts against persons. Far-right and jihadist extremists have been more deadly than left-wing and single issue groups (Freilich, 2003; Kaplan, 1995; Smith, 1994). Given the emphasis many have placed on understanding this issue, researchers have lamented the dearth of studies that examine the criminal activities of extremist offenders (Gruenewald and Pridemore, 2012).

Recently, honor killings have also received increased scholarly attention (Doğan, 2014a, b; Hayes et al., 2016). However, some have argued that using the term honor killing, rather than domestic violence or femicide, may create “bright boundaries” between those considered insiders and outsiders and between immigrants and the majority (Shier and Shor, 2016, p. 1180). Labeling an incident an honor killing also draws attention away from the broader issue of patriarchy and maintains hierarchies in social structures. Perry (2001) has argued that both violence against women and ideologically motivated homicides allow offenders to maintain dominance and power. It is unclear though if honor killings are similar to homicides motivated by an extremist ideology that have previously been shown to be premised on the notion of honor and maintaining a sense of dominance.
The US Extremist Crime Database (ECDB) offers quantitative and qualitative data on fatal extremist acts and honor killings committed in the USA since 1990. Since honor killings are motivated by the offender’s belief that the victim’s behavior shamed the family and that the homicide can restore the offender’s and/or his family’s honor, it is possible that honor killings resemble homicides motivated by an extremist ideology. This study thus focused on the similarities and differences between honor killings and extremist homicides motivated by offenders’ anti-LGBTQ ideology. As discussed below, prior research has suggested that unlike other ideologically motivated homicides, extremist-related anti-LGBTQ homicides may involve offenders’ attempts to demonstrate their power or protect their honor.

Honor killings

Honor killings are conceptualized as homicides committed by one or more perpetrators, who are usually males (Cooney, 2014). The homicide is in response to what the offender(s) perceives to be the victim’s violation of familial honor codes including actual or alleged behaviors by the victim that the offender(s) believes will shame the family (Kulwicki, 2002). Research has reported that females may “dishonor” their family by engaging or being perceived to have engaged in the following behaviors, including loss of virginity before marriage, infidelity (Baker et al., 1999; Cooney, 2014; Kulwicki, 2002), interacting with men who are not family members (Akpinar, 2003), or acting autonomously by, for example, gaining an education, leaving an abusive husband, or dressing how she wants (Hasan, 2002; Hayes et al., 2016; İnce et al., 2009; Pope, 2012). The offender(s) believes the violent act will restore their family’s honor. It is estimated that 5,000 women and children are the victims of honor killings annually (United Nations Population Fund, 2000), though this estimate likely underreports the prevalence of honor killings worldwide (Wikan, 2008).

Baker et al. (1999) argue that honor killings are a worldwide phenomenon composed of three elements: control of female behavior; feelings of shame when a male loses control; and levels of community involvement in enhancing and controlling this shame. Despite the common elements of honor killings cross-nationally, there is variation in the motivation behind honor killings depending on where the crime occurred. Kulwicki (2002) reported a female victim’s alleged sexual misconduct was the primary motivation for Jordanian honor killings. In contrast, Hayes et al. (2016) have found the process of separation and real or perceived westernized behavior of the victim were the primary motivations for honor killings that occurred in the USA. Therefore, the interpretation of honor may differ across nations but both revolve around the behavior (real or perceived) of women.

An analysis of American honor killings found they shared many similarities with domestic violence and hate homicides (Hayes et al., 2016). This suggests that both honor killings and hate homicides may provide offenders with rationales or justifications to punish “others,” which, in these cases, include minority groups and women (Perry, 2001). In support of this, van Baak et al. (2017) reported that all American honor killings referenced one technique of neutralization. These neutralizations suggest that even for offenders who may be committed to conventional norms, punishment of “others” may still be deemed acceptable. This study extends this research that has compared hate crimes in general (primarily involving racial, ethnic, or religious minorities) to honor killings by examining extremist-related anti-LGBTQ killings, a bias-motivated crime that is rooted in power and notions of honor.

Anti-LGBTQ ideologically motivated homicides

Far-right extremists in the USA subscribe to aspects of the following beliefs. They are nationalistic, anti-global, suspicious of federal authority, and reverent of individual liberties, especially their right to own guns and be free of taxes. They believe in conspiracy theories involving imminent threats to national sovereignty or personal liberty and believe that their personal or national “way of life” is under attack. Often, these conspiracy theories involve the government acting to infringe individual liberties using police officers to
carry out their evil intentions. Sometimes such beliefs are vague, but for some, the threat also originates from specific racial or religious groups. They believe that they must be prepared to defend against this attack by participating in paramilitary training or survivalism (Freilich et al., 2014).

Perry (2001) has suggested that both violence against women and hate homicides allow offenders to maintain dominance and power and are often indistinguishable. Both women and members of minority groups are targeted because of their identity. Given the norm of heterosexuality in many Western nations, violence against women and LGBTQ individuals may provide men with an avenue to accomplish hegemonic masculinity (Perry, 2001) while allowing the offender to “do gender” (Kelley and Gruenewald, 2015).

Even though same-sex marriage has been legalized in the USA and an increasing number of Americans support same-sex marriage (Richey, 2014), violence against LGBTQ individuals still occurs and support for homosexuality varies across the USA (Adamczyk et al., 2016). Since 2016, there has been a 29 percent increase in the number of hate homicides of LGBTQ and HIV affected individuals (National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, 2017). This number has consistently risen over the last five years and suggests hegemonic masculinity still occurs across the USA.

Anti-LGBTQ homicides differ from other types of extremist and non-extremist homicides (Gruenewald, 2012). Tomsen (2009), who examined anti-homosexual homicides in New South Wales, Australia, has found these homicides are not homogenous and fall into two broad categories. The first category included attacks in public spaces and was marked by a “tone of outrage” (Tomsen, 2009, p. 66). The second was a more confrontational scenario that typically occurred in private. Gruenewald and Kelley (2014), relying on data from the ECDB, examined the situational correlates of anti-LGBT homicides that occurred in the USA and categorized these homicides based on victim selection by the offenders. Gruenewald and Kelley (2014) differentiated between predatory homicides where “offenders appear to target LGBT victims to seek power” and responsive homicides where “offenders appear to desire to restore honor” (p. 1138). In these latter homicides, offenders may target a victim they perceive to have “affronted” them. Therefore, the homicide may allow the offender to regain honor by demonstrating masculinity (Buikin, 1999; Perry, 2001). Using data from the ECDB, a case study analysis of five anti-LGBT motivated homicides indeed suggested that offenders of anti-LGBT homicides were influenced by notions of male honor (Kelley and Gruenewald, 2015).

Therefore, in both honor killings and homicides motivated by the extremist offenders’ anti-LGBTQ ideology, honor appears to play an important role in an offender’s selection of a victim. Honor killings typically involve victims and offenders who know one another (Hayes et al., 2016). Unlike prior research on bias-motivated homicide where the victim and the offender are usually strangers (Freilich and Chermak, 2013), research on anti-LGBT violence finds that the victim and offender are not always strangers (Tomsen and Mason, 2001; Gruenewald and Kelley, 2014). The current study therefore compares the role of honor and shame between honor killings and anti-LGBTQ homicides by identifying similarities and differences across these two types of homicides.

**Methodology**

This study uses data from the US ECDB, which collects open-source data on all completed and attempted domestic extremist homicides that have occurred in the USA since 1990 (see Freilich et al., 2014 for inclusion criteria). The ECDB, which includes incident, offender, and victim data sets, captures illegal violent and financial incidents in which at least one or more of the suspects involved subscribes to an extremist belief system (i.e. environmental/animal rights, far-right, and jihadist extremists). Importantly, the ECDB also captures the primary motivation for each incident including whether the offenders were motivated by anti-government sentiments, racist beliefs, or anti-LGBTQ motivations. Extremist violent crimes detailed in the ECDB include homicides, suicides, bombings, arsons, and death by law enforcement. Additionally, a substantial amount of material is gathered in relation to profit-driven crimes, such as money laundering and financial terrorism.
Data on extremist incidents included in the ECDB are gathered from various open sources and is a multi-stage process (Freilich et al., 2014). Existing terrorism databases as well as official government sources, watch groups, and scholarly accounts are reviewed to identify cases that meet the inclusion criteria. Following identification of a case, more than 30 web engines are systematically searched to identify all publically available information on the incident. This information is then copied into a Word document. The ECDB is a relational access database and includes incident-level, offender-level, victim-level, and organizational-level measures. Data are systematically extracted from the Word document into the ECDB. The Word documents contain all the publically available information on each case and can also be used to extract key statements for qualitative analyses (Freilich and Chermak, 2009).

Honor killing population

The ECDB uses a similar process to identify and code all honor killings in the USA (Freilich et al., 2014) that it uses to identify all homicides committed by extremists in the USA (i.e. the universe[1]). For an honor killing to be included in the ECDB, and thus in the current study, several criteria had to be met. First, a homicide must have been committed. Second, the incident must have occurred between January 1, 1990 and December 31, 2016. Third, the offender(s) targeted the victim because of the victim’s actual or perceived misbehaviors the offender(s) believed could shame the family. Fourth, the honor killing was committed by the perpetrator(s) with the motive of protecting or regaining the perceived honor of the perpetrator(s), family, and/or community. Fifth, the perpetrator(s) believed the death of the victim would accomplish a social goal, including revenge or a warning. In total, 16 incidents satisfied the honor killing inclusion criteria and were coded in the ECDB. It is a US-based population.

Far-right ideologically motivated homicides with anti-LGBTQ motivation

We queried the ECDB to identify all far-right ideologically motivated incidents where the primary motivation was identified as anti-gay or anti-bisexual (herein referred to as anti-LGBTQ homicides). In total, the ECDB includes 21 anti-LGBTQ homicides. Therefore, the 21 cases included in analyses are the US-based population of ideologically motivated anti-LGBTQ homicides committed by a far-right extremist offender.

Analysis

We gathered the open-source search files for each of the 16 honor killings and 21 anti-LGBTQ homicides. Each of the 37 files was initially reviewed for the ECDB criteria used to identify and categorize the homicide as an honor killing. We paid close attention to the last three components of the criteria, namely, the victim’s actual or perceived misbehaviors the offender(s) believed could bring shame; the perpetrator(s) motive for protecting or regaining the perceived honor that had been lost; and the social goal that would be accomplished by committing the homicide. The first author initially closed-coded each of the cases for discussion of shame and honor. Subsequently, within the broader themes of shame and honor, the first author open coded for sub-categories. An iterative coding process was used that allowed sub-categories to emerge but also could be modified throughout the analysis phase. Once these categories were grouped together, they were each given a name to represent the main focus of the group.

Findings

Table I presents a descriptive comparison between honor killings and anti-LGBTQ homicides. A total of 19 perpetrators were responsible for the deaths of 40 honor killing victims. Half of the honor killings involved multiple victims, including the murders of unborn children and extended family. Two of the honor killings involved multiple perpetrators. In these cases, two male cousins were charged with murdering their female cousin while the other involved one primary offender and two accomplices. In contrast, 33 perpetrators of anti-LGBTQ homicides were
responsible for the deaths of 28 victims. Over a third of the anti-LGBTQ homicides (38.09 percent, \( n = 8 \)) involved multiple perpetrators. Additionally, 14.28 percent of these cases involved multiple victims (\( n = 3 \)). Finally, while all honor killing victims had some prior relationship with the offender (i.e. spouse, other relative), only 28.57 percent of the anti-LGBTQ victims knew their perpetrators.

**Role of shame**

Table II highlights several themes that emerged from the open-source files across the honor killings and anti-LGBTQ homicides. Shame was an important precursor for both the honor killings and anti-LGBTQ homicides. Intriguingly though, shame manifested differently across the two types of homicides. Sub-themes within the broader theme of shame included shame to the family; shame related to suppressing homosexual urges; and acts that were shameful according to religious tenets.

**Shame to family**

Only the honor killings mentioned aspects of shame to the family. Within the honor killings, 81.25 percent of the incidents suggested the primary reason for the homicide was the shame the victims brought to the family. For example, one offender of an honor killing admitted to murdering his wife and violently attacking his daughters after learning that his brother had sexually molested them (*Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, 2004). This perpetrator confessed to attacking his four-year-old daughter after a gynecological exam because the act had “sullied” her reputation (*Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, 2004). In this case, the offender perceived the victim’s reputation to be related to the family name. In another honor killing, a father strangled his daughter after she initiated the process of ending her arranged marriage. According to police reports, the father “felt she disgraced the family by trying to end her arranged marriage” (Jeffcoats, 2008). Shame to the family was often typified as the victim becoming too westernized (\( n = 10, 62.50 \) percent of honor killings), the victim wanting a divorce or not accepting an arranged marriage (\( n = 5, 31.25 \) percent of honor killings), and perceived inappropriate sexual acts (\( n = 3, 18.75 \) percent of honor killings).

### Table II Motivations for murder

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Honor killings (( N = 16 ))</th>
<th>LGBTQ homicides (( N = 21 ))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shame</td>
<td>Percent of cases overall with theme (%)</td>
<td>Percent of honor killings with theme (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shame to family</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>35.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suppressing homosexual urges</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts that are shameful according to religious tenets</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>Protecting masculinity</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Protecting honor</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** \( n = 37 \). \( N \), the total number of incidents examined for each type of homicide.
Shame related to suppressing homosexual urges

In contrast, shame within the anti-LGBTQ homicides was partially the consequence of personal ignominy. Evidence suggests that 23.81 percent of the anti-LGBTQ homicides were committed as a result of the offender attempting to suppress homosexual urges. For example, two brothers shot and killed a gay couple during a hate crime spree. One brother later admitted to being gay and that he was ashamed of his sexuality. Similarly, two friends were charged with beating a gay man to death and setting his body on fire. The victim’s brother later revealed that the victim had an ongoing relationship with the perpetrator stating, “there was a relationship there and he didn’t want [victim] to tell anybody” (Rawls, 1999). Additionally, several of the offenders of the anti-LGBTQ homicides attempted to use the “gay panic defense,” which suggests, “a person with latent homosexual tendencies will have an uncontrollable, violent reaction when propositioned by a homosexual” (Black, 1999). Of the five anti-LGBTQ homicides that suggested that the homicides were the result of suppressed homosexual urges, three (60.00 percent) attempted to use the gay panic defense. In contrast, this subtheme did not emerge in the honor killings.

Acts that are shameful according to religious tenets

Nevertheless, there were similarities between the honor killings and the anti-LGBTQ homicides when shame was examined in light of the offenders’ religious tenets. This theme was present in 27.03 percent of the 37 cases. Specifically, 31.25 percent (n = 5) of the honor killings cited violations of religious norms as a motivation for the murder while this justification was found in 23.81 percent (n = 5) of the anti-LGBTQ homicides. A perpetrator of an anti-LGBTQ ideologically motivated homicide rationalized the homicide by stating, “I’m not guilty of murder. I’m guilty of obeying the laws of the Creator” (Delshon and Stanton, 1999). Further, the offender invoked the tenets of Christianity by claiming, “It’s part of the faith. So many people claim to be Christians and complain about all these things their religion says are a sin, but they’re not willing to do anything about it. They don’t have the guts” (Delshon and Stanton, 1999). Similarly, some offenders of the anti-LGBTQ homicides used their faith to excuse their behaviors while also condemning the sexuality of their victims. For example, one perpetrator who plead guilty to murder said, “I repented. [The victim] is in hell because he’s a homosexual, and it tells you in the New Testament that that’s wrong” (Weintraub, 2000). Perpetrators of honor killings also appealed to their religion. After beheading his wife in what the offender believed was an attempt of keeping her from entering paradise, he claimed that God gave him “extra courage so he could save himself and his children” (Lioni, 2011). Another perpetrator of an honor killing suggested that his acts would be forgiven, stating, “God will protect me, God is watching me, I strangled my daughter, I killed her” (Jeffcoats, 2008).

Role of honor

A secondary goal of this analysis was to compare how honor manifests across honor killings and anti-LGBTQ homicides. Two sub-themes emerged within the broader theme of honor and included protecting masculinity and protecting honor in general.

Protecting masculinity

Approximately 35.14 percent of the 37 homicides were motivated by some perceived slight against the perpetrator’s masculinity. For the anti-LGBTQ homicides, this abuse against masculinity typically resulted from a perceived sexual advance by the victim. This perceived affront to masculinity occurred in 47.62 percent (n = 10) of the anti-LGBTQ homicides. For instance, two brothers stabbed and killed an acquaintance outside of a local bar and said, “Your faggot brother tried to rape my brother” (Bean v. Texas, 1998). Upon apprehension, the pair told officers, “Where we come from, men don’t do that” (Pressley, 1996). Similarly, a teenager shot and killed a fellow classmate after the victim told him he liked him and asked if he would be his Valentine (Associated Press, 2008). Upon apprehension, the pair told officers, “Where we come from, men don’t do that” (Pressley, 1996). Similarly, a teenager shot and killed a fellow classmate after the victim told him he liked him and asked if he would be his Valentine (Associated Press, 2008). This theme is also evident in the murder of a college professor by one of his students who suggested that; “he was verbally inappropriate with at school” (Associated Press, 2015). The perpetrator later explained that he committed the
murder because the victim was flirting with his younger brother on a social media website, stating, “He ain’t physically touched him, but he was in the proposal to try to and I wasn’t going to let that happen” (Associated Press, 2015). Violations of masculinity were characterized differently for the honor killings. Approximately 18.75 percent \( (n = 3) \) of honor killings were the result of violations of gender roles. For example, one perpetrator physically beat his wife to death because she would not cook him the type of meal he wanted for dinner. His lawyer argued that disciplining his wife in this manner was customary in his culture. Other violations of gender roles within the honor killings included dating other men and prematurely ending the relationship.

### Protecting honor in general

Almost half of the honor killings and anti-LGBTQ homicides (48.65 percent) included claims of protecting honor in general as a motivation to commit the murders. The vast majority of honor killings (75.00 percent) included this claim while 28.57 percent of the anti-LGBTQ homicides discussed honor. After fatally stabbing his wife and himself, one perpetrator of an honor killing told law enforcement officers, “They [wife and daughters] took my honor” (Zeigler, 2004). In a recorded conversation given by a perpetrator of an honor killing, he emphasized the importance of honor and why murder may be a justifiable response to dishonor by stating, “[that] for an Iraqi, honor is the most valuable thing. No one hates his daughter, but honor is precious, and nothing is better than honor, and we are a tribal society that can’t change. I didn’t kill someone off the street. I tried to give her a chance, but no result” (Associated Press, 2011). Over a quarter (28.57 percent) of the anti-LGBTQ involved the offender, claiming he was protecting the honor of the white race. Several of the anti-LGBTQ perpetrators cited that they “killed for the cause” (Simonson, 2005) or because gay individuals are an “enemy of their cause” (Nix and Cravens, 2003) to their sexuality.

### Discussion

These findings suggest that honor killings and anti-LGBTQ homicides share similarities. While the theme of shame being brought to the family was concentrated among honor killings, both types of homicides included justifications based on the offenders’ religious beliefs. Both homicides also made reference to the offender’s honor and how the victim may have dishonored the offender or their family. In these instances, the offenders believed the homicide would restore their honor or their family’s honor. Importantly though, while these two types of homicides shared similarities, differences also emerged. While a little more than a fifth of offenders of the anti-LGBTQ homicides stated the offenses were related to shame in an attempt to suppress homosexual urges, this theme did not emerge within the honor killings. Also, the perpetrators of the honor killings had some relationship with each one of the victims while only 28.57 percent of the anti-LGBTQ homicides involved victims and offenders who knew one another.

By definition, honor killings are homicides in which the offender(s) believes the victims’ real or even perceived behaviors would, in some way, bring shame to the family (Kulwicki, 2002). Therefore, it was not surprising that the vast majority of honor killings included aspects of familial shame. However, roughly a fifth of the honor killings did not mention aspects of shame. In these instances, perpetrators were motivated by perceived slights against their masculinity (e.g. not cooking a desired meal) instead of acts that could have been deemed shameful (e.g. not upholding cultural traditions). It is important to note that acts motivated by perceived affronts to the perpetrator’s masculinity highlight the overlap between domestic violence and honor killings, both of which emphasize the use of violence as a mechanism to assert control and power over women. It is likely that for some cases, the role of honor carries more weight in the commission of these homicides than does shame and that honor killings may be similar to domestic violence homicides in general (Shier and Shor, 2016).

Similarly, prior research suggests that offenders of anti-LGBTQ violence are more likely to know their victims than other bias-motivated offenders (Tomsen and Mason, 2001; Gruenewald and Kelley, 2014). Because the victim and offender may have a prior relationship in anti-LGBTQ
homicides, it may be possible for the offender to claim the victim’s behavior shamed the offender. While not explored in the current study, future research should examine the link between shame and ideologically motivated bias homicides.

Prior research has also found that offenders of honor killings may use their religious beliefs to neutralize or justify the incident (van Baak et al., 2017; Doğan, 2014a). What was unique about the current analyses is that the offenders of these two types of homicides used the tenets of two different religions to justify their murders. Therefore, honor killings and anti-LGBTQ homicides were not associated with one specific religion. Indeed, honor killings have been found to occur across Christian, Jewish, Sikh, and Muslim communities (Muhammad, 2010). Findings confirm that these homicides may result from traditional cultural values rather than strictly religious beliefs (Lodhi and Siddiqui, 2014).

Additionally, the comparability of shame across homicides may be most pronounced in cases citing religion as the justification for the incident. Offenders of both homicides consistently reiterated that their actions were a consequence of the victim’s violation of their religious beliefs. In the offender’s view, acts by the victim were an affront, not only to the offender’s personal religiosity, but also to the religious community globally. Subsequently, committing such violent acts on behalf of their respective religious community restored any loss of shame or honor.

Importantly, honor killings are conceptualized as violations of a perceived honor code (Kulwicki, 2002). Similarly, prior research has suggested that anti-LGBT homicides may be motivated partly by the offender’s attempt to restore honor (Gruenewald and Kelley, 2014; Kelley and Gruenewald, 2015). One way for the offender to restore this honor is to demonstrate masculinity (Bułkin, 1999; Perry, 2001). Hayes et al. (2016) found that offenders of hate homicides focus on the victim’s actual or perceived characteristics while perpetrators of honor killings highlight the victim’s actual or perceived behaviors. As Perry (2001) argues, these differences may allow powerful groups to maintain dominance over less powerful groups, like sexual minorities and women. How these homicides are presented in the newspapers and open sources may reflect these social structural hierarchies. This is supported by the finding that newspapers articles present honor killings and domestic violence homicides differently in what might be an attempt to create differences between groups (Shier and Shor, 2016).

Implications for future research can be drawn from the current analysis. The current study was primarily concerned with drawing connections between honor killings and anti-LGBTQ homicides. However, it is reasonable to assume that other forms of extremist violence (e.g. racially motivated homicides) may also highlight similar motivations. Future research should examine this relationship across extremist ideologies. Additionally, the current study highlights the applicability of critical criminology in understanding motivations behind extremist behavior. Future research should continue to expand this line of inquiry.

While this study makes important contributions to our understanding of honor killings and anti-LGBTQ homicides, it has limitations. First, while the ECDB attempts to identify all honor killings and ideologically motivated homicides that have occurred in the USA since 1990, there is the possibility that open sources do not identify an incident as an honor killing or an ideologically motivated event. Future research should compare incidents included in the ECDB with other data sources (i.e. official data). Second, this analysis does not solely rely on statements given by the perpetrator. Second-hand accounts (e.g. statements by family members) of offender motivations for the homicide are also examined. These accounts may not reveal the true motivations of the offender as they see it. Given the nature of the data, they may be representations of rationalized behaviors that could be used during litigation proceedings. Examples of this were found in some of the sources examined (i.e. the gay panic defense). Future research can address this by only examining statements made by the offender. Finally, the number of cases examined across honor killings and anti-LGBTQ cases was relatively limited. While only a few cases were included in the analysis, they represent the publically known population of both honor killings and anti-LGBTQ homicides.
Findings from the current analyses suggest that honor killings and anti-LGBTQ homicides share similarities. While there has been increased scholarly attention to honor killings, it is important for future research to recognize that this crime parallels extremist-based violence and violence against women (Hayes et al., 2016). Doing so will hopefully limit the likelihood of creating “bright boundaries” (Shier and Shor, 2016, p. 1180) between honor killings and other types of homicide in an effort to design policy measures that will assist victims and limit the likelihood of this crime from occurring.

Note
1. In this instance, universe refers to the total number of homicides committed in the USA during the specified time period that meets the established definition of honor killings or anti-LGBTQ homicides.

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Further reading


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Attitudes toward intimate partner “honor”-based violence in India, Iran, Malaysia and Pakistan

Michelle Lowe, Roxanne Khan, Vanlal Thanzami, Mahsa Barzy and Rozina Karmaliani

Abstract

Purpose – Although intimate partner violence (IPV) and “honor”-based violence (HBV) are major concerns throughout the world, little research has investigated the acceptance of these forms of abuse outside of the West. The purpose of this paper is to therefore respond to this gap in the literature by exploring attitudes toward HBV in a fictional depiction of IPV across four Asian samples: India, Iran, Malaysia and Pakistan.

Design/methodology/approach – Participants (n = 579) read a hypothetical scenario in which a husband, despite his own marital infidelity, verbally abuses and physically assaults his wife after discovering that she has been unfaithful. Participants then completed a questionnaire that assessed perceptions of damage to the husband’s honor, approval of intimate partner HBV against the wife, and perceptions of both the victim-wife and the perpetrator-husband.

Findings – The findings revealed that more males than females, across all four nations, were endorsing of honor-adhering attitudes in response to the perceived threat to the husband’s reputation resulting from the wife’s infidelity. Additionally, of the four samples, Pakistani participants were the most approving and Malaysians least endorsing of honor-adhering attitudes.

Originality/value – The results are discussed in relation to studies of honor-adherence in Asian populations. This study provides an original glimpse into the perceptions of intimate partner HBV in these not-often sampled nationalities.

Keywords Attitudes, Intimate partner violence, “Honor”-based violence, Perceptions, Collectivist cultures, Cultural factors

Paper type Research paper

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a major concern for health, criminal justice and economies worldwide (Dietrich and Schuett, 2013). Global prevalence is high, with cultural factors influencing both the rates of IPV and attitudes toward the acceptability of using this form of violence (Madhani et al., 2017). For example, evidence suggests that IPV disproportionately affects women from honor cultures in parts of Asia (Mayeda and Vijaykumar, 2016). For instance, data from over 69,000 Indian women who completed the 2005-2006 National Family Health Survey indicated that in the 12 months prior to the study, 31 percent had been victims of physical abuse and 8 percent of sexual abuse at home (Kimuna et al., 2012). In a study of 400 Iranian women, a notable proportion reported that they had experienced psychological/verbal (58 percent), physical (29 percent) and sexual abuse (10 percent) (Sheikhbardsiri et al., 2017). More specifically, the most recent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan annual report (2015) cites that in the last three years alone, around 2,300 women have been victims of “honor” killing. Other sources indicate that on average there are more than 10,000 “honor” killings per year in just this one nation alone (Kirti et al., 2011). It is estimated that Pakistan has the highest global rate of “honor” killing (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), 2015).

Cultures of honor place a high premium on a family’s respectable social image (Brown et al., 2009). A core expectation in honor cultures, which are collectivist and patriarchal in structure, is that females and males adhere to strict gender roles (Galanti, 2003; Rivera et al., 2008). This social expectation dictates that females demonstrate their worth by exhibiting loyalty, humility,
unconditional compliance, and submissiveness to their male relatives (Cohen and Nisbett, 1994; Rodríguez Mosquera et al., 2002; Vandello, 2016). Males, on the other hand, acquire honor if they act tough and, if deemed necessary, use aggressive force to protect or restore their own, and by association, their family’s honorable reputation (Vandello, 2016).

The collectivist cultural system promotes an ideology in which both the community and family apply pressure on married couples to ensure that wives submit to their husband’s authority, stand behind his decisions, tolerate his actions, and remain faithful (Galanti, 2003; Moreno, 2007; Vandello and Cohen, 2003). In this way, the social hierarchy of honor cultures result in male dominance over female counterparts (Torres et al., 2002), and socially legitimizes the use of “honor”-based violence (HBV) as a means of restoring moral order (Vandello, 2016). Violation of the feminine honor code (e.g. sexual immorality or having an extramarital affair) in particular can threaten a husband’s (and his family’s) reputation and this type of situation results in high rates of HBV (Ahrens et al., 2010). The demands of meeting this cultural expectation are such that both female and male family members may encourage one another to use aggressive means to uphold or protect the social perception of their family’s good standing (Cohen and Nisbett, 1994). This view is supported by a review of the attitudinal literature in which it was found that while females from collectivist honor cultures were less approving of HBV compared to their male counterparts, a notable proportion endorsed the use of abuse, violence and killing other females in the name of family “honor” (Khan, 2018).

While adultery is discouraged in many cultures, it carries a particularly harsh stigma in honor cultures that promote collectivism over individualism (Vandello and Cohen, 2003). It is thus not surprising then that HBV is widely reported across many collectivistic cultures, for example, in the Mediterranean, North America, and Latin America (Dietrich and Schuett, 2013; Vandello and Cohen, 2003), as well as in Turkey (Doğan, 2014; Sev’er, 2005), the Middle Eastern and South Asian nations (Eisner and Ghuneim, 2013; Nasrullah et al., 2009).

Despite this, surprisingly few studies have examined attitudes toward HBV against intimate partners. Cultural factors are shown to determine whether victims perceive family violence to be abusive or not (Lira et al., 1999) as well as the likelihood of victims seeking help (Vandello et al., 2009). In studies with Latino populations, for example, those who adhered to honor-based cultural traditions were more accepting of violence against intimate partners than IPV that was unrelated to defending honor (Dietrich and Schuett, 2013; Vandello et al., 2009). Additionally, Latino participants viewed IPV perpetrators more favorably when the violence was due to a threat of dishonoring a husband’s or family’s reputation, and they rated a wife more positively when she stayed with her violent husband than when she left the family home (Vandello et al., 2009). In short, attitudinal research highlights the importance of a husband’s reputation when honor-adherent participants make judgments about victims and perpetrators in IPV situations, in line with the beliefs within those cultures.

Similar to honor-adherent Latino samples (Vandello et al., 2009), the handful of studies conducted in Asian nations indicate that victims’ perceptions of IPV are likely to be unconducive to help-seeking. For example, a study of pregnant Pakistani women found that while 47 percent perceived physical abuse to be a form of IPV, only 8 percent and 0.4 percent considered verbal and sexual abuse, respectively, to be violent (Madhani et al., 2017). Indeed, no women in Madhani’s et al. study sought professional help after being abused by their husband. This anomaly is perhaps better understood when viewed in context of social norms in Pakistan, which dictate that a husband controls his wife’s sexuality, and she should be sexually available for him, readily and exclusively. Studies show that there is a powerful cultural norm in Pakistan, by which it is socially acceptable for a husband to maintain that his wife deserves “sarzanish” (in Urdu, a stern warning or symbolic humiliation) if she refuses sex or is unfaithful (Fikree et al., 2005). Similar to the western term “cuckold,” husbands in Pakistan who fail to chastise their wives for sexual immorality are often regarded as an object of derision and are labeled as “run mureed” (a wife’s subservient).

This study is the first multi-nation investigation to explore attitudes toward a husband’s use of HBV against his wife, across four Asian nations, namely, India, Iran, Malaysia and Pakistan. Research conducted in these specific nations are a valuable addition to the limited but growing research conducted in comparable Middle Eastern, North African, South Asian and Turkish
populations (see Khan, 2018). To obtain a degree of consistency across such diverse populations, a sample of university students from each nation was recruited for this study. The use of student participants also aligns with a majority of the extant HBV attitudinal research, thereby increasing the reliability of any comparisons made. This study explored the extent to which a husband’s honor was perceived to be damaged by his wife’s infidelity, and the acceptance of him using HBV against her when he found out. The following four attitudinal views were investigated: perceived damage to a husband’s honor, approval of HBV in response to a wife’s adultery, perceptions of the victim-wife and perpetrator-husband. In collectivist honor cultures, female adultery can be damaging to a husband’s (and thereby, the family and community’s) reputation (Vandello, 2016). Therefore, it is expected that there will be gender differences in perceptions of the husband’s honor being damaged, approval of HBV against the wife, as well as perceptions of both the wife and the husband, with males being more endorsing of honor values than females. No previous studies have investigated attitudes toward HBV in these specific Asian nations. As these nations are collectivist-orientated honor cultures, it was expected that participants from all four countries would endorse acceptance of HBV to some extent, although based on previous research, it was predicted that attitudes would be particularly honor-endorsing in Pakistan compared with those of the other three nations.

Method

Design

The study employed a 4 (country of residence) x 2 (gender) between subjects design. Country of residence comprised participants from India, Iran, Malaysia and Pakistan. Four dependent variables comprised items that measured participant’s perceptions of damage to the husband’s honor, their approval of his use of HBV against his wife, and perceptions pertaining to the characterological likeability of both the victim-wife and perpetrator-husband.

Participants

Data were collected from 579 (289 male; 290 female) participants of Asian ethnic origin across four countries of residence: India (n = 141), Iran (n = 124), Malaysia (n = 164) and Pakistan (n = 150). The Indian data were collected from two universities in Aizawl, the state capital of Mizoram, which is situated in the North-eastern region of India. Iranian data were collected from a university in the capital city, Tehran. The Malaysian data were collected from a university in the suburbs of Kuala Lumpur, and Pakistani data from Karachi, the capital of the Pakistani province of Sindh. Age ranged from 17 to 50 years (M = 23.45; SD = 4.74). In total, 480 participants ascribed to a religious denomination, with 207 (36 percent) reporting they were Muslim, 179 (31 percent) Christian, 61 (11 percent) Buddhist and 33 (6 percent) Hindu. The majority of participants had been educated past 16 years, with 277 (48 percent) having university-level education, 272 (47 percent) further (post-16) education, and the remainder having been educated up to school level (up to 16 years). The majority of participants were either single (60 percent) or dating (23 percent), with the remainder being married (12 percent) separated, cohabiting or widowed (all < 1 percent).

Materials

Based on measures used in a study to explore perceptions of damage to honor in Latino populations (see Dietrich and Schuett, 2013), a questionnaire booklet was designed for the purpose of this study. Written instructions asked participants to provide demographic details including gender, age, and ethnic origin. Participants were then asked to read a hypothetical scenario before answering a set of questions used to measure their attitudes toward the intimate partner HBV depicted in that text. The scenario text was as follows:

Asfia/Kimi/Maryam[2] and Pasha/Zuala/Ali have been having an affair for 6 months; they work together as teachers at a local college. Asfia/Kimi/Maryam’s husband, Rizwa/Tluaanga/Riza, had no idea of her infidelity although he himself was having an extramarital affair. He only became suspicious when he saw them holding hands in a photo taken at a college social event. When Asfia/Kimi/Maryam came home from work that night, Rizwa/Tluaanga/Riza called her “a whore”, punched her to the ground and kicked her. He threatened that unless she ended her affair with Pasha/Zuala/Ali, he would kill her.
Participants were asked to answer four questions that examined perceptions of damage the husband’s reputation, approval of his use of HBV against his wife, and views of both these protagonists respectively. Each response was rated along a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. The wording of each of the four dependent variables was as follows:

1. Damage to the husband’s honor – Asfia/Kimi/Maryam has damaged her husband’s honor by openly having an affair with Pasha/Zuala/Ali.
2. Approval of intimate partner HBV – It is reasonable to use violence in this circumstance.
3. Perceptions of the victim-wife – Asfia/Kimi/Maryam is a caring person.
4. Perceptions of the perpetrator-husband – Rizwa/Tluanga/Riza is reliable.

Procedure

A similar procedure was used across all samples for consistency across populations. In each country, a research team collected data from students at a number of colleges and universities campuses, using opportunity sampling. Adverts were placed around campuses with a website address so participants could complete the questionnaire online. Students, when approached on campus with paper copies, were verbally briefed about the study, and asked if they wished to participate. Those who agreed were provided with the questionnaire booklet to complete in their own time, and to return to a secure drop-in box. A detailed briefing and debriefing sheet, attached to the questionnaire, detailed the full research aims and informed them that participation was voluntary, confidential, responses were anonymous and that any information provided would be used for research purposes only. The project was fully approved by each participating institution’s ethics committee guidelines.

Results

Multivariate effects

Multivariate analysis of variance was conducted to examine the influence that country of residence and gender had on perceptions of the perpetrator-husband’s use of HBV across the four dependent variables. Significant multivariate effects were revealed for country of residence, Pillai’s $= 0.52$, $F(12, 1,698) = 29.76$, $p < 0.001$ and gender, Pillai’s $= 0.04$, $F(4, 564) = 5.84$, $p < 0.001$. The interaction between country of residence and gender was non-significant, Pillai’s $= 0.20$, $F(12, 1,698) = 0.74$, $p = 0.72$. Subsequent univariate analyses on the significant main effects are detailed below.

Gender

Significant univariate main effects were revealed for two of the four dependent variables, namely: approval of intimate partner HBV, $F(1, 567) = 13.01$, $p < 0.001$; and perceptions of the victim-wife, $F(1, 565) = 6.40$, $p = 0.01$. Males were more approving of intimate partner HBV and considered the victim less likable than did females. Damage to the perpetrator-husband’s honor, $F(1, 567) = 0.62$, $p = 0.43$, and perceptions of the perpetrator-husband $F(1, 567) = 3.59$, $p = 0.06$ were not significant, although perceptions of the perpetrator were marginal. See Table I for means and standard deviations.

Country of residence

Significant univariate main effects were revealed for all four dependent variables across country of residence; namely, damage to the perpetrator-husband’s honor, $F(3, 567) = 31.41$, $p < 0.001$, approval of intimate partner HBV, $F(3, 567) = 122.26$, $p < 0.001$, perceptions of the victim-wife, $F(3, 567) = 14.64$, $p < 0.001$ and perceptions of the perpetrator-husband, $F(3, 567) = 55.08$, $p < 0.001$.

Post hoc Tukey tests revealed that Pakistani participants were more strongly believing that the wife had caused damage to her husband’s honor than were Indian, Iranian or Malaysian participants.
Pakistani participants were more approving of the intimate partner HBV committed against the victim-wife than were Indian, Iranian or Malaysians. In a stepped effect, Indians were more approving of violence than Iranians or Malaysians. In turn, Malaysian participants were more highly disapproving of intimate partner HBV than participants from any of the other nations. In a similar stepped fashion, Pakistani participants had more positive views regarding the likeability of the perpetrator than participants from the other three nations. In turn, Iranians and Indians were more positive than Malaysians, who were more disapproving of the perpetrator-husband than participants from India, Iran and Pakistan were. Interestingly, however, Pakistani, along with Iranian participants had more favorable perceptions of the victim-wife than did Indian or Malaysians. Table II shows the means and standard deviations.

**Table I** Means and standard deviations across participant gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Damage to perpetrator-husband’s honor</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>1.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5.05</td>
<td>1.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval of intimate partner HBV</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>1.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of victim-wife</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>1.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of perpetrator-husband</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>1.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

The gender differences revealed a partial confirmation of predictions. Specifically, although mean differences were small, males were significantly more approving of the perpetrator-husband’s HBV toward his victim-wife and they regarded her less positively than did female participants. These findings align with research in honor cultures that highlight the promotion of masculine dominance over female kin and expectations of a wife’s loyalty, submissiveness and sexual faithfulness toward her husband (e.g. Torres et al., 2002; Vandello and Cohen, 2003).

In evaluating this study’s findings, it is important to remember that in Asian collectivist cultures, as those sampled for the present study, there is a social expectation for a husband to chastise his wife if she is perceived to violate the rigid gendered-honor code; if he does not, he himself brings shame upon both himself and his family (Zakar et al., 2013). It is perhaps unsurprising then that when compared to females, males were more approving of intimate partner HBV and more

**Table II** Means and standard deviations across country of residence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Damage to perpetrator-husband’s honor</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>1.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>6.24</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval of intimate partner HBV</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of victim-wife</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of perpetrator-husband</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
negative toward the victim-wife as the onus is very much upon males within honor cultures to respond publically with aggressive machoism to uphold his and his family’s honor (Cohen and Nisbett, 1994; Khan, 2018), should a wife breach her gender role expectations.

Contrary to predictions, no gender differences were found for perceptions of damage to the husband’s honor or how he was perceived. Interestingly, both males and females responded that the husband’s honor had been damaged by the wife’s infidelity. This implies that within honor cultures, males and females endorse honor-based beliefs in similar measure, and both believe that female infidelity to be damaging to a husband’s reputation.

More broadly, these findings may seem paradoxical in light of a large volume of research that has found that typically, females in contrast to males, are more likely to blame men who perpetrate IPV against women (see Eigenberg and Policastro, 2016; Flood and Pease, 2009). Yet, a different pattern is beginning to emerge in piecing together findings from the growing research conducted in Asian collectivist honor cultures in relation to HBV (see Khan, 2018). For example, in a study of 601 members of the public in Pakistan, upon reading a hypothetical scenario, over half the females (53 percent) interviewed approved of a husband killing his wife in the name of so called “honor,” after witnessing her in an extramarital relationship with a stranger (Shaikh et al., 2010). It was also notable just under three-quarters of these females (71 percent) thought that the husband should not forgive his wife, and over a half (57 percent) thought the husband should divorce her, and ask her to leave his house straight away. A study of British South Asians (a majority of Indian and Pakistani origin), found that while a comparably small percentage supported using HBV against a female, if she had dishonored her family, about one-fifth (18 percent) of both males and females agreed that HBV was justifiable for disobeying her father (8 percent), marrying someone unacceptable (7 percent) or wanting to end her marriage (7 percent) (ComRes, 2012). While significant gender differences were not reported in this and other studies with comparable diasporic British Asians populations (e.g. Khan et al., 2018), they do indicate that in collectivist communities that have migrated from Asia, there is a degree of acceptance for using HBV against females who break honor-codes (Brandon and Hafez, 2010). This has wide-reaching implications for the perpetuation of intimate partner HBV globally (Hayes et al., 2016).

It was predicted that all four nations would express honor-endorsing attitudes to some extent, although Pakistani participants were expected to have more negative honor-endorsement than Indians, Iranians and Malaysians. As predicted, findings confirmed that participants across all four nations (as collectivist-patriarchal cultures) endorsed intimate partner HBV to some extent. Results across the four measures were consistent in showing that Malaysians were the least honor-endorsing, least condoning of intimate partner HBV, and less positive toward the perpetrator-husband than the other nations, while as expected, Pakistani participants were the most honor-endorsing, most approving of intimate partner HBV, and had the highest positive perception of the perpetrator-husband. Perhaps this finding is not altogether surprising given that Pakistan is estimated to have the highest worldwide rate of “honor” killing (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), 2015). The present study is not without limitation. Although the participant age range was wide, the mean age revealed that a majority of the participants were young adults with relatively high educational achievements, recruited from university settings. As such, their opinions may not be representative of their older or less-educated counterparts (Lown and Vega, 2001). Additionally, although some demographic data were collected, research suggests that factors such as socioeconomic status (West et al., 1998), and coming from an urban vs rural background (Moracco et al., 2005) may be associated with attitudes toward IPV and HBV (Brandon and Hafez, 2010; Eisner and Ghuneim, 2013; Shaikh et al., 2015) therefore should be accounted for in future studies.

A number of factors restricted the generalizability of the current findings, including the use of just one hypothetical scenario upon which to test the attitudinal measures. Although hypothetical scenario studies lack ecological validity relevant to real cases, they are frequently utilized in attitudinal research, and provide an ethical means by which to test sensitive topics in a way not possible if depictions of real cases were used (see e.g. Schoenberg and Ravdal, 2000; Sleed et al., 2002 for further discussion). Previous studies have also used this method to collect data on participants’ perceptions of HBV in Asia, including Pakistan (e.g. Shaikh et al., 2010;
Shaikh et al., 2015). Additionally, hypothetical scenarios provide a scientific way to test specific variables while not confounding results by including extraneous factors that may be apparent in real and uncontrolled cases. Still, it is recognized that this study used only one vignette to depict a husbands’ use of intimate partner HBV against his wife, in response to her infidelity, where the perceived damage to honor was public. Participants may have responded differently to a situation that depicted a perceived affront to honor that was not public (Dietrich and Schuett, 2013), did not depict marital infidelity, or one in which the victim was male and the perpetrator was female. Therefore, it would be advantageous for future studies to test judgments toward HBV that involve other violent situations that arise through means other than infidelity, involving protagonists in relationships other than that of marital partners.

This study is the first multi-nation investigation in Asia that explores attitudes toward intimate partner HBV. To see if the current findings can be replicated, future research could recruit to compare the attitudes of multiple-samples of participants from a number of collectivist cultures, including those from the Middle East and South Asia (Eisner and Ghuneim, 2013; Vandello, 2016). There is also scope for cross-cultural studies to compare attitudes toward intimate partner HBV in collectivist cultures (with both native and diasporic populations) with individualist cultures where HBV has been reported in Europe, such as Germany (Grzyb, 2016), Finland (Keskinnen, 2009), Sweden (Wikan, 2008) and across North America (Chesler, 2009; Hayes et al., 2016). The current findings permit a more nuanced understanding of the role of culture in the acceptance of intimate partner HBV. This will aid the development of more effective education, intervention, and prevention programs that increase awareness and support options with these difficult to identify and reach populations.

Yet, it is important to acknowledge then that individuals’ adherence to collectivist honor principles may act as an obstacle to victim help-seeking (Khan, 2007). It is also important not to overlook the attitudes of professionals who are likely to have direct contact with HBV victims in practice settings. For example, although health and emergency services workers are in place to provide support for those vulnerable to this form of abuse, studies have found that nursing staff, in-training to work within healthcare services in collectivist cultures, would condone the use of violence (even murder) if committed to protect “honor” (Can and Edirne, 2011). Clearly, there is a pressing need for attitudinal change programs in collectivist honor cultures, to train professionals in the safeguarding arena, including police, social welfare, health, education services. (e.g. Mayeda and Vijaykumar, 2016; Sedem and Ferrer-Wreder, 2015). An innovative attitude change program in Sweden called “Sharaf Heroes” is a laudable exemplar of how interventions might be designed to engage young male populations to address attitudes that condone the use of HBV (Rexvid and Schlytter, 2012). This long-term program offers educational workshops and courses where men from different cultural and religious backgrounds attend courses about human rights and equality, where they are encouraged to discuss the patriarchal origins and detrimental consequences of HBV. Once they complete a course, a “qualified” Hero can then themselves deliver a workshop in schools, organizations, and authorities. This program has been rolled out to a number of Swedish cities, and across other countries, such as France, Holland, Norway and Germany (Rexvid and Schlytter, 2012). Practical developments, such as these, may prove to be influential in changing attitudes toward HBV, as they implicitly require participation and engagement from males raised in patriarchal, collectivist cultures, who are most “at risk” of perpetuating HBV beliefs, and so their insight could play a part in a program’s success.

In conclusion, this multi-nation attitudinal study provides a novel overview of how individuals from Asian collectivist cultures differ in their perceptions of intimate partner HBV. Due to the populations sampled, and for the specific focus on intimate partner HBV, this study’s findings add to the growing research in this previously overlooked area. The current findings also have applied value and could guide practice efforts in combating perpetrators’ HBV-supportive attitudes that endorse the use of violence as a means of maintaining family honor. There is also scope for exploring factors other than that of culture, including psychosocial risk and protective factors already established in the aggression literature, which may influence the development of prosocial attitudes that discourage the use of violence against intimate partners in the name of so called “honor.”
Notes
1. All percentages are rounded up.
2. The protagonists’ names in the scenario were changed to reflect the country in which the questionnaires were distributed.

References


Further reading


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Females perpetrating honour-based abuse: controllers, collaborators or coerced?

Lis Bates

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to address an emerging international debate about the involvement of females in perpetrating honour-based abuse (HBA). Presenting new empirical data, this study profiles the different roles played by women, discussing them in relation to gender and their relationships to victims, and argues that acknowledgement of female perpetrators does not fundamentally challenge a gendered interpretation of HBA.

Design/methodology/approach – Some 1,474 case files flagged as HBA were gathered from one police force in Southern England and 50 domestic abuse agencies across England and Wales. Descriptive statistics explored which victim, perpetrator and abuse characteristics were associated with female perpetration. Case narratives were thematically analysed to profile the different roles females played. Findings were explored in eight key informant interviews with caseworkers from the services data came from.

Findings – This paper finds that: females are more involved in perpetrating HBA than other forms of domestic abuse, but primary perpetrators are still mostly male; victims are overwhelmingly female; the context for abuse is the maintenance of patriarchal values on gender roles; female perpetrator roles vary, meriting further exploration; and female perpetrators can be conceptualised within a gendered framework.

Originality/value – This paper presents important new empirical data to advance the debate on the role of women in perpetrating HBA. It will be of interest to academics, researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners alike.

Keywords Gender, Honour-based violence, Mother, Forced marriage, Mother-in-law, Patriarchal bargain

Paper type Research paper

Honour-based abuse (HBA) is usually framed as a form of gender-based violence (Siddiqui, 2014). This is supported by empirical evidence, which shows that HBA, in common with other forms of gender-based violence, most often involves female victims and male perpetrators (Hester et al., 2015). However, the involvement of female family members in perpetrating HBA has been documented as a distinctive feature (Sen, 2005).

In the past couple of years there has been a fledgling but growing international debate about the role of women as perpetrators. A 2015 police inspection in the UK noted that female family members (in particular mothers and mothers-in-law) were quite frequently involved in carrying out or facilitating the abuse of (mostly) younger female family members (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), 2015). Recent empirical research has suggested that mothers, in particular, may play a more active role in perpetrating HBA than previously thought (Aplin, 2017).

This paper contributes to that debate. Presenting new empirical data, it profiles the different roles played by women in perpetrating HBA, discussing them in relation to gender and the relationships between female perpetrators and victims. It asks and answers four questions, in the context of England and Wales. First, how common is female perpetration? Second, who are female perpetrators? Third, what roles do women play in perpetrating abuse? Fourth, can HBA still be conceptualised as gendered abuse?
Background

**Female victims and female perpetrators**

While HBA sometimes involves female perpetrators and male victims, the abuse is gendered as most victims are women and most perpetrators men (HMIC, 2015; Hester, 2013; Sen, 2005). In England and Wales, latest data from the Forced Marriage Unit showed that 80 per cent of cases were female and 20 per cent male (Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), 2016). Latest Crown Prosecution Service data (for 2016-2017) found that 72 per cent of victims in HBA cases where gender was known were women, and 28 per cent men (Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), 2017). Kazimirski et al. (2009) found that 96 per cent of victims of forced marriage were women, and 4 per cent men.

Within an overarching violence against women lens, involvement of female perpetrators is often cited as a distinctive feature of HBA (Aplin, 2017; Her Majesty’s Government (HMG), 2014; Sen, 2005). This poses a potential challenge with conceptualising and responding to HBA as a form of violence against women (Roberts et al., 2014). Sen (2005) notes that “not only men but also women play a central role in ensuring that women adhere to gender norms […] women are key in ensuring these limits and can also be party to decisions to kill women” (p. 50).

In 2016-2017, 86 per cent of defendants in HBA prosecutions were men and 14 per cent women. The equivalent figures for domestic abuse were 92 and 8 per cent (CPS, 2017). While the perpetration of HBA crimes remains heavily gendered (men against female victims), women are more often involved than in cases of domestic abuse.

*How might women’s involvement be explained?*

Women have been involved in several high-profile “honour killings”. Some have played an active role – for instance the mother-in-law of Surjit Athwal. Surjit was a 26-year-old British woman who disappeared in India during a visit in 1998; her husband Sukhdev and his mother Bachan were convicted by a UK court nine years later for her murder. In other cases, women’s roles seem to be more complex and the line between “perpetrator” and something more akin to a “coerced victim” blurred. For instance, the case of Tulay Goren, a British Kurdish girl who disappeared in 1999 from her home in London. During the trial of Tulay Goren’s father and uncle(s) for her murder it was shown that her mother, though on the face of it “colluding” with the murder, was herself highly controlled, severely abused and intimidated by her husband, who had attempted to kill her at least twice (Bingham, 2009). It was only the testimony of Tulay’s mother and sister which led to the conviction.

Thus, there may be questions over the extent to which women “perpetrators” have an active choice in their actions. There may be nuances to their roles which have as yet been insufficiently explored – for example, might they be operating tacitly to mitigate or disrupt male-perpetrated violence within the family? Similarly complex roles negotiated by women are described by Giovannini (1987) who found that Sicilian girls meeting secret boyfriends were routinely exposed by their sisters to the family. He concluded that the implications for the sisters of having a “ruined” sister motivated them to betray the secret, for fear of being tainted by association. Analysing roles of female family members in three “honour” killings in Sweden, Elden (2011) noted that “the women, sisters and mothers, all act in different ways” and that women “have been more or less invisible in this debate, as have internal power relations within the family” (p. 128f.). Interviewing survivors, she found that women (especially mothers) often secretly helped their daughters (e.g. to conceal a pregnancy or to report abuse to the police), but that they suffered a high price themselves for doing so if found out (e.g. harassment by community members, abandonment). She suggested that female “solidarity” could be limited, with women willing to help one another until the point that it impinged their own reputation – the same notion of “infection” by association with a “bad” woman as observed in the Sicilian context.

A key theory is Kandiyoti’s “patriarchal bargain”. She argued that women strategize within a set of concrete constraints, and that different forms of patriarchy call for different strategies to maximise security and optimise their options with varying potential for active or passive resistance in the face of oppression (Kandiyoti, 1988). The notion that women’s participation in patriarchal family structures gains them influence has been developed to show that age (and associated status)
may be as powerful a dividing line as gender. Payton suggested that “patriarchal structures do not just unite men against women, but the older generation against the younger. Older women may be included in family councils and take a role in conspiracies, provided they have internalised the gender roles of the ‘honour’ system and play a masculine role in enforcing them on the younger generation” (Payton, 2011, p. 75). Rew et al. (2013) argued for the existence of a “culturally specific form of ‘patriarchal bargain’” in Indian society, and showed that mother-in-law to daughter-in-law violence can be conceived within feminist frameworks (p. 147). Gangoli and Rew (2011) suggested that “woman-to-woman violence not only serves male interests in dividing women, but also uses older women to control younger ones in the family” and that “social and familial benefits accrue to women who accept, and are complicit in, these relationships” (pp. 420-1).

In sum, the literature shows that, while female perpetrators are often a feature of HBA, their roles are varied, and can be conceptualised within an overarching framework in which women negotiate their own roles and power in relation to patriarchal norms and family hierarchies relating to age and status.

Methods

Data on victims, perpetrators and abuse profile were collected from 162 case records flagged as HBA by specialist caseworkers in one police force in South England and two domestic abuse services in the North and East Midlands of England. Data comprised profiles of people involved, case notes, narratives of incidents, and interventions offered. The 162 cases were supplemented by 1,312 pre-coded victim, perpetrator and abuse profiles from HBA cases reported to national charity SafeLives by 48 other domestic abuse services across England and Wales. Cases spanned the period 2010-2015.

Descriptive statistics (frequencies and Pearson’s $\chi^2$ for significance) were run on key variables across the combined data set of 1,474 cases, to identify which victim, perpetrator and abuse characteristics were associated with female perpetration. Additional narrative information from the 162 more detailed case records was analysed thematically, to consider the nature of female perpetrator roles. Emerging findings were explored in eight “key informant interviews” with police and victim caseworkers specialising in HBA from the three sites the 162 detailed case records were extracted from.

In constructing the 162 case data set, the police force was sampled opportunistically, being the only one out of seven initially approached where research access was granted. Case records were added from two specialist domestic abuse services supporting HBA victims, one in North England and one in the East Midlands of England, selected because they were in different parts of England to the police force (i.e. to sample more areas), and because they supported sizeable numbers of HBA victims (as reported in data returns to SafeLives). All 162 cases were tracked from report to the police/support service to the point that the police/support service closed the case. Data were extracted, coded and anonymised by the researcher from databases at each site. Anonymised data were transferred to the secure server of a University in Southern England via encrypted memory stick, as per Data Agreements signed with each site. Research ethics permission was granted by a University in Southern England.

Findings

How common is female perpetration?

Across all cases, HBA was heavily gendered. Some 48 per cent of the combined data set of 1,474 cases involved a male primary perpetrator, and only 4 per cent a female primary perpetrator. In the remaining 48 per cent of cases the gender of the primary perpetrator was unknown. Thus, where primary perpetrator gender was known, 92 per cent were male, and 8 per cent female. To look in more depth at perpetrator gender and roles, further analysis was conducted on the 162 case data set where the relationship of the perpetrator to victim could be mapped in detail (these case narratives contained records of all the known perpetrators, not just the primary perpetrator as recorded in the 1,312 case data set). Once women in secondary
perpetrator roles were also counted, 50 per cent of these cases (81/162) involved a female perpetrator in some role (either primary or secondary). Figure 1 shows females as a proportion of all the primary perpetrators (inner ring) and any perpetrators (outer ring), where gender was known.

The finding that women were involved most often alongside other perpetrators (usually men), rather than acting alone, was tested using Pearson’s $\chi^2$ statistic in SPSS on the 162 cases. This showed a highly statistically significant association ($p < 0.001$) between involvement of a female in some role and the involvement of multiple perpetrators. In total, 95 per cent of cases involving a female also involved one or more other perpetrators; in only 5 per cent of cases were they acting alone.

Who are the female perpetrators?

The cases sampled involved a mixture of abuse from a (current or ex) intimate partner, and from family members, all flagged by the reporting agency as honour-based. Across all cases, approximately one-third of cases involved abuse perpetrated by a current or ex-intimate partner alone, one-third involved abuse from family members, and one-third a combination of both intimate partner and family members. The distinction is important, because the data show that involvement of a female in perpetrating abuse was (significantly) associated with cases involving violence from family members, and not with intimate partner abusers who acted alone. In cases which only involved an intimate partner perpetrator, only 7 per cent of perpetrators were female. In cases which involved an intimate partner perpetrator plus family members, 65 per cent included a female perpetrator. For those which involved family members only, this was 67 per cent.

Who were these women? Table I profiles who the females were in relation to the victims in the 81/162 cases which involved a female perpetrator. Most commonly they were the victim’s mother (42 cases, 52 per cent), acting alone or sometimes with the victim’s aunt or sister. The female perpetrator was a mother-in-law in 23 cases (28 per cent), again acting alone or with the victim’s sister(s)-in-law or aunt(s)-in-law. The victims’ aunts(s) or sister(s) accounted for a further five cases (6 per cent) and the victim’s aunt(s)-in-law or sister(s)-in-law another ten cases (12 per cent). Only seven cases (9 per cent) involved a female current or ex-intimate partner perpetrator (a wife or girlfriend).

**Figure 1** Female primary perpetrators (inner ring) and secondary perpetrators (outer ring)

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Note: $n = 162$
The nature of the abuse differed. Abuse from mothers commonly took the form of controlling behaviour and emotional manipulation, including threats to harm to kill themselves or crying/pleading with victims not to shame them. Less physical violence was recorded from mothers; this tended to come from fathers and brothers. By contrast, mothers-in-law were more associated with trapping victims at home, physically preventing them from leaving, domestic servitude and carrying out physical abuse— including slapping, pushing, beating.

**What roles do women play in perpetrating abuse?**

The narrative detail available varied considerably in the 81/162 case records involving female perpetrators. For all 81, the case notes were re-read to see if there was a description of the nature of the female’s involvement. Some simply recorded that one or more women were involved, but did not specify the nature of the woman’s role separate to that of the male perpetrator(s). For instance, several recorded risks from the parents without specifying whether the mother was actively involved. Other records specified the nature of the abuse, and who had done what.

To explore in more depth the different roles played by these women, the 19 cases (one-quarter) which gave fuller description of the roles of the females were pulled out. For each, the role of the female(s) was thematically analysed to see: first, if they were leading or directing the abuse (for instance, if the victim reported to the caseworker that they were); second, whether they were carrying out certain abusive acts (e.g. restraining the victim, reporting on their behaviour to the lead perpetrator) but following another person’s lead or acting jointly with them; and third, if there was any record of the female being coerced, intimidated, or acting to resist or protect the victim.

Based on these measures, three different roles emerged. In some cases, women took a lead role, orchestrating or directing others—most often mothers-in-law towards their daughters-in-law (these were named “controllers”). In other cases, women acted in support of a male perpetrator, commonly their husband or son: there was a record of them carrying out specific abuses but generally in support of their husband or son (these were named “collaborators”). A third group seemed more passive, coerced or intimidated (e.g. they were victims of domestic abuse themselves, or in fear for their own safety or reputation) (these were called “coerced”). Of the 19 cases examined, 5 were observed to be “controllers”, 11 “collaborators” and 3 “coerced”. Case studies for each are given below.

**Controllers.** In this role, the female took the lead, organising or directing other family members to abuse. Across all 19 cases examined, mothers-in-law most often took this role, though there were some cases involving mothers.

Case 1: a 30-year-old Muslim Indian woman experiencing domestic abuse from her husband (verbal, physical, coercive control and rape). She said the assaults were ordered by her mother-in-law, some carried out herself, and some by the victim’s husband under the mother-in-law’s direction (Domestic abuse service, East Midlands).

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**Table I** Who are the female perpetrators?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship to victim</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother-in-law</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister(s)-in-law/aunt(s)-in-law</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Ex) wife/girlfriend</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister(s)/aunt(s)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total cases</td>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** 81/162 cases involved a female perpetrator in some role. The table sums to more than 81 because seven cases involved females from more than one relationship category.
Case 2: a 25-year-old Sikh Indian woman experiencing severe physical abuse from her husband. She asked for a divorce and he threatened to kill her if she left. She feared violence from her mother-in-law, who she said orchestrated the abuse. There were bail conditions against the mother-in-law and husband (Domestic abuse service, East Midlands).

Collaborators. In this role the female was actively involved, either taking a lead from male relatives, or acting jointly with them – but the case notes make clear that they played a specific role in the abuse.

Case 1: a 24-year-old British Asian woman who had fled a forced marriage from her brother and mother. There was physical abuse from her brother, and policing from her mother who prevented her wearing make-up and checked on her whereabouts constantly. She was locked in the house, not allowed out on her own and not fed for periods of time. Her mother had threatened to kill herself if the victim ever left home (Domestic abuse service, East Midlands).

Case 2: a 20-year-old gay Qatari woman claiming asylum in UK in fear of violence from her family including both parents and brothers, who believed that her atheism and homosexuality were mental health issues and wanted to force her to marry a man. Qatar imposes the death penalty for homosexuality and atheism. Her brother and mother were trying to track her down (Domestic abuse service, East Midlands).

Of the cases reviewed, “collaborators” was the largest single group by frequency (11/19 cases). This profile seemed particularly to involve mothers, often acting alongside fathers or brothers.

Coerced. In this role, the female perpetrator(s) seemed to be coerced, intimidated and/or victims themselves, often of previous domestic abuse from their husband. For this group, evidence of antecedent domestic abuse in the record was used as one indicator of coercion.

Case 1: a 20-year-old British Pakistani women whose parents were preparing to marry her to a cousin in Pakistan. Her father was physically and verbally abusive and controlling, and had tried to strangle her. Her mother was suspected of passing information to the father about the victim, but police records show her to be a repeated victim of previous domestic abuse herself from her husband (the father) (Domestic abuse service, East Midlands).

Case 2: a 19-year-old British Indian male forced by his parents to get engaged to his cousin in India. He believed the marriage was intended for his wife to care for his disabled sisters. His parents were emotionally blackmailing him to marry, threatening to send him to Africa to live with family if he refused. His father had strangled him; but there was also a recorded history on file of physical domestic abuse from his father to his mother which suggested she may not have agency herself (Domestic abuse service, North England).

Discussion

Interpreting female roles

Literature shows that perpetrators of HBA are commonly male (HMIC, 2015). However, both theoretical discussions (e.g. Sen, 2005) and empirical work (e.g. Dyer, 2015; Glick et al., 2016) identify the involvement of female perpetrators as a key feature of HBA, especially compared with other forms of gendered violence. The study presented in this paper found that perpetration was heavily gendered, with 48 per cent of all cases involving a primary male perpetrator, and 4 per cent a female (92 and 8 per cent, respectively, of cases where gender was known). However, it also found that, when females acting alongside a male perpetrator (i.e. in a secondary role) were also counted, half of all cases involved a female perpetrator in some way. When a female was involved, it was most commonly the victim’s mother (42 cases, 52 per cent), or their mother-in-law (23 cases, 28 per cent), other female in-laws (10 cases, 12 per cent) or female blood relatives (5 cases, 6 per cent). Only seven cases (9 per cent) involved an (ex) wife or girlfriend (Table I).

These data support the literature in finding primarily male perpetrators, but also certain roles taken by female perpetrators, often alongside men. The finding that mothers were the most common female perpetrator (52 per cent) is in keeping with Aplin’s recent empirical research, which found that mothers were perpetrators in 64 per cent of cases involving a female perpetrator
(Aplin, 2017), and contributes to the argument she makes for understanding better the risks posed by mothers in these cases. However, this study found much greater involvement by mothers-in-law (28 per cent) compared to Aplin (6.4 per cent).

Specialists in HBA (the eight “key informants”) from the data sites interviewed for this study described the roles and motives of female perpetrators as varied. They said that women sometimes directed abuse; in other cases, they might not intervene to prevent it. Women were described as not always having a choice. Potentially they were in fear for their own safety, and having to consider the risk to their own honour, standing and reputation: mothers from the potential shame from a “wayward” daughter, mothers-in-law for the implications of failing to train a daughter-in-law properly. While this study has not investigated in-depth the motivations or agency of female perpetrators, it has found some emerging evidence in the case file narratives of such varying roles. It has described three roles in particular, as follows, setting them out to invite further debate.

First, the “controllers”. These were cases in which women seemed to actively abuse their female in-laws, often a daughter-in-law or sister-in-law. These roles were clearly delineated by power hierarchies – they were the older, matriarchal figures, and often the in-laws against a younger bride joining the family. As Gangoli and Siddiqui have argued, this reflects the power and organisation structures of extended (South Asian) families. These cases provide evidence for the intersection of age and status within the family being as important a power dynamic as gender (Payton, 2011; Rew et al., 2013, on a culturally specific form of patriarchal bargain). Key informant interviewees identified domestic servitude of a daughter-in-law and control (sometimes leading to abuse) by a mother-in-law as quite typical, especially because this reflected common division of duties in the household, with a mother-in-law in charge of the household and daughter-in-law holding specific domestic duties. These cases often occurred in joint family households, where a son and daughter-in-law lived with his extended family.

Second, the “collaborators”. Here, women seemed to actively collude and collaborate in abuse of their natal family members, or in-laws, but alongside other perpetrators. It is not clear why, but arguments advanced about self-interest or fear (Payton, 2011), about female relatives distancing themselves from shame by association (Giovannini, 1987) or about the patriarchal bargain (Kandiyyoti, 1988) may apply.

Third, the “coerced”. In the handful of these cases in this sample, the narrative suggested that the female (often the mother) may perhaps have been a victim of abusive or controlling behaviour from male relatives herself; in some she was listed as resistant, or even as a protective factor to the victim, perhaps advocating on her behalf. This role exists in the literature, especially around previous high-profile cases (e.g. Tulay Goren’s murder) where women’s roles in the family and abuse were complex (Eldek, 2011). These raise further questions: can we be sure that women are always active in the abuse? Might they be “guilty by association”, or indeed trying to mitigate the actions of male family members?

Can HBA still be conceptualised as gendered?

So far this paper has examined the question of perpetrator gender, and found that HBA involves primary male perpetrators but that female perpetrators are more represented than they are in other forms of domestic abuse, especially when secondary perpetrators are considered. This section considers what the greater involvement of female perpetrators means for a gendered conceptualisation. First, however, to address fully whether HBA is gendered, in addition to perpetrator gender, we must consider three related questions: whether victims are gendered, whether the context and motives for abuse are gendered, and, whether the nature of abusive behaviours carried out by females differs from that from males.

Victims are mainly female. Previous research has shown that victims are predominantly female (HMIC, 2015), but that there are male victims too (Samad, 2010). Estimates of the proportion of male victims vary from around 4 per cent (Kazimirski et al., 2009) to 28 per cent (CPS, 2017). This study found strong evidence of HBA victimisation as gendered. Across all 1,474 cases, 94 per cent of the victims were female – a higher rate than has been reported before (HMIC, 2015; FCO, 2016). Only 4 per cent were male (2 per cent were unknown).
Context and triggers for abuse relate to gender roles. The literature identifies triggers or justifications offered for perpetration of HBA against women and men. Government guidance states that both genders can be victims of forced marriages to prevent relationships deemed “unsuitable” by family members, and as a means of controlling unwanted sexuality, which might include LGBT relationships, but that this particularly relates to the sexual behaviour of women (HMG, 2014). Men are also exposed to abuse including forced marriage to control their sexuality or relationships deemed “unsuitable” (Hester et al., 2008; Jaspal, 2014; Khan et al., 2017; Samad, 2010).

This study supports the triggers/justifications previously identified in literature for both female and male victims. Females were victims because they were seen to transgress expected gender roles and behaviours. They were abused by their own family members for either rejecting a marriage desired by their family, choosing their own partner who their family disapproved of (e.g. three cases involved Asian girls dating white boys), or for having a westernised lifestyle. For females, there was evidence of sexual orientation being a trigger for abuse – including the “punishment” of women for being lesbian/gay. Women were abused by their in-laws where their in-laws rejected the victim for being an inferior match to their son/brother (e.g. one victim was rejected by her Asian male partner’s family because she was a white woman; another was rejected by her in-laws for their perception that she was of an inferior ethnic caste).

Males were victims where they were seen to transgress the family expectations of marriage, but again this often related to expected gender roles. Like the women, they suffered abuse from their own family members for either rejecting an arranged marriage desired by the family, or making a love match deemed unsuitable (e.g. for being the wrong ethnicity, culture or caste, or for having children from a previous relationship). Some men were forced to marry to “correct” them for being gay.

The nature of abuse from female perpetrators. Analyses of the 162 cases in SPSS using Pearson’s $\chi^2$ statistic showed that certain forms of abuse were statistically associated with involvement of a female perpetrator in some role (primary or secondary). Physical violence was significantly less likely in cases involving a female ($p < 0.01$); it occurred in 72 per cent of these cases, compared with 97 per cent of cases which did not involve a female perpetrator (this does not mean a female was carrying out physical abuse in the 72 per cent, just that someone was). Similarly, sexual abuse was significantly less likely ($p < 0.01$). Control, harassment, stalking and emotional abuse were not statistically different between cases involving a female and those which did not. Less sexual abuse is to be expected, since most female perpetrator cases were not those involving intimate partner relationships; but the findings on physical abuse are interesting. Do they suggest that females are just more likely to use emotional and verbal abuse and coercive control, rather than physical force; or is it possible that their presence in an abusive situation in some way reduces other perpetrators’ use of physical violence? Both possibilities are somewhat at odds with recent findings by Aplin of mothers using not only “hard psychological abuse” and condoning violence from male relatives, but also themselves using physical force against daughters (Aplin, 2017). This study has not been able to qualitatively unpick these questions, but further work would be useful to explore the difference in findings between these two studies.

Do female perpetrators mean HBA is not gendered? We can see, then, that on three key measures HBA is clearly gendered: the victims are overwhelmingly female; the context for abuse is control, correction or punishment of perceived transgressions of gender roles and/or the gendered expectations that women will conform to the family’s wishes; and the involvement of a female perpetrator changes the types of abusive behaviour. Yet, the findings presented in this paper also raise questions about how to interpret women’s roles in HBA within a gendered framework. There is some evidence here for a rebalancing of how we view HBA perpetration to recognise better the roles played by women. The cases in this sample provide qualified support for arguments that women can be drivers of HBA, and that the risks they pose may have been somewhat overlooked in a focus on male violence (Aplin, 2017; Glick et al., 2016; Khan, 2018).
However, examining HBA from a starting point of violence against women by men (i.e. an assumption of male perpetration), there is a risk that identifying female perpetrators serves to make the males invisible. In identifying female perpetrators, the males involved in the same case must not be ignored, and how those roles interplay must be scrutinised. In addition, whether perpetrators are male or female, the gender of the victim must also be centre-stage.

This paper suggests that, in theorising this area, there has been some “essentialising” (Gill and Mitra-Kahn, 2010), in which the roles and motives of female perpetrators have been flattened together to become one-dimensional. This can create a falsely dichotomous discourse, where it is tempting to see women as either wholly innocent or wrongly whitewashed. In fact, these data suggest that women’s roles are more varied than current conceptual and policy understandings allow, and that female perpetrators are not single, homogenous group. There is evidence of female solidarity and advocacy on behalf of the victim, as well as of females actively acting against the victim. As Elden (2011) has argued, women perpetrators play different roles – and these roles may point to as yet not sufficiently understood power relations within families. Rather, this is support for an intersectional argument that “women perpetrators” should be seen as not a single group, but multiple individual actors on which operate different influences (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992). We need to look critically and in a more nuanced way at the variety of roles they play. It is possible to have that debate in a way that avoids the temptation to make all women bad, or all women blameless.

Limitations

There are some limitations to this study. First, drawing data from particular agencies (police, victim services), and from three geographic areas of England, means it is not known whether the 162 cases profiled on female perpetrators are representative more widely, either nationally or internationally. The figures from the overall data set (1,474 cases) reflect a wider range of geographical areas within the UK, but remain limited to victim service and police data. Second, these data were not specifically collected for the purpose of qualitative exploration of meaning and motives on female perpetration. Not all the 162 case records captured in-depth the complexities of the roles played by women. Accordingly, this paper does not claim to be able to analyse in full all of the nuanced roles played by women, or make claims about the proportion of cases which fall into the three female perpetrator roles observed. Rather, it profiles those cases where detail was available, and starts to draw out different roles, which are offered up for discussion. Further work could explore the nuances of women’s roles, and the risk or protective factors that women may represent in such cases, through richer qualitative methods such as focus group discussions or interviews.

Conclusion

The evidence in this paper strongly supports a continued interpretation of HBA as gendered, arising from strongly patriarchal cultures and values which privilege men’s status and value over women, involving primarily female victims and primarily male perpetrators. Even where female perpetrators are involved, the primary perpetrator is still most often a male, and the victim most often a female. Critically, the patriarchal context of HBA, and the gendered nature of most cases, must be kept centre-stage. However, within these parameters, these data provide evidence of greater involvement of females alongside males in perpetrating abuse than other forms of domestic abuse. This paper has started to explore the varied roles women play, suggesting three possible roles for further exploration. More research is needed to unfold these roles, using methodology better designed to explore meanings and motives (e.g. qualitative interviews), but these cases show that the debate cannot be essentialised: not all women act the same. Most importantly, seeing the women should not mean we stop seeing the men.

Note

1. The total does not sum to 100 per cent as a few cases involved more than one of these women.
References


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