



Exploring the role of mothers in 'honour' based abuse perpetration and the impact on the policing response

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ABSTRACT

This article intends to illuminate the role played by mothers within 'honour' based abuse (HBA) crime, an issue that is both obscured and under researched. Findings are drawn from 100 HBA investigations (2012–2014) and fifteen semi structured interviews (2016) with specialist police officers in one UK police force.

The findings show that mothers play fundamental, indeed "massive" role in perpetrating honour abuse against daughters. Mothers inflict violence, sometimes with an intention to induce an abortion; they inflict hard psychological abuse and condone the violence inflicted by other male relatives, mainly sons. This article challenges the ability for mothers to effectively safeguard child victims of HBA. Police under recording of female perpetration is apparent. Victim loyalty and reluctance to prosecute mothers contributes to the blurred of boundaries between mothers as 'perpetrators' and mothers as secondary 'victims' acting under duress. Such factors adversely affect the policing response.

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Introduction

There are no national or local statistics available to assess the scale of HBA in the UK, as no single crime of "honour based abuse" exists. HBA can encompass a variety of violent acts including murder, unexplained death/suicide, fear of or actual forced marriage, controlling sexual activity, domestic abuse, child abuse, rape, kidnapping, false imprisonment, threats to kill, assault, harassment and forced abortion (NPCC strategy, 2015:15). Although there are overlapping similarities between domestic abuse and HBA in terms of coercive control, there are notable features differentiating HBA from traditional constructs of violence against women. HBA is condoned and supported by multiple family members, wherein decisions are made and facilitated by the collective. Such co-opting is not evident within 'traditional' crimes of domestic abuse (Chesler, 2009; Oberwittler and Kassel, 2011; Payton, 2011).

A substantial body of academic literature contends that HBA perpetrators are predominantly male (Belfrage, Strand, Ekman, and Hasselborg, 2012; Chesler, 2010; Eisner and Ghuneim, 2013; Welden, 2010) and typically the woman's blood relatives such as father, brother(s) and uncle(s) (Gill, 2013; Gill and Brah, 2014; Jafri, 2009). Furthermore, HBA is unquestionably a gendered crime, with the majority of its victims being female (Gill, 2013; Sen, 2005). This is due to the uneven power relations between men and women, with men enjoying a higher status within the family dynamic (Gangoli, Razak, and McCarty,

2006). Indeed, the current research findings support this contention¹ with women representing 96%² of the 100 victims. It must be acknowledged that because daughters are considered to be breaking social rules, victims are perceived by kin and community as responsible for their own victimisation (Jafri, 2009; Welden, 2010), and thus paradoxically labelled as transgressors or "outsiders" (Balzani, 2011:87; Becker, 2008).

Significantly, the role of women in 'policing' the behaviour of women, as well as the potential for female participation in violence or murder (Rew, Gangoli, and Gill, 2013; Sen, 2005) is a distinctive feature not identified in 'traditional' domestic abuse settings. Historically, honour based abuse research has focused on the extremes of honour killing rather than non-lethal violence towards women. It is considered that limited access to police data has precluded a detailed examination of the role that women play. Such limitations have led academics, such as Chesler (2009, 2010) and Chesler and Bloom (2012), to use media reporting to progressively compile a "jigsaw," piecing together modus operandi, victim and offender details in order to obtain a holistic

¹ The exception to this is Oberwittler and Kassel's study of 78 honour killings in Germany (1996–2005) which found "unexpectedly high rates" of male victims - 43% (Oberwittler & Kassel, 2011:1)

² In the other 4 cases of male victims, offending against males was either 'ancillary' to the key crime against their girlfriends or the offending was often diverted from males to their girlfriends. The current research supports Chesler's findings, that men are 'rarely' the sole target (Chesler, 2010:5; also Oberwittler & Kassel, 2011: 3), and were attacked alongside female victims.

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international picture of behaviour(s). The involvement of the ‘mother’ in high profile UK murder cases, illustrated in the killings of Rukhsana Naz (1999) and Shafiea Ahmed (2003), the latter fully explored by Gill (2014), at least begins to unravel and acknowledge that female perpetration exists. Much research has been undertaken in relation to exploring the voices of South Asian women in the HBA sphere (Gill, 2004; Gill and Brah, 2014; Sen, 2005). Yet such research implicitly accepts it is “usually men who carry out the violence” (Gill & Brah, 2014:75), despite some murders showing evidence to the contrary. Although HBA is a display of patriarchal power, it may be wrong to assume that women are incapable of displaying, reinforcing or aligning with that power. Many women when faced with criminal justice sanction, vindicate themselves by suggesting they are unable to defend and protect children due to the ‘duress’ and the violence they suffer at the hands of their husband. This was the prominent 11th hour ambush ‘defence’ utilised by Farzana Ahmed (8th July 2012) in the Shafiea Ahmed’s murder trial. The mother entirely implicated husband Iftikar Ahmed in their daughter’s murder. The defence sought to present the mother as a secondary victim, in that by trying to defend Shafiea from her husband’s attack she was pushed away and punched with a clenched fist (Gill, 2014:187). Such a depiction not only conflicts with the antecedent history but is at odds with the testimony of daughter Alesha Ahmed, which instead exposes the mother as a willing participant and co-conspirator. The history of violence and psychological abuse inflicted by the mother highlights that she replicated many of the offending behaviours alluded to within this article; she physically attacked her daughter ‘countless times’; she psychologically tormented her about an intended forced marriage in Pakistan; she locked her daughter in a bedroom for two days without food only letting her out to use the toilet. Moreover, the mother acted as key communicator to the authorities in ‘justifying’ Shafiea’s bleach swallowing incident as ‘accidental’ (Gill & Brah, 2014:77). Both parents financially abused the victim, stealing £1000 from her part time work account. On the night of the murder, it was the mother who searched her bags, accused her of ‘hiding’ her earnings and pushed her on the settee, encouraging her husband to kill by saying in Punjabi “just finish it here” (Gill, 2014:186). Kandiyoti’s research on the “patriarchal bargain” provides theoretical insight for such behaviours, by suggesting that in order to resist total male control, women become ‘participants’ with a vested interest in the system which oppresses them (Kandiyoti, 1988). Rather than resist and rebel, women negotiate within this confined and limited space, as a form of self-protection. This concept shall be explored further within the context of female perpetration. Although academics do confirm the tacit ‘involvement’ of women in honour based abuse (Balzani, 2011; Eisner and Ghuneim, 2013; Roberts, 2014:71; Sen, 2005), such research does not delineate the particular dimensions and nature of abuse performed by women. The present study aims to expose the degree of participation and operational methods employed by female perpetrators, specifically mothers, within that unfolding crime.

Through the examination of the Aqsa Parvez (2007) case study, Welden suggests that the role of the mother within the family dynamic is “far smaller” in comparison to that of male family members, representing an indistinct, “nearly invisible,” figure (Welden, 2010:389). In support of Ballard’s research, this article challenges that proposition, arguing that mothers play a more active role within the family and within HBA crimes than previously considered. Although agreeably, women do not inflict violence on the same scale as male perpetrators, the findings demonstrate that women are capable of threatening and inflicting serious acts of violence within specific contexts. The idea that women perpetrate violence against other women causes significant “discomfort to feminists” as it erodes ideas of feminist solidarity (Rew et al., 2013:148). This could be why such a thorny issue has received scant attention within domestic abuse literature. However, women are central to gender construction, and the role of mothers and women more generally is a “crucial area of future research” (Balzani, 2011:84).

Research methodology

The main research comprised of a mixed method design, employed in order to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the research problem (Cresswell, 2014). This article, however, focuses predominantly on qualitative data findings from 100 cases of honour based abuse incidents reported to police and drawn directly from police computer systems. It also relies on fifteen semi structured interviews from 14 detective police officers in specialist operational police protection investigation units (detective constables, sergeants and Inspectors) and one neighbourhood officer (constable). In order to distinguish between police data and police officers interviews, the former shall be referred to as a ‘case’ with a corresponding number (1 – 100) and the latter is referred to ‘interview’ followed by a letter.

The research strategy involved obtaining all (674) HBA cases reported to one police force between 2011 and 2014 (inclusive). Such incidents were specifically coded by the communications branch at the time of reporting. From this large sample, a stratified sample of 100 HBA cases (2012–2014) was chosen. In order to ensure this sample was ‘representative’, the researcher chose incidents across 11 divisional areas spanning the geographical force area. Examining 100 cases of honour based abuse is a multiple case sampling strategy. The researcher accessed and examined a host of related police electronic records in order obtain a holistic “richer picture” (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2008:72) of each case, using examples that are nestled within a real context that exude thick descriptions (Geertz, 1993) and have a strong impact on the reader. Such records comprised of the incident report, a running secondary investigation log of decisions and actions made by both uniform and specialist officers for example around suspect interviews, case conferences and strategy meetings with multi agencies, video interviews, issues with witnesses; DASH³ risk assessment questionnaires exploring victims fears; intelligence and crime reports. The constant comparative method was applied in which the researcher compared data against data within and across 100 cases in order to improve the explanatory power of the concepts, termed the theoretical sampling of fresh contexts (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In this way an explanatory model of the behaviours of victims, perpetrators and the police was developed. A detailed thematic analysis was then undertaken to explore the recurring patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

The only qualifying criteria for interviewees were that officers must have strategic or operational involvement in honour abuse investigations. Eleven of the fifteen participants were female officers. Twelve participants were white British, with three of the participants of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indian heritage. The length of service for officers ranged from eight to 29 years, with the mean average being 15 years-service. Officers had a combined 228 years of policing experience. The semi structured interviews ranged in duration from 33 min to 1 hr 35 min.

The philosophical approach taken was that of symbolic interactionism, which focuses on understanding what people ‘do’ and the interactive processes that take place between and amongst actors (Blumer, 1969; Charon, 2010; also Ritzer, 2008). Formal accounts of institutions seldom reflect the informal realities of the ‘living world’ of the institution (Atkinson & Housley, 2003:169). Such a method of examining documentary artefacts was chosen to avoid Goffman’s “impression management,” which could protect the interests of officers and police force reputation, rather than scratch beneath the veneer. Goffman (1990) suggests that individuals seek to project a socially acceptable idealised self-image. However, the aim was to unmask the backstage reality (Ritzer, 2008; also Punch, 2009) rather than advocate modified behaviour that projects an “acceptable face to outsiders” (Reiner & Newburn, 2008:355). The focus on the context, actions and decisions of actors means that the complexities and sometimes conflicting behaviours are fully exposed. The benefit

³ Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment (DASH) risk assessments

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