



# Urgent Response to COVID-19

Harmful Traditional Practices in the  
Workplace

**GUIDANCE FOR BEST PRACTICE**

2020



## Background

The first two-weeks of the COVID-19 lockdown saw an alarming global surge in domestic abuse reports.<sup>1</sup> In multiple incidents across the UK,<sup>2</sup> 9 women and children were murdered by a family member. Hidden in these figures are incidents of ‘honour’ abuse and other forms of domestic violence commonly referred to as ‘harmful traditional practices’.<sup>3</sup>

We urge organisations across the UK to take clear and direct action to support employees at risk of all forms of domestic harm during the COVID-19 lockdown in a way that is inclusive, and recognises and respects the cultural and ethnic diversity of their workforce.

We have published this urgent response to COVID-19 to help organisations safeguard their employees effectively. Our recommendations are practical measures to support employees, working remotely during the coronavirus pandemic, who may be affected by ‘honour’ abuse and other forms of domestic violence.

## Why organisations should adopt these recommendations

Employers must recognise that domestic abuse does not have to occur on an organisation’s premises to affect the workplace, and that the COVID-19 lockdown has created conditions for a perfect storm. With movement restrictions aimed to stop the spread of coronavirus, many employees are forced to live and work in a worst-case scenario. Socially isolated at home with abusive family members, people at risk of harmful traditional practices and other forms of domestic abuse are also at increased risk of self-harm and suicide.<sup>3</sup>

Organisations must act quickly, sensitively, and strategically. They have a moral, ethical, and legal obligation to safeguard employees, which they can do by adopting the following evidence-based recommendations.

## Recommendations

- **Board level buy-in:** Senior executive teams and managers must take the lead in demonstrating to employees that they recognise all forms of domestic abuse (including ‘honour’ abuse and other harmful traditional practices) as a workplace problem. They should reassure staff that there is organisational support, especially during this unprecedented lockdown. This support should be communicated via the intranet, electronic communications, or podcasts.
- **Appoint a workplace champion:** As a main point of contact within an organisation, a champion must be allocated time and resources, so people affected by, or at risk of, domestic abuse and harmful traditional practices can seek support online or by phone, in confidence, without fear of being judged or compromised. Safe words should be used when discussing issues online or by phone.
- **Poster campaign:** Digital online banners should be used to detail emergency refuge shelters, helplines, or information services. People affected by domestic abuse (including harmful traditional practices) may not be fully aware of, or may be intentionally misinformed about, their legal rights. Sensitive poster campaigns may help them access support from trained internal and external agencies. Services that support ethnic minority groups must be included. See p.18 of our full [guidance](#).
- **Anonymous ways of communicating concerns:** Anonymous online surveys are a way in which employees in danger can ask for advice or help at a time convenient and/or safe for them.
- **Responding to ‘red flags’:** Often the warning signs are visible in email, telephone conversations or conference calls. Importantly, if an employee discloses that they are a victim of any form of domestic abuse or are in immediate danger, believe them. The ‘one chance rule’ simply cannot be ignored and is recognised by the police and governmental agencies as having the potential to save lives.
- **Reputable eLearning:** Deliver culturally sensitive and inclusive domestic abuse awareness and safeguarding training that can be accessed on any online device.

Click [here](#) to access the full guidance. Read p.17 for ten practical steps for when an employee discloses that they are a victim or survivor of domestic violence, including harmful traditional practices.

“Staff working remotely may be out of sight but NOT out of mind. This guide is critical to support and protect staff exposed to domestic abuse and harmful traditional practices working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

### Gerry Campbell MBE

Former Scotland Yard Detective Chief Superintendent

## Take home message

The importance of supporting and safeguarding remote workers has been brought into sharp focus by the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown of 2020. Already on the rise prior to the crisis, the upward trend of remote working now looks certain to gain pace. This makes our guidance an essential resource for employers.

## References

1. UN News (6 April 2020). UN chief calls for domestic violence 'ceasefire' amid 'horrifying global surge'. Retrieved from: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1061052>
2. Townsend, M. (4 April 2020). Domestic abuse cases soar as lockdown takes its toll. The Guardian. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/04/domestic-abuse-cases-soar-as-lockdown-takes-its-toll>
3. Khan, R., Saleem, S., & Lowe, M. (2018). "Honour"-based violence in a British South Asian community. *Safer Communities*, 17(1), 11-21. Retrieved from <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/SC-02-2017-0007/full/html#loginreload>

You can leave your home in a lockdown to avoid injury or illness or to escape a risk of harm.

If you feel your life is in immediate danger, you should contact 999.

The emergency line has a feature called the Silent Solutions System, in case you're afraid of being overheard making an emergency call. When the operator asks you which emergency service you require, dial 55 and the call will be transferred to your local police force as an emergency.



Scan for full guidance, supporting video and infographic

### Honour Abuse Research Matrix

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[www.uclan.ac.uk/harm](http://www.uclan.ac.uk/harm)

E: [HARMnetwork@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:HARMnetwork@uclan.ac.uk)

 @HARMnetwork

### Cite this guidance

Khan, R. & Hall, B. (2020). Harmful Traditional Practices in the Workplace: Guidance for Best Practice. Honour Abuse Research Matrix (HARM), University of Central Lancashire, UK. Available from [uclan.ac.uk/HARM](http://uclan.ac.uk/HARM)