



Honour Abuse
Research Matrix

‘Honour’ abuse: the experience of South Asians who identify as LGBT in North West England

Report prepared for Lancashire Constabulary, UK



ABOUT

Honour Abuse Research Matrix (HARM)

HARM is recognised as a key knowledge transfer agency and a leading authority in the field of honour abuse research.

Established in 2018 by Dr. Roxanne Khan, UCLan, HARM is a multi-disciplinary, transnational network guiding efforts to develop sustainable evidence-based strategies in response to the global health crisis of honour abuse.



Who we are

Our diverse consortium is made up of local, national, and international members from academia, the police and other emergency services and first-responders, crime scene investigators, legal professionals, government advisors, the Civil Service, NGOs and support organisations, social services and safeguarding professionals, survivors, activists and students.

What we do

- Further research and pioneer strategies to eliminate traditional harmful practices: honour abuse, violence, killings, forced marriage and FGM.
- Foster multi-disciplinary working partnerships and research collaborations world-wide.
- Raise awareness and inform public policy via evidence-based education and training.

In association with

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University of Central Lancashire



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Abstract

Media groups across Europe have reported on what has been called a “gay genocide” and “antigay purge” in Chechnya; it is alleged that men, suspected of being gay, have been victimised by the authorities and been threatened with so called ‘honour’ killings by their families.^[i] Further disconcerting is that homophobic ‘honour’ based violence is reported in other countries where homosexuality is condemned or considered ‘a sin’ - this includes South Asian nations where same-sex sexual activity is not only taboo but a criminal offence with a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.^[ii]

With a focus on female victims, studies with South Asian and Middle Eastern populations have identified a range of social and demographic factors that explain why some people endorse ‘honour’ abuse and killings.^[iii,iv] As the victimisation of girls and women is far more frequent, this has attracted the lion’s share of scholarly and public interest. Investigations into homonegative ‘honour’ based victimisation are still sparse. Thus, very little is known about the psychological, social and cultural factors associated with different types of ‘honour’ abuse specific to gay men of South Asian origin in England.

To gain insight into lived realities and perceptions of LGBT honour abuse, this study draws together the fragmented literature in this area to provide a context for qualitative data collected from 14 participants (4=female; 10=male) who identified as LGBT living in England. Using an online questionnaire, three themes were explored, including: (1) respondents’ demographic, social and familial background; (2) honour abuse victimisation experienced and witnessed and how this affected respondents’ psychosocial wellbeing; (3) perceptions of the efficacy of emergency services and welfare agencies to respond to LGBT-based ‘honour’ abuse.

These findings indicate that extensive work needs to be undertaken to improve awareness of the difficulties faced by South Asian LGBT at risk of ‘honour’ abuse and violence in the UK.

Background

In England, the South Asian diaspora makes up only 5% of the population[1], yet represents the largest immigrant population in the country. A binding commonality of South Asian nations is that they are collectivist honour cultures that emphasize the maintenance of strong bonds with both immediate and extended family [2], Honour cultures are inherently patriarchal and are characterised by strict gender roles. Males are expected to act 'tough' and exercise dominance. Females, on the other hand, maintain an honourable reputation by demonstrating their purity, modesty, and obedience to their father and husband [3]. As honour is maintained by a reputable public social image, these gender roles are enforced collectively by families and the wider community [4].

'Honour' abuse in England

'Honour' abuse has been reported across many South Asian populations, both domestically (in countries of origin) and internationally, including diasporic communities in England [5][6]. Interestingly, there seems to be a parallel between these migrant population sizes and official police reports of 'honour' crimes, that in 2010, was highest for the Metropolitan Police (n= 495), followed by West Midlands (378), West Yorkshire (350), Lancashire (227), Greater Manchester (189), Cleveland (153), and Suffolk (118) [7].

In the UK, the term 'honour' based violence (or abuse) is now used to define a crime or incident committed in defence of, or to protect the honour of, an individuals' family or community [8]. In 'honour' abuse cases, it is common for perpetrators, if questioned by authorities, to underplay or rationalise the abuse without expressing remorse, and claim their violence was used to protect family honour (izzat) from shame (sharam) [9] . Since the first official 'honour' killing in England in 1999, a majority of recorded 'honour' crimes have been committed against South Asian females [10]. As so few studies have examined 'honour' based male victimisation, little is known about the abuse they experience. Yet charities in England report South Asian males might be facing abuse that is comparable to their female counterparts, including threats of violence, physical or sexual assault, imprisonment, and forced marriage [11] [12].

LGBT 'honour' abuse globally

In both national and migrant South Asian communities, 'honour' based violence often occurs when it is perceived that sexually 'improper' behaviour has brought sharam on an individual's family or community. For females, this might include expressions of sexualized behavior considered to demonstrate impurity [13][14]. Yet, both females and males are at risk if it is thought that they are not heterosexual, as this impinges on the strict gender role expectations [15][16]. Analysis of data from Turkey (a Eurasian collectivist culture) for example, found that there were 22 'honour' killings related to the sexual identity of the victims, from 2007 to 2009 (Democratic Turkey Forum, 2011).

As sources indicate the average number of 'honour' killings, solely for Pakistan, may be more than 10,000 per year [17], it is perhaps unsurprising that LGBT people are openly reported to be at risk of victimization from their immediate and extended family members in South Asian diasporic populations [18]. These crimes are officially acknowledged by the United Nations Refugee Agency, who state: "LGBT persons often reveal exposure to physical and sexual violence, extended periods of detention, medical abuse, threat of execution and honour killing" (UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 2008).

UK LGBT 'honour' abuse

In piecing together these fragmented reports, new concerns have emerged concerning South Asian people who identify as LGBT at risk of 'honour' based abuse and violence in England [11]. Since the first official 'honour' killing in England in 1999, the majority of recorded 'honour' crimes have been committed against females of South Asian origin [14]. As so few studies have examined 'honour' based LGBT victimisation, little is known about the abuse they experience. However, charities in England have reported concerns that South Asian who identify as LGBT might be facing comparable abuse, including forced marriage, threats or actual violence, sexual assault, and imprisonment [15,16]. Although the prevalence of 'honour' based violence in England cannot be easily or reliably ascertained, it is widely accepted that any figures are likely to represent only the tip of the iceberg [10]. Despite this, official data indicates that like their counterparts in South Asia, diasporic populations who identify as LGBT in England are also at risk of 'honour' based abuse and violence.

An examination of police recordings from 39 forces across England showed that 11,000 cases were recorded between 2010-2014 [19]. Only four police forces provided information on victim gender that, when combined, showed 271 male victimization cases were recorded between 2010 and 2017 [20]. In the most recent annual review of crimes in the UK from 2015-2016, almost a quarter of 'honour' based violence victims (where gender was recorded) were males [20]. Statistics from the British Home Office's Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) for 2014 and 2015 show that of the approximate 1,220 forced marriages reported, approximately one-fifth were males (FMU, 2016). Official homicide statistics also show that annually, males represent one-third of 'honour' killing victims in the UK [21]. Almost entirely, these figures represent South Asian victims.

Although victim sexual orientation was not reported in these data, it is not implausible that at least a proportion of these cases were victimised because of their LGBT sexuality. Data from the FMU supports this proposition, with reports that 30 (2%) victims in both 2015 and 2016 were South Asian LGBT. Sexual orientation or sexual identity are only recorded by the FMU if victims volunteer this information at first contact, and victims are not routinely asked to disclose this personal information. Due to the power of izzat and sharam in South Asian communities, details of sexual identity or orientation is not likely to be disclosed easily by victims; in particular, they may struggle to reconcile both internal (psychological) conflicts and external (social) pressures [22]. Therefore, it is reasonable to estimate that 'honour' abuse and violence is most likely occurring at a higher rate than currently reported by South Asian LGBT. A recent study conducted by BBC Newsnight reported that of 70 men in England interviewed about their experiences of 'honour' based violence, a proportion were victimized due to their sexuality [11].

One interviewee stated that: *"[P]eople I knew were marrying women even though they were gay - or they were killing themselves...I feared for my life. I felt I could be killed... I would be disowned, kicked out of the house and forced to marry a woman, definitely".*

This interviewee disclosed that once the news of his homosexuality spread to his wider community, he was warned that he would be punished for dishonouring both his family and his culture; he was threatened with the humiliation of being violated by an electric hand drill.



THE CURRENT STUDY

This project aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the types and extent of 'honour' based abuse, witnessed and experienced by South Asian LGBT in NW England?
2. In what familial, community, and wider social context is 'honour' based abuse experienced by South Asian LGBT?
3. How do South Asian LGBT perceive the support efforts of emergency services and welfare agencies in NW England, in terms of their ability and efficacy to meet their needs as a vulnerable group at risk for 'honour' based abuse?



Methods

Study design and Measures: An online questionnaire was used to collect anonymous qualitative and quantitative data.

The questionnaire comprised three parts.

- Section One collected information on the participants' demographic background.
- Section Two asked questions about participants' experiences of their LGBTQ identity and their South Asian culture.
- Section Three asked for participants' opinions on the available support services for people who identify as LGBTQ from South Asian communities living in North West regions, and how they might be improved.

Participants, Procedure, and Ethics: A low response rate was expected from the target population due to the strict participation criteria that respondents ought to self-identify as LGBTQ, be of South Asian origin and live in a North West region of England. The research team made contact with support agencies and social groups in the UK, run for/by South Asians who identify as LGBTQ. Key contacts for these groups advertised the study on their websites, social media, or directly to their peer-support/social or mailing groups with aim of recruiting respondents from the North West. These agencies are established LGBTQ support organisations and were trusted to be sensitive to the needs of individuals from this demographic in their advertisement of the study.



Findings

Theme 1 – Demographic, Social and Familial Background

Gender, Age, and Sexual Orientation: Participants' (4 female, 10 male) ages ranged from 17 to 45 years (Mean = 30 years). Participants were asked whether or not they identified as LGBT and whether or not they engaged with the wider LGBT community. Of the fourteen participants who took part in the study, half of the participants stated that they identified as LGBT while half did not. More specifically, ten participants stated that they identified as homosexual, three as bisexual/bi-curious, and one as heterosexual. Eight stated they engaged with the LGBT community, but six did not.

Relationship Status: A total of 13 participants stated their relationship status (one participant did not complete this question). Three participants were single, four dating, three co-habiting, and three separated or divorced. No participants were married.

Educational Status: Participants were mainly highly educated, with eight achieving Higher Education qualifications, five Further Education, and just one participant educated to school level.

Location: Thirteen out of fourteen participants stated their current county of residence. Six participants reside in Lancashire, four in Greater Manchester, two in Yorkshire and one in Cumbria. Participants were asked to reveal whether or not they were born in the UK, how many years they had resided in the UK if born outside, and their ethnic/national origin. Nine participants were born in the UK, and five elsewhere. Of those not born in the UK, three were born in Pakistan, one in Bangladesh and one in the United States. Participants born elsewhere had resided in the UK between seven and 37 years (Mean = 17 years). Regarding ethnic/national identity, six participants were Pakistani, five Indian, and one Bangladeshi. One participant stated "other" and one did not answer this question.

Religion and Family Ties: Five participants stated they were religious; nine participants were not. Religious denomination varied, with four stating their religion as Islam, two as Christian and one Sikhism. One participant said they attended worship, six did not, and seven participants did not answer this question. Three participants stated they had actively rejected their faith.

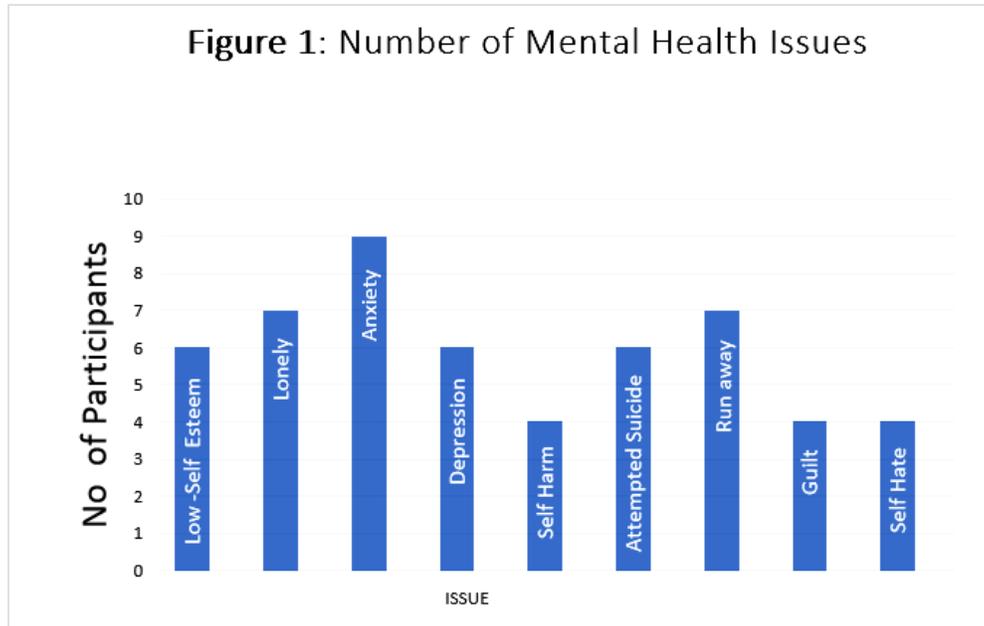
Participants were asked to respond to three questions about the strength of their religious conviction, that of their family, and how strongly their family identified with the Asian community (on a scale of 0 to 4, with 4 being very much). Overall, participants indicated that their religious conviction was relatively low (Mean = 1.7), but that of their family was high (Mean = 3.7). Participants reported their family's commitment to the Asian community was high (3.2). Participants were also asked (on a scale of 0 to 4, with 4 being very much), how important izzat was to their family, and to what extent participants felt their family was shamed by their LGBT status. Mean scores on both questions was high: 3.5 and 3.9 respectively.

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Theme 2 - Honour Abuse victimisation experienced and witnessed and how this affected respondents' psychosocial wellbeing

Mental Health: Participants were asked to state whether they had been affected by nine different mental health issues. Figure 1 shows the number of participants affected across each domain.



Most participants indicated more than one mental health issue, ranging from one (2 participants) to one participant stating “yes” to all nine domains.

‘Honour’ Abuse Experiences: In response to three questions, around one half of the participants indicated that they had experienced ‘honour’ based abuse and violence, as a result of identifying as LGBT, from members of their community (yes=6; no=8), their family (yes=5; no=8) or strangers (yes=8; no=6).

Additionally, two questions addressed forced marriage: whether they themselves had been married (or expected to marry) without their consent (yes=5; no=9); knowing of anyone in their community who identifies as LGBT being forced to marry (yes=8; no=6). The final question asked participants whether they had reported ‘honour’ based abuse or violence to the police (yes=1; no=12).

Theme 3 – Perceptions of Support Services in NW England

Participants were asked to respond in their own words to three questions, broadly addressing how they perceived the support efforts of emergency services and welfare agencies in NW England, in terms of ability and efficiency to meet the needs of LGBT people within the South Asian community at risk of ‘honour’ based abuse.

The first question in this section asked participants to say why they felt so few reports of ‘honour’ based abuse were made to the police from LGBT individuals. Eight participants gave their opinions, which, for some participants, focused around fear of damaging family reputations and/or being outed within their community. See Box 1.

BOX 1: PARTICIPANT QUOTE

“South Asian people don’t [sic] accept LGBT people ... I think that’s why there is more police reports from south Asian LGBT people”, “Because they feel by telling the police it would out them”, and “Fear of family (being disowned etc)”.

Other participants commented on lack of police resources to make reporters safe, perceived lack of support, trust or racism from the police. See Box 2.

BOX 2: PARTICIPANT QUOTE

“Lack of resources to make it safe after reporting; Lack of help to move away from prejudiced family; Lack of re-accommodation options; Lack of prosecutions; Lack of action against zealots; Lack of real action against community promoting harmful honour traditions”, “What can they do to help?... no one really trusts the police and they do not understand what it is like. I know there are Asian police now but can we trust them, and what can they do anyway?”, and, “Because the police are institutionally [sic] racist and brown people hate/fear them...”

Next, participants were asked their opinion on what local support agencies (e.g., community, crime and safety, education, and faith groups) could do to encourage and support more open and transparent LGBT South Asian communities. Seven participants responded. Most comments related to more awareness of LGBT issues in places of worship. See Box 3.

BOX 3: PARTICIPANT QUOTE

“Ensure LGBT posters are placed in mosques”, and, “Have more open discussions in temples/mosques/churches about LGBT issues and that they exist in every community and it is nothing to be ashamed about; Try to separate sin from homosexuality”.

One participant commented on wider issues, such lack of integration of Asians and fear of being blamed. See Box 4.

BOX 4: PARTICIPANT QUOTE

“Encourage Asians to come out and integrate more. so much bad stuff has happened with terrorism and so Asians are scared of being blamed for this so it is a good time to get them out more. Asians are so traditional and family obsessed but they are judgmental and need to integrate more.”

Finally, participants were asked their opinion on what is important for South Asians who identify as LGBT. Four participants responded to this question. Comments related to more support being needed within South Asian communities to support coming out and for mental health concerns to enable LGBT individuals to have a voice within their community, and better laws to protect LGBT people. See Box 5

BOX 5: PARTICIPANT QUOTE

“Well, i see teenage boys who might be gay and they are religious and look so depressed. it is so sad. they will probably be married to women against their will and pretend to be straight just to get by”, and, “...there certainly needs to be a voice for LGBT South Asian people. Someone to normalise being gay not only to themselves, but to their families.... I think mental health in the South Asian community is vastly understated and more research and support should be given in general as well as for the South Asian LGBT community. If we have more support groups, more openly gay south Asian people that people can identify and relate to that would be wonderful....”

Limitations

While the strength of this small-scale study is its potential to facilitate much needed larger-scale research into the ‘honour’ based abuse experienced by South Asian LGBT populations in the UK, there are a number of methodological drawbacks to consider. These include the study’s use of a localised, non-representative, convenience sample, as this limits opportunities to generalise findings to other populations across the UK. Additionally, the small sample size resulted in a lack of statistical power that would be necessary to statistically explore the data.

Recommendations

These findings indicate that it is important for statutory agencies and professionals to properly understand what honour abuse is. Without a full understanding, the response can compromise the safety of vulnerable South Asian LGBT populations in the UK.

Specialised evidence-based training is required to ensure that police and all public sector staff dealing with LGBT populations can identify signs of honour abuse, respond appropriately and know how to help victims to access appropriate specialist support.

There is an urgent need for a national effort to tackle honour abuse. Current strategies tackling domestic abuse, including existing local and national oversight and monitoring groups, should include experts in honour-based violence research and representatives from the various support organisations.

Conclusions

These results suggest that 'honour' based victimisation is underreported by South Asians who identify as LGBT living in the north west of England. Unsurprisingly, participants reported a range of negative health consequences related to their abusive experiences, and highlighted a range of barriers in seeking help from external welfare and emergency agencies. They were also able to suggest a number of ways in which services could be improved. These findings indicate a pressing need for safeguarding agencies in the UK to review current emergency responses and welfare support so that they consider such fundamental, culturally-defined concepts as the role of 'honour' in designing and delivering services for specific vulnerable South Asian LGBT populations.



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Report Authors

Dr. Roxanne Khan is Director of HARM. She is a Chartered Psychologist and Scientist based at the University of Central Lancashire, where she is a Senior Lecturer in Forensic Psychology.

Beth Hall (BSc) is undertaking her MSc in Forensic Psychology at the University of Central Lancashire. She worked as a Research Intern on this project.

Dr. Michelle Lowe has a long career in research, with over 100 academic publications, conference presentations and practice-based evaluation reports. She is a Reader of Criminological and Forensic Psychology at the University of Bolton.

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Honour Abuse Research Matrix

HARM network

School of Psychology
University of Central Lancashire
Preston
Lancashire, UK
PR1 2HE

Tel: +44 (0) 1772 89 5175

Email: HARMnetwork@uclan.ac.uk

www.uclan.ac.uk/harm