



Spotlight #4: Episode 7

Podcast Transcript

Introduction: Spotlights is a series of online events and publications focusing on a particular group of victim/survivors who are often hidden from services. As a part of SafeLives Spotlight on 'honour' – based violence and forced marriage, this week my colleague Deidre met with Dr. Geetanjali Gangoli, a Senior Lecturer at the Centre for Gender and Violence Research at the University of Bristol. In her interview, Dr Gangoli talks about her research for the HMIC regarding how victims and survivors of HBV and FM felt about how the police responded to them both during and after the crises that led them to contact the police. We hope you find this interview as enlightening as we have.

Key:

I: Interviewer

R: Respondent

[s.l. – sounds like]

I: So thanks for joining me.

R: Okay, it's fine.

I: Do you just want to start off by telling me about yourself?

R: Yeah, so I've been working in the area of gender based violence for, I think, about fifteen years...no, a bit longer than that, twenty years probably. And I've been working...I started off looking at the relationship between the law and the feminist movement in India; so that was my PhD and I moved on very quickly to look at violence against women, particularly because the area where feminists kind of looked at where most of the focus was and activism was around gender based violence; violence against women in particular. And then I moved to the UK in 1999/2000 and then started doing more work on ethnic minority women. I started off...I think I was always interested in looking at the kind of slippages between forced and arranged marriages, because a lot of marriages in the Indian sub-continent, as you know, are arranged, but the degree of force within some of the arranged marriages can be quite subtle and I have always been interested in looking at that. So I've done some research around that in the north-east and also around the question of whether women, who experience forced marriage, might be more likely to experience other forms of domestic violence, like interpersonal violence or not.

And then more recently I've been doing work on kind of, conceptually, exploring the question of what honour means in the context of honour based violence and, also, that it's a useful term, in itself, to understand what we know. So, I suppose, what I'm saying

is there a difference between honour based violence and other forms of domestic violence and abuse or other forms of gender based violence and is it helpful to treat it differently.

I: Right.

R: That's the question.

I: To give it a difference label?

R: Yeah, exactly, yeah.

I: That sounds really interesting. And I know that the research we're going to talk about today is some participatory research that you did around women's experience of the criminal justice system.

R: It was particularly victim/survivors' voices and their experiences with the police. It was really...it was part of the HMIC, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary inspection, which was actually looking at police responses for honour based violence, so it didn't really look at the criminal justice system in general.

I: So it was more specifically about the police's response?

R: Yeah...

I: Okay. And what made you do that research? Why were you particularly interested in it?

R: So we were commissioned to do it. I think...well, we're part of a large team and I think all of us had been interested in it and, particularly, I've been interested in – well, the question that I just raised – are women's experiences of honour based violence. In what way are the different and similar to what their experience of gender based violence and I'm also interested in how the criminal justice system responds to them. Do they treat the black and minority ethnic women or women who might be seen as experiencing honour based violence...do they see them as other women who might be experiencing gender based violence or are they treated differently? And what's the difference and what is the...you know, are there advantages in treating them differently? It may be that they are treated differently; and that's a good thing. Or, actually, it's not really helping them and I think it's sad. And I think it was particularly when we were commissioned to do this and we saw the scope of what we were asked to do. I thought it was really interesting, because I think at the heart of a lot of research that I do is getting women's voices and their experiences of what justice means, their experiences of their interaction with the police. So in this inspection the police also evaluated their own practice.

I: Hmm. And you did it around fifty interviews that you did with women who had experienced honour based violence?

R: Yeah.

I: And some of them had contact with the police and others didn't?

R: Yeah

I: So, looking at the survivors of honour based violence in forced marriage, those who maybe chose, in some circumstances, not to report to the police...

R: Yeah.

I: **...what were the barriers for them doing that? What were their apprehensions around it?**

R: For not reporting?

I: **For not reporting.**

R: Okay, so there were...it's quite complex really, So, in terms of barriers for not reporting, there were a lot of barriers. So some of them spoke about fear of blackmail, so, you know, fear of that they'd lose their children, for instance, or they would get into trouble with their family. They were also worried about maintaining family honour, so, though while it was that they may have experienced honour based violence, but the act of reporting to the police was also seen as dishonourable compounding the dishonour, if you like. But sometimes it was quite simple, sort of, structural things, so it was just they didn't know how to report or where to report. And so, you know, and this is particularly for participants who may have come from overseas.

So, first generation immigrant women, they either didn't know how to contact the police; they didn't know that they could just dial 999, for instance, sometimes they didn't have a phone with them, for instance, and also that some of them came from countries where going to the police is actually seen as shameful in itself. I mean, having the police come to your house is seen as shameful in itself, so you get associated as a criminal and so they don't want to bring that onto themselves, if you like. Some victims suggested that they had reported incidents to the police in the past – or they'd had contact with the police – but because they'd had a poor experience they decided not to do it again.

and what was quite interesting was that there were six cases where perpetrators actually claimed victim status to the police. And there were a further three the perpetrators reported or threatened to report the victim as a bad mother to social services.

I: **Okay.**

R: So they were using that and that made women frightened to approach the police, because they didn't want to lose their children. They reported...so, for example, in one case the perpetrator reported the participant to the police for harassment; in one case as a missing person when she had left with the children and there's one case they reported the woman as a perpetrator of domestic abuse. So they were being pre-emptive, as it were, in those cases. So then what actually takes place when the police come there at that point then, of course, they start off with the assumption that the woman is responsible and, of course, if she makes an allegation at that stage against her husband or her in-laws, then it's kind of seen as defensive and I think then that weakens issues, as well. So there was a man who said – a husband said – receiving unknown calls from the wife and the police said to stop threatening; stop making those calls and, actually, didn't even probably check that she was making it or not.

I: **So, for the women who did decide to report to the police either once or every time or no matter how many times, what was their expectation? I know that with lots of women who experience domestic abuse, sometimes they want what's happening to just immediately stop and some of them want some form of justice.**

R: Yeah, well, that's a difficult question because I think when they first made the decision to report, as you say, most of the time it is because they were in a crisis situation and they wanted the violence and abuse to stop. So they didn't necessarily have a long term plan

about what they were asking for. They didn't even know what would happen. So they didn't really have an expectation. I suppose, a hope that the violence would stop...

I: Immediately, in that moment?

R: ...yeah, which is perfectly valid, but I think the long term impact I think there is, just as with other forms of domestic violence, women, once they're out of the immediate danger or something changes in their life, then their expectations also change or their desires also change, because then they can probably think back and think, okay, I wanted this to stop and it's now stopped. Now I can take stock of what I really want. Do I want my husband, my family members, prosecuted or do I just want to get on with my life!

I: Yeah, definitely?

I: So you looked at kind of their perceptions of how the police interacted with them and then the police's perceptions of how...

R: Yeah

I: ...oh yeah, so you did what the women's perceptions were?

R: Yeah.

I: What was their perception of...what came out to you as really interesting?

R: What was interesting – and I think that's the key summary, as well – was that the initial response, in most cases, they said that the initial response was really good. So the police were quite – in most cases – fantastic at the crisis point. So they came quite quickly. They often either arrested the perpetrator or took him away. They, in some cases, took the women away from the site of violence, if you like, and they got them safe. I think it would be safe to say that women felt that it was the follow up which was a bit of a problem. And that, I think, is consistent in many of the interviews that we looked at; and, also, the closure of cases, in some cases. I mean, having said that, there were a couple of instances of very good practice where individual police officers worked very closely with victims or they had ISVA support and that worked very well, where they had individual ongoing support.

But, predominantly, it was the follow up support they would have to keep ringing up and tell their story to somebody else on the phone and try to find somebody who had...they may have had a named officer, but then they didn't always get to speak to them. They got important bits of communication by text sometimes, for instance. In one case – it's reported in here – a woman said that she was informed by text that her case was being closed which, you know, you can see that police are very busy, but for the woman it came as a bit of a...you know, it was probably quite heart breaking. So it's those kinds of things where I think that it just, after the initial contact, support tends to slip.

I: Okay. It seems quite inconsistent the level of support and advice that they get?

R: Absolutely, yeah. I think it is inconsistent, but I think it is consistent – and that is the thing – where the police response is at the strongest is at the initial point of crisis. And it's later, when the women seem safer, that it seems to slip.

I: Why do you think that happens?

R: I suppose, because that's police's probably...I mean, that, again, I'm going beyond the report and speculating, but I presume it's because the police are probably trained to

respond to crisis and, perhaps, because they don't...I mean, it maybe again I'm going beyond the report and I'm just thinking about the sort of wider work that I've done around this area, because probably the police might believe that they're not there to offer support. And they're there for crisis management and, I suppose, it's this question of what expectations women have from an agency and what the agency feels they're able to give you.

I: Okay.

R: So, for instance, with the criminal justice system, women might want to go and have their day in court, if the case goes that far. But then they are treated as a witness and it's the crime prosecution service who might decide, for instance, that they can testify or not and then it's almost like they feel that control might be taken away from them.

I: Yeah, definitely.

R: Yeah. And I think it's that, because that's how the criminal justice system is set up and the police probably feel that, okay, we made this woman safe; we've taken her to a safe place either to a refuge or a B & B, you know, and probably, hopefully, put her in touch with social services, if she's got kids and it's their job to keep her safe. And it's that. I think that's the kind of missing link, somewhere, to have that continued support. Now, I suppose, I'm not suggesting the police does everything, because obviously they...but it may be that's a gap that needs to be picked up somewhere.

I: Okay. Yeah, I can imagine that it's quite a disempowering process. I remember when I used to work in court, as an IDVA, and the disappointment when – and even the disappointment on the phone beforehand – when they think, oh it's not my case, I'm just a witness in the crown prosecution's case and they're making the decision about whether a charge goes forward with or without me and they can demand that I make a statement with or without my, you know, consent.

R: Yeah.

I: And they can decide what to use or not use and what to charge or not charge and, yeah, it can be quite disempowering and disappointing, really.

R: Yeah, absolutely, and I think that comes through as well...and, I think, sometimes the experiences, again, of women who may have experienced gender based violence, honour based violence, it's where the police...it's not even that different from the experience that other women might have. It's very similar, but again it's complicated by the fact that some of them don't have language support, they may not have close family nearby. They're in a country they haven't lived in for that long, so that, obviously, adds another layer of complexity to their experience, which makes it even more frightening. So there was one woman who was attacked by her husband. She was brought with her son to the police station at ten O'clock and she'd been injured. Her clothing was torn. She was left to wait for fourteen hours where, during those fourteen hours, she got one offer of a hot drink; that's it. And there was no food offered for herself or her child and then somebody came at four o'clock to give her medical attention and at six o'clock in the morning she was spoken to by the handover officer. And she was only questioned on mid-day, the day after the attack.

I: Wow.

R: So that kind of seems she was removed from the place where she was unsafe, but then it was almost like nobody seemed to care for her and I think it's those kinds of gaps, as well. Now, I suspect, that the police are probably under-resourced – I mean, they are under-resourced and, therefore, that might explain some of it, but these are the kinds of

women's experiences about how difficult these things can be for them. I suppose, specifically, around honour based violence, even with the initial contact. Women said that sometimes the police didn't understand their culture, so they didn't understand how things worked in their family, so they didn't...you know, why women weren't speaking, for instance. So, if women understand. So, if you have an officer who might understand your shared culture and you immediately understand that, actually, this is a problem which could be a problem for one particular culture, for instance, but may not be something which white officers might be familiar with then there would be that level of comprehension. They'd move the case forward, so they don't have to explain what is happening to them, because they already understand. So, I guess, that's the issue as well.

I: I guess, they shouldn't have to be dependent on a lottery of whether or not they get an officer from the same ethnic background and who's sympathetic to their situation, really. They should be trained and aware...

R: Exactly.

I: ...yeah.

R: Yeah, I guess, that's the issue as well. That they should be trained and aware, but, yes and that's the thing, I mean, there was this one participant, she said that, when the police entered her house, the mother-in-law was sitting there and the husband was upstairs and she said that she couldn't talk to them with her in-laws in the house and the police officer said, you know, they can't really listen, but she said that they were just standing outside the door. So she did say that he was very helpful, but the point is, of course, that in that situation, if you remove the woman from the house, then it's almost like a permanent removal, because it's quite hard for her to then go out and it can get quite complex. And I don't have any solutions about what this officer might have been able to do in that case, but it almost seems like you would probably not want to interview people, while possible perpetrators are around.

I: No, I think that's a normal thing that most officers would and should know, but it kind of takes that added level of understanding to know that the mother-in-law could be playing a role...

R: *[Over-speaking]* perpetrator...

I: ...in that and that's where they kind of need that added awareness.

R: Exactly.

I: What was your advice, coming out of this, if there was anything? What was your conclusion for them?

R: I suppose, the conclusion that comes out was really that the police do need more training, in terms of different cultural realities for women, but, also, it's never culture by itself, is it? I mean, it's quite easy to talk about culture, if it just exists by itself and then you can – I don't know what the word is 'refire'] a problem and make it seem like it's just cultural, but, actually, for a variety of these women and also women that I've interviewed on other projects, as well, the culture becomes...often, it's just complicated with structural issues. So you have all this rhetoric about shame and honour and so on, but also women have issues to do with immigration and they have issues to do with financial security. You could have very young women, for instance, who are forced into marriage, a British-Asian know that they can call 999, for instance, but they're financially and emotionally dependent on their parents or they're at university and they just don't want to mess their lives up, for instance. And it's quite complex, because, if you are only

focusing on culture and not looking at the wider immigration status but, also, the other emotional needs, then you can't understand what actually might be happening to women, so how to have a response there as well. But, I guess, that's probably the key issue that the police would probably benefit from more training around honour based violence, but also what it means and how it interacts and it interlinks with other forms of oppression and inequalities.

I: Thank you very much for giving this.

R: No problem.

I: It's really interesting.

R: Good, good. You said you were going to meet Liz, isn't it?

I: Yeah, I did, but I think she's had some...

Conclusion: Thank you for listening. If you'd like to find out more about Safelives Spotlight on 'honour' – based violence and forced marriage, go to our website SafeLives.org.uk where we will be uploading content every week, each exploring a different aspect of 'honour' based violence and forced marriage. And if you'd like to participate in the discussion, you can join the live Twitter Q&A on the 8th June from 10-11am. Just go to #YourChoice.