



Spotlight #4: Episode 5

Podcast transcript

An Interview with Shigufta Khan: how children and young people may experience 'honour' – based abuse

Welcome to Spotlights, a series of online events and publications focusing on a particular group of victim/survivors who are often hidden for services. As part of SafeLives Spotlight on 'honour' – based violence and forced marriage, my colleague Deidre has met with Shigufta Khan, CEO of Blackburn & Darwen District Without Abuse. Shigufta talks about hbv with a particular focus on children and young people- how they can experience abuse and the impact this might have on them. We hope you find the interview as enlightening as we have.

Key

SK: Shigufta Khan

I: Interviewer

I: Thanks for joining me today. Can you just start out by telling me who you are, a bit about yourself?

SK: My name is Shigufta Khan and I am the Chief Executive Officer of Blackburn and Darwen District Without Abuse, a specialist domestic abuse charity based in Blackburn and locally known as the 'The Wish Centre'.

I: When you and I chatted for the first time and talked about what this podcast topic might be, you said you want it to focus on children and young people's experiences of honour-based abuse.

SK: I did and when we were talking we often focus on the adult in the relationship and rightly so, and there is a lot of support and awareness around an adult suffering domestic abuse which might be linked also to forced marriage and honour-based abuse, but I think quite often we don't focus on the children in that situation. So for me there are two ways of looking at children and young people; one is where they are directly affected by forced marriage or they could potentially be a victim of a forced marriage, so that's been discussed in the family.

I: Does that happen quite early on?

SK: That can happen quite early on, so when we support the adult, especially if there are children in that relationship, we will always ask whether that has even been discussed or ever been mentioned or whether that is an issue and quite often that has been

discussed at quite an early age. So if you have children, especially girls and it is usually girls which are affected by this, although we have had young male victims as well of forced marriage but predominantly it is the females, where it can be from the age of eight upwards when parents might start thinking about, or the abusive parent might start thinking about, the marriages of those children of that relationship.

But the other side of it is where children are often manipulated or used as perpetrators in a relationship. So, for example, when the mum splits up from that relationship, so the mother's left the home, the children are used to spy on the mother and feed back to the extended family or coerced into becoming abusive to the mother and that is something we have seen. I myself as seen as a practitioner and now I am seeing that in the service where the Idvas are coming and saying to me that this is going on, how do we deal with this situation and what do we do with this scenario and it seems to be a really quite common thing that happens in South Asian families where the mother is trying to leave the family home, extended family members or the father are using children to coerce or to be abusive to the parent.

I: Yes. When we did the last spotlight on young people, part of it was looking at young people who harm and we found that a lot of harm is directed towards the mother who often has experienced domestic abuse from her partner. How does honour-based violence come into it as opposed to another form of domestic abuse? Is it the extended family involvement?

SK: It is the extended family involvement. When I have dealt with the cases myself or when I have spoken to the practitioner, they say there is a definite difference in the way children are used. So, for example, one of the workers, she was talking about a case in supervision where she was seeing that the mother-in-law is exerting a lot of pressure and this was a very young child, that she was saying to him that your mother's not feeding you properly, you must demand that your mother makes you this, your mother makes you that; if your mother does not make you this she is not feeding you what you should be eating. So the child is then coming home and demanding that you need to make me this and you need to make me that, and it is very precise and a very definite form of control almost from that young child to his mother, and I will not eat anything else that you have made unless you make me what my grandma has asked for you to make me. So that is very different.

I: And is that because she has left, it is a way of still exerting control?

SK: Exerting control. We had another case, for example, this was an extended family where the father was using the children. He had given the 12-year-old cameras to put in the property and given the 12-year-old sleeping tablets to put into the mother's food. It's very different to the abuse that we see happening in other situations where usually the abuse is around child contact. So in a non-BME family where children are used, they are used as pawns usually and they are used in a child contact scenario, so the children are used by the abusive partner as a way of getting in contact with the partner that has left and that is the scenario that we see happening time and time again. But this form of abuse is very different form of abuse that you see in BME situations where the child is used to manipulate.

We have had cases where we have had children coming into a refuge accommodation, six-year-old, seven-year-olds squaring up to refuge workers: why do you want to talk to my mother, you should not be talking to my mother, or they sit in and they refuse to leave the room; they are taking on a very perpetrated-type role where my mother must do this or my sister must do this or they must behave in this way and they can be quite challenging to staff from a very young age. You have six/seven year old boys taking on that role of the male in the family and the females of the family must do what they

are saying because they are now the man of the house and that is very learned behaviour, very difficult to unpick and undo because often the mothers have not been allowed to parent or not being able to parent, so it is a very different scenario isn't it then for us to then educate them and teach them that no that is your role; you are the parent and this is a child and this is what you must do and this is how you must do it.

I: Yes, and by the time that they do learn that the power dynamics must have really, really shifted so that it can be difficult to actually assert yourself because there might be some danger in that.

SK: Yes, exactly.

I: So you talk about how the children and young people are involved in the abuse in two ways, either they are witnessing it or sometimes becoming a part of it and I am guessing in lots of circumstances both.

SK: In both or there is a massive overlap. So in the scenario where I mentioned about the child being used to put cameras in the house etc. the abuse from the father was directly towards the children where they have been physically chastised by the father. So the older child was trying to be protective towards the younger siblings in that scenario and it almost was a way of, if I do what dad is asking me to do then I will not get hit, my younger siblings will not get hit and he's trying to take on that protective role and in that situation I suppose you have those dynamics where children often associate themselves or align themselves with the stronger parent and in this situation it is often the abusive parent. So, to protect themselves and to protect maybe the siblings, I am better off aligning myself to this parent than the weaker one. So you have those situations or those scenarios playing out where the children are having to make those decisions at a very young age; where do I feel safer and what is the best thing for me to do in this situation.

I: It is survival tactic.

SK: Yes.

I: In your experiences of young people who have been involved in honour based abuse, I am guessing the impact is very similar to any young person who has experienced domestic abuse or is there a difference or what have you found around the impact on their wellbeing?

SK: Around honour-based abuse, so if you have this scenario where you have been manipulated, not just by an abusive parent but also by extended family, it must very, very difficult and very challenging for that young person then to decide what is the right thing for me to do now because what they are hearing from multiple is that this is the right thing to do and agencies are telling them or professionals are telling them that no this is not the right thing to do. What we have also found is that it is also very much led by the males in the family, so where you have boys in the family, it is very much about this is what a man's right is or this is how women are treated. You've got those sorts of values being ingrained which have very dangerous connotations to them further down the line.

I: And outcomes...

SK: And outcomes but those are instilled in and we have seen that more in the boys of the family than you do in the girls in the family. So in one particular situation, this one where the child with the eight-year-old was telling his mother you must cook me this and I must eat this and I will not eat anything else. He was also very abusive to his

younger sister, so the abuse was towards the two females in that family home; he was the only boy – it was brother and sister.

I: So that kind of attitude and abuse of women it becomes normalised because it is not just your father but it is all the men in the family and then it sounds like in that situation it is the older women as well that are condoning that behaviour and teaching it. And for the girls as well I am guessing that becomes normalised as that is how men act and that is how I respond.

SK: One of the things that this little boy was doing was, the school raised it as an issue and the school identified the abuse and identified some very strange behaviour that was happening with this young boy, how he was being manipulated. It started when he attacked his sister in the playground and beat his sister up quite badly because she was playing with a white British girl and he was saying but dad has told that we are not supposed to do this. A lot of the issues when they first came to the attention was to do with racial behaviour but when you unpicked it all, when intervention started taking place with that family, there was domestic abuse that was going on in the family home but the school identified a racial issue and that is how it was identified as a factor. But when you delved into it, the domestic abuse that was going on was quite horrific really and obviously when Children's Services became involved and the case escalated with two other agencies and mum left the family home and we started working with her and the children came on to our programmes, when we started unpicking all of that there was so much that was uncovered where the whole family then united against the mother and so all the extended family and this little boy every time he had contact with family the abuse started again; every time the contact was finished he was okay and we could work with him and that was quite a difficult scenario then to break him away from his extended family who were having such a negative impact on him.

I: And that must have been traumatising for him –that's his support network, his family?

SK: Yes, and all of sudden then he's associating agencies with the fact that agency are involved, therefore I cannot have contact with my grandparents and uncles and father. So, for an eight-year-old child that is very difficult to understand.

I: It is very sad.

SK: Very sad, yeah.

I: Do you find that in circumstances where there are children and there is honour-based abuse going on, is it almost always that the children become involved at some level or is that only in certain circumstances that the children become involved?

SK: It is not in all situations. In a lot of situations, the children are used by extended family as a way of controlling the victim that has left the family home. So in a situation where there is no honour issue and that there are no cultural aspects to it, you would often see extended do not have that control over the children, it is dad who wants contact. Whether he wants contact with the children or whether he wants contact with the partner, it is still difficult and a challenge to deal with but you do not have these challenges that you do in the South Asian community where boys are prized and thought very highly of and it is very difficult for the family to think that we have lost that contact with the children. Often you have people living in extended families, in joint families even if they do not live in the same family home, the network in the community is so tightly knit that you have a lot of contact with your extended family every day that you do not in some other communities.

So, it is very difficult for that family to think, no I do not have any contact with that child; that child is no longer in my control, if you will. So they will try their best to keep that contact and maintain that contact.

So I suppose in a large proportion of cases you will have cases where you will have manipulation from the family and the children will be directly involved in that.

I: It is obviously a huge safe-guarding issue but it is not a stereotypical one for child safe-guarding to deal with – Children’s Services. How do you feel they typically respond? Do you feel that they have a grasp or an understanding of the type and extent of abuse that is going on with that child and are able to respond to it?

SK: I do not think they do. For a start, with Children’s Services, under their remit for Children’s Services or CAFCASS or other organisations contact with both parties is something that is promoted and...

I: That is like the starting place?

SK: Yes. So when you have an assessment, you look at contact as a heart of that assessment isn’t really?

I: Yes.

SK: Even if you go to a Child Protection or a Child in Need meetings you are inviting both parties; there is openness, there’s a dialogue; all of that is something that underpins everything that children...

I: It comes from a basis that a child is better off with both parents.

SK: With both parents involved. So where you have that issue going on anyway, where you have domestic abuse, we have scenarios where we are advocating that possibly contact is not the right thing or contact should not be allowed. You’ve got those issues going on in normal domestic abuse cases but you have the additional layer of honour-based abuse, it’s something that is just not on anybody’s radar. I find whether we’ve got cases where children are being manipulated or used by extended family, you often have the extended family sat in those Child Protection conferences and Child in Need conferences. Either the mother will bring some support with her, but often she does not have any support with her because her family is not with her in this country or is not supportive of her leaving the relationship in the first place. So she is sat very isolated and you have the father with all the extended family around the conference table which is so intimidating.

I: And they don’t often clock the manipulation or coercion involved in that?

SK: No. We have had one very recent Child Protection, one Child in Need in this case, where the mother was made to feel that was a parenting issue, that the children’s abuse and the children’s behaviour was a parenting issue. It was not an issue where it was even recognised that these children had been manipulated; it was almost like the blame was put on the mother that you are not parenting appropriately. So the whole thing was not unpicked or opened up or not even recognised all those children are actually suffering a lot of emotional harm and damage which has a lasting impact on them.

I: And as much as she changes her parenting it is not going to change anything because the actual cause of it is still a factor that has not been addressed because they do not understand.

SK: No because the children have been manipulated every time they go and have contact with father and extended family, that this is what you must do and this is what you must say and this is how you must behave towards the mother.

I: So how do you think that needs to be addressed?

SK: I think there needs to be an understanding and recognition from Children's Services, from IROs when they are chairing these conferences, that you see whether it is safe to have these extended family members in the conference room, what is their role in there and why are they there. Also if the mother is saying that every time the child has contact with the extended family and comes back home and this is what the child is doing, listen to what the mother is saying, look at the wider picture and maybe challenge some of the cultural things that people do not want to challenge for various reasons that need to be challenged.

I: Yes, I think that is something that has come up in other interviews that I have had is that professionals are afraid to address what is going on because of fear of I guess stereotyping or being offensive on any level. Is that something you have experienced?

SK: That is something we have experienced. One scenario could be that they do not recognise it and two, they do recognise it but they do not know how to deal with it. So it is in the too difficult to deal with box so let's not open that box up because it might bring up things that we do not know how to respond to; let's just deal with what we do know. But if you've got these additional factors that are happening or going on, unless you open that box up and look at it and actually unpick everything that is going on, you are not going to deal with the root cause of the problem.

I: Nothing will change for her or for the children and behaviour will be perpetuated.

SK: Yes, exactly.

I: So the young person or the child experiences abuse within the household and that has all the negative impacts that we know that has on their wellbeing and they see the way the men in the family act towards the women in some circumstances. How do you feel that affects them in their later life as adults?

SK: It is going to affect the way they conduct their own relationships in the future and what we find is and what I find really, really strange is in scenarios where you have the females in the house endorsing this behaviour, this is how you must treat your mother or this is how you must treat your sister, they are endorsing that behaviour that this is how you must treat females and the backlash is that this is how they are going to treat you as well in the future. So it is almost not understanding that when you are giving these values to a young man, what are you actually creating for the future...

I: For yourself as well.

I: How do you feel it needs to be addressed? I know that sex and relationship education is now becoming mandatory in schools...

SK: Yes, which is fantastic.

I: Yes. How does this element need to come into it, if it needs to come into it?

SK: I think schools obviously need education in recognising this, so if they identify these issues happening they need to put a safeguarding alert in because I think it is something that needs to be escalated. Schools as a single agency cannot be dealing with it, so although healthy relationships and sex education is becoming mandatory, that is fantastic, so they can deal with healthy relationship education-wise I suppose and they can educate young people on consent which definitely needs to happen. But if you have to identify other issues you need to bring other professionals into it because it is not something that schools can deal with on their own.

I: So it is training for the professionals in the school setting to be able to teach that but also to identify and then for the social worker to pick it up...

SK: And also to identify it and pick it up.

I: ...and see it beyond domestic abuse, to see the honour-based abuse as well?

SK: Definitely.

I: So it is about training and awareness for all professionals at their own level?

SK: Yes, but also for people in the community as well. A lot of these children will go to the Mosque after school and Mosques do not just teach in these settings, they do not just teach the Quran but they will teach other aspects of how you become a good person, how you are a good Muslim. So definitely I think that needs to happen in those settings as well because some of these young men might understand it better in that setting than they would do in a school setting if it comes from religious guidance to them and it should be very different. That religious guidance will then contradict what their own extended family are telling them or their abusive extended family are telling them on how you should treat women and how you should respect women. So I think it needs to happen in different settings and different scenarios and everybody should be given the same message because otherwise how confusing is that for a young person and getting told something by their family because they misinterpret religion and culture into something that they want to teach that young person...

I: And use.

SK: ...and use for their benefit. So I think that setting where they go to these afterschool clubs, the Mosques to learn, something needs to happen there as well.

I: So it is working with strong community members to advocate for those changes and awareness?

SK: Yes, absolutely because I think that is where you would reach more of these young men than you ever would do in school, because in school if you are doing the healthy education and healthy relationships, what you are telling them there is so different to what they are learning from their home. They must get quite confused, so is this a white Western view? Which view is the right view for me to take on board and for me to follow? So really that view that has been taught in schools needs to filter down into the Mosque and the mother says where they going to school to gain that religious education.

I: Yes. Sounds good. I think we have covered everything. I think it is a good ending to end on - what do we do about it?

SK: What do we do about it, yeah?

I: **That is really interesting. Thank you for doing it with me.**

SK: Yeah, good.