

'Honour'-based Abuse and Forced Marriage Cases at MARAC in Scotland





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About this Guidance

SafeLives is a UK-wide charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse.

Safer, Sooner is a SafeLives multi-agency project (funded through Delivering Equally Safe (DES) which builds on the MARAC Development Programme (MDP), supporting Scottish MARACs to embed the SafeLives evaluated model and improve practice to offer a more effective response to victim-survivors and their families who are at risk from domestic abuse. We want to improve multi-agency capability, consistency, and capacity across Scotland, making it everyone's business to keep women and children safer, sooner by:

- Finding safe ways for victim-survivors to be an active part of the process
- Improving the understanding of domestic abuse across frontline, multi-agency practice
- Strengthening opportunities for coordination

We want to embed a system that directs every victim-survivor of domestic abuse in Scotland, whatever their risk and whatever first step they take, to the right support to make them safer, sooner.

Through our engagements with MARACs and MARAC professionals across Scotland, we heard about inconsistencies in the response to cases that involve so-called 'honour'-based abuse, including where there is a threat of forced marriage, and when the perpetrator(s) is not a partner or ex-partner. This has also been continuously highlighted by specialist services in other forums at local and national levels, including during the Scottish Government MARAC deep-dive events in 2021[1] following the consultation on the future of multi-agency risk assessment arrangements in Scotland[2].

'Honour'-based abuse, including forced marriage or threat of forced marriage, is a form of violence against women and gender-based violence. As such it is appropriate for referral to MARAC, and cases should be accepted for discussion at Scottish MARACs. MARAC has been highlighted as effective in responding to these cases by the Scottish Government[3]. A multi-agency approach may be even more important for cases involving 'honour'-based abuse, due to the nature of risks and victim-survivors potentially being less likely to have reported the abuse to the police or to be engaged with specialist services, making a coordinated response particularly important.

[1] Scottish Government MARAC deep-dive learning report (to be published)

[2] Risk assessment and interventions for victims of domestic abuse: consultation response analysis (Scottish Government, 2019)

[3] 'What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls' (Scottish Government, 2020)

Contact Us

Please contact Scotland@SafeLives.org.uk for further information or questions in relation to this guidance.

Visit the SafeLives website to find out more about our work, access a range of resources for professionals, and explore our training and support.



We all feel like there just hasn't been enough captured around women's experiences, and there's not enough research done. Their voices are just not being heard well enough.

- Focus group participant

Through Safer, Sooner we have consulted with professionals from specialist services who support victim-survivors of domestic abuse and so-called ‘honour’-based abuse in Scotland, and colleagues from Police Scotland, to explore how Scottish MARACs currently respond to these cases and how responses can be improved. We wanted to understand what the current response looks like and what guidance is needed to improve consistency across the country to ensure a consistent, safe, and robust response to all victim-survivors.

A research report that accompanies this guidance^[1], outlines the findings from a survey of Scottish MARACs and themes from focus groups conducted with specialist practitioners in Scotland. The development of this best practice guidance has been informed by these findings and created with support and input from staff from [Shakti Women’s Aid](#), [Hemat Gryffe Women’s Aid](#), [Amina Muslim Women’s Resource Centre](#), [LGBT Youth Scotland](#) and [Police Scotland](#).

[1] The research report can be requested by contacting Scotland@safelives.org.uk

To understand current practice and any gaps in provision and responses, we surveyed Scottish MARACs and conducted focus groups with specialist practitioners to explore the prevalence of cases involving so-called ‘honour’-based abuse, and/or forced marriage, at Scottish MARACs. We asked about current responses and what best practice should look like.

Key Findings

There is very little consistency in the way that MARACs across Scotland respond to ‘honour’-based abuse referrals, with some accepting the referrals while others do not.

For some MARACs, the decision on whether to accept a referral depends on the identity of the primary perpetrator. Some MARACs do not accept an ‘honour’-based abuse case if the primary perpetrator is a family member rather than a partner or ex-partner (as per the definition of domestic abuse in the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018). Many of the focus group participants would like to see this aspect of the law changed to include family abuse as a form of domestic abuse.

The specialist service practitioners who formed part of the focus groups were not confident in referring ‘honour’-based abuse cases to MARAC - usually because they did not believe they would be accepted.

Focus group participants were concerned that staff in non-specialist services often lack the understanding of ‘honour’-based abuse necessary to recognise this type of abuse as well as to adequately support the victim-survivors.



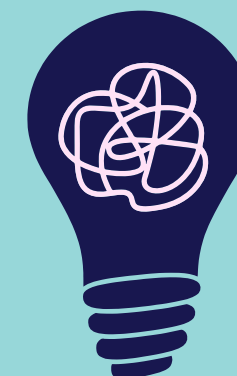
The number of ‘honour’-based abuse cases estimated to have been referred to each MARAC over 2021 is less than three for most MARACs surveyed.

Of the MARACs surveyed, only one in ten (11%) record the numbers of ‘honour’-based abuse cases that are referred to them.

Staff in specialist services and almost all the MARAC representatives felt that MARACs would benefit from more support in managing ‘honour’-based abuse cases.

Suggestions included:

- Standard guidance created for MARACs.
- Greater involvement of specialist services in the MARAC process.
- Tools specifically designed for ‘honour’-based abuse victim-survivors, including specific referral tools and risk assessments.
- Training on ‘honour’-based abuse
- Longer-term safety plans.
- Family members and wider family members who are perpetrating abuse are to be treated in the same way that perpetrators who are partners or ex-partners would be treated.^[1]
- More robust safety plans for victim-survivors who have no recourse to public funds, are immigrants or asylum seekers, identify as trans or who are not confident English speakers.



[1] For brevity, for the remainder of this report, ‘family members’ will refer to extended family members, including family members of a person’s partner or ex-partner, as well as their immediate family.



What is 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage?



“

Some families / communities abuse women, saying it is because they want to protect the family or community 'honour' or 'izzat'.

Shakti Women's Aid

What is 'honour'-based abuse?

There is currently no statutory definition of so-called 'honour'-based violence or abuse in Scotland. Scottish Government includes 'honour'-based violence in the wider definition of violence against women and girls (VAWG) as:



So called 'honour based' violence, including dowry related violence, female genital mutilation, forced and child marriages, and 'honour' crimes.

- Equally Safe, 2016



The terms honour-based abuse, honour crime, honour-based violence and Izzat embrace a variety of incidents or crimes of violence (mainly but not exclusively against women), including physical abuse, sexual violence, abduction, forced marriage, imprisonment, and murder where the person is being punished by their family or community. They are punished for actually, or allegedly, undermining what the family or community believes to be the correct code of behaviour. In transgressing this, the person shows that they have not been properly controlled to conform by their family and this is to the shame of the family. Honour crime may be considered by the perpetrators as justified to protect or restore the honour of the family.[1]

- Scottish Government, 2014

[1] [Multi-agency practice guidelines: preventing and responding to forced marriage](#)

There is currently no specific statutory offence of so-called 'honour'-based abuse in Scotland, and abuse perpetrated by family members is not covered by the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018. Instead, 'honour'-based abuse perpetrated by family members, or the wider community, will be dealt with using existing legislation, for example the threatening or abusive behaviour (section 38 of the Criminal Justice & Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010) or assault[1].

We have chosen to use the term 'honour'-based abuse rather than violence in this guidance in recognition of this encompassing a range of behaviours not limited to physical violence, and in line with the Scottish understanding of domestic abuse.

It is important to understand that there can be no 'honour' in abuse; the concept of 'honour' is used to control the victim to comply with expectations of what is understood as acceptable or unacceptable behaviour. Specialist organisations in Scotland who fed into this guidance emphasise that 'honour' can mean different things to different families, and in different contexts, but 'honour'-based abuse should be understood as any act and/or behaviour by the victim-survivor that is perceived as bringing shame to the family or community[2].

'Honour'-based abuse can be perpetuated by family members, (ex)partners, and wider communities. It is primarily experienced by women and girls, but men may also be victim-survivors. When identifying or coming out as lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans may be a trigger for 'honour'-based abuse for both men, women, and non-binary people[3]

[1] Other legislation may also apply

[2] [HBA & MARAC - Research Report](#)

[3] ['Your Choice: Honour-based violence, forced marriage and domestic abuse'](#) (SafeLives, 2017)

What is Forced Marriage?

A forced marriage is different from an arranged marriage, where the marriage is arranged by one or both families, but both parties are free to accept the arrangements or not. Forced marriage is a form of ‘honour’-based abuse and may be seen by a family as a route to restore ‘honour’.

Forced marriage involves one or both spouses being forced to marry without their consent.

‘Force’ in this context includes behaviours to:



“(a) coerce by physical, verbal, or psychological means, threatening conduct, harassment, or other means, (b) knowingly take advantage of a person’s incapacity to consent to marriage or to understand the nature of the marriage.

(Forced Marriage etc.(Protection and Jurisdiction) (Scotland) Act 2011)

“A forced marriage is a marriage in which one or both spouses do not (or, in the case of children and some adults at risk, cannot) consent to the marriage and coercion is involved. Coercion can include verbal, physical, psychological, financial, sexual, and emotional pressure and taking advantage of a person’s inability to give consent.[1]

Scottish Government, 2014

[1] [Multi-agency practice guidelines: preventing and responding to forced marriage](#)

Responding to cases involving 'honour'-based abuse at MARAC



Victim-survivors who experience or are at risk of experiencing so-called ‘honour’-based abuse deserve a coordinated response to the risks they are experiencing, including from wider family and/or community members - MARACs are ideally placed to provide this.

The premise of MARAC is to increase safety through a coordinated action plan that addresses the risks identified. Actions should relate to identified risks and be volunteered by the attending agencies. Action plans should consider unique aspects of each victim-survivor’s individual situation and consider both short-term immediate safety needs and longer-term support for recovery and (re-)establishing independence.

Specialist services supporting victim-survivors of so-called ‘honour’-based abuse must be involved from the start, to inform risk assessments and to feed into immediate safety planning; however, all agencies will have a role to play in keeping victim-survivors safe through a coordinated multi-agency response.

Multi-agency approaches, including MARAC, have been highlighted as effective in responding to cases involving ‘honour’-based abuse^[1]. A coordinated multi-agency action plan may be particularly important in cases that involve ‘honour’-based abuse and/or (threats of) forced marriage, due to the nature of the risk.



[1] ‘[What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls](#)’ (Scottish Government, 2020) emphasises multi-agency working, including specific reference to MARAC, as effective in both raising awareness of and responding to ‘honour’-based abuse.



MARAC has to trust our judgment because not all of these cases may be reported to the police.

Focus group participant

Effective MARAC responses should be led and informed by the expertise of specialist services, inclusive from the point of referral through to action plans and follow-up after the meeting. This expertise is crucial both for assessing risk and informing action plans. As these cases may be less likely to be reported to the Police, the input and expertise of specialist services in assessing risk is particularly important.

Although specialist services will play a particularly central role in action plans for victim-survivors of ‘honour’-based abuse, all agencies must consider how they can meaningfully contribute to increasing the safety of victim-survivors and addressing any safety concerns. This may involve working closely with and being guided by the specialist service supporting the victim-survivor, in relation to ensuring any actions do not create service-generated risks or the victim-survivor becomes overwhelmed by agency involvement.

Safe accommodation and support to rebuild social networks were highlighted in our focus groups as particularly important for longer-term safety for victim-survivors of ‘honour’-based abuse.



Having a specialist organisation is so important because if it was as easy as ‘oh can you just can you give me a list of things so I can identify this better?’ We would have done that ages ago.

Focus group participant

We recognise MARAC professionals may feel less familiar or confident assessing risk and creating action plans for ‘honour’-based abuse cases involving wider family or community members as perpetrators; however, there are transferable skills from other domestic abuse cases which can be applied. This includes looking at perpetrators from the wider family or community in a similar way to (ex)partners to identify patterns of abusive behaviour and consider any relevant previous and current criminal history or other intelligence when assessing risk.



MARAC professionals need to be equipped with the right tools and knowledge to identify and respond effectively to ‘honour’-based abuse. This is particularly important as this form of abuse may be less likely to be reported to the police.



MARAC professionals to ‘think ‘honour’-based abuse’ to be able to effectively identify victim-survivors potentially at high-risk of harm and refer to MARAC.



Professional judgement may be more important when assessing risk of harm in cases involving so-called ‘honour’-based abuse.



MARAC professionals should be open-minded and consider intersecting and contributing factors when assessing the potential for harm, alongside the use of risk identification tools such as the SafeLives DASH.



Assigning a single point of contact for victim-survivors to coordinate action plans and agency involvement is good practice in domestic abuse cases; however, it may be even more important in cases where the victim-survivor has limited trust in services due to the abuse and/or past experiences of poor service responses.



Professionals also need to be mindful of how perpetrators manipulate systems and victim-survivors’ views of systems to keep them isolated and dependent on the perpetrator. Because of this, action and safety plans for ‘honour’-based abuse victim-survivors may need to be longer-term and should be guided by the victim-survivors’ pace and space for action.



Risk Assess

Using DASH & professional judgement.

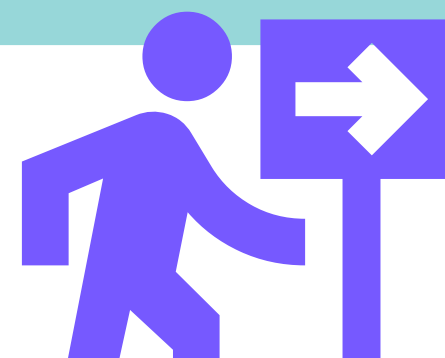
Consider additional risk factors & risks from multiple perpetrators.

Seek input from specialist services.

Identify

Think 'honour'-based Abuse" - be open-minded in terms of background, gender, perpetrators.

Ask!



Referral

Signpost and refer to specialist services for HBA victim-survivors.

Refer to MARAC if high-risk, including through professional judgement considerations.

Safety Planning

Sensitive and immediate safety planning.

Consider the risk of forced marriage.

Legal responses.

Signposting and advice.





Identify

Think 'honour'-based Abuse"
- be open-minded in terms of
background, gender, perpetrators.

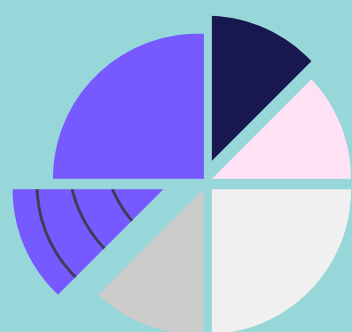
Ask!

‘Honour’-based abuse, although distinct from domestic abuse, is a form of gender-based violence and violence against women and girls. As such, cases involving this type of abuse, including from wider family members, are appropriate for referral to MARAC, and cases should be accepted for discussion at Scottish MARACs.

As a multi-agency forum, bringing together representatives from local voluntary and statutory services, MARAC is a unique opportunity to address risk through a joint action plan, and has been highlighted as effective in responding to cases involving ‘honour’-based abuse[1].

MARAC brings together multiple perspectives and provides opportunities for coordinated action, which may be even more important in cases involving ‘honour’-based abuse, where risk is often high, but can be misunderstood or difficult to spot. Timely and proportionate information sharing is crucial to support victim-survivors and address risk, and it is important that MARAC professionals are aware of the signs of ‘honour’-based abuse and how it may differ from other forms of domestic abuse.

[1] [‘What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls’](#) (Scottish Government, 2020) emphasises multi-agency working, including specific reference to MARAC, as effective in both raising awareness of and responding to ‘honour’-based abuse.



SafeLives’ (2017) Spotlight report found that victim-survivors of ‘honour’-based abuse may be more likely to be abused by multiple perpetrators (54% compared to 7% of domestic abuse victims-survivors).



People take the opinion if it's not reported to the police, it is not as risky. Or if it's not reported to the police, it is not as real. And that cannot be further from the truth, because most of the [‘honour’-based abuse] cases are actually considerably riskier than ... typical domestic abuse cases.

Focus group participant

Dynamics of ‘honour’-based abuse

‘Honour’-based abuse is defined in relation to the motive (to defend or restore perceived honour) and can involve multiple perpetrators, including family, extended family, and community members, who may be strangers to the victim-survivor. In other cases of domestic abuse, family members may be seen as protective factors.

Participants in our focus groups also emphasised the involvement of extended family members (such as the mother-in-law), highlighting that even where the victim-survivor’s partner is not the primary perpetrator, they may become ‘absorbed into the rest of the family’s behaviour and be unable or unwilling to act against them.

What is perceived as ‘honour’ can also differ widely between families, and abuse often involves high levels of coercion and isolation of the victim-survivor.

Victim-survivors who are at risk of, or who experience ‘honour’-based abuse may be more likely than other domestic abuse victim-survivors to be at high-risk of serious harm[1]. However, as highlighted in our focus groups, victim-survivors may be less likely to contact the police or disclose to other statutory agencies. Lack of police involvement can be seen as a proxy for ‘low risk’ when there may be deeply embedded patterns of coercive control, which mean victim-survivors are at high-risk of harm.

[1] [‘Your Choice: Honour-based violence, forced marriage and domestic abuse’](#) (SafeLives, 2017)

Coercive control

Coercive control in cases of ‘honour’-based abuse may take different forms than in other cases of domestic abuse and be perpetrated by wider family members. Coercive control can be a powerful tool for the compliance of victim-survivors.

LGBT+ victim-survivors

LGBT+ victim-survivors may be at particular risk of ‘honour’-based abuse, in relation to their sexual orientation or identity, and any perceived ‘shame’ this brings on their family or community. Participants in our focus groups emphasised how intersectional identities may make some victim-survivors more vulnerable to ‘honour’-based abuse, especially for those who identify as trans. LGBT+ victim-survivors may also be more vulnerable to forced marriage, for example, by being forced into a heterosexual marriage because their family does not accept their sexuality.

For LGBT+ victim-survivors, their sexuality and identity may be used against them to further control and isolate them. ‘Honour’-based abuse is closely linked to a perception of ‘family honour’, and as such, for young LGBT+ people ‘coming out’ to their family may be a significantly risky time.

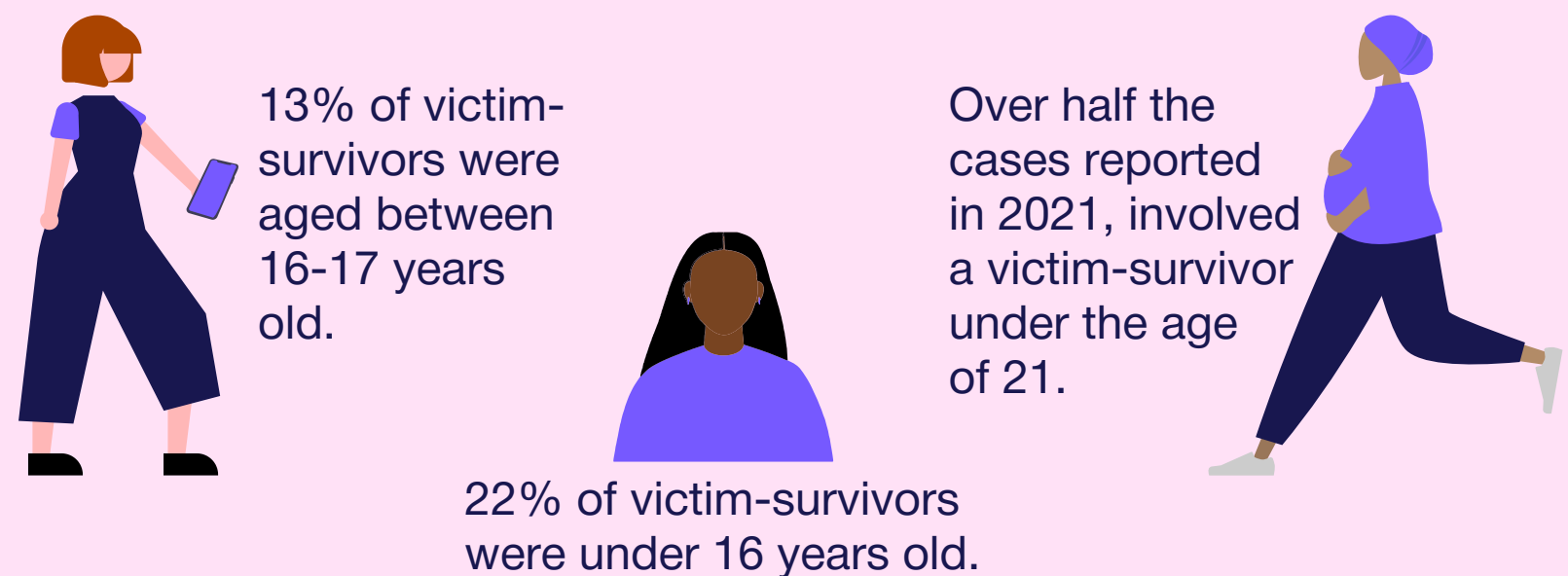
Internalised homo-, bi- and trans-phobia can also contribute to victim-survivors feeling like they ‘deserve’ the abuse they are experiencing because of their gender or sexual identity. The lack of appropriate services for LGBT+ people experiencing abuse from their wider family can further isolate victim-survivors and force them to stay in an abusive situation[1]. This may be particularly true for male survivors as service provision is limited for male survivors in Scotland.

[1] [Supporting LGBT Survivors](#) (LGBT Youth Scotland)

Forced Marriage cases at MARAC

There may be significant overlap between cases involving forced marriage, or threat of, and ‘honour’-based abuse being referred to MARAC. MARACs should be aware that some victim-survivors who experience ‘honour’-based abuse may also be victims of forced marriage. This could include risks to any children involved in the cases discussed.

Age is a significant risk factor in relation to the risk or threat of forced marriage[1]. Data from the Forced Marriage Unit[2] show that...



Younger victim-survivors may be less likely to be in contact with specialist services, or to recognise what they are experiencing as ‘honour’-based abuse. In these cases, it will be important to consider which is the most appropriate service or process to coordinate support.

The Scottish Government (2014) [multi-agency practice guidance](#)[3] provides guidance for Scottish professionals responding to forced marriage cases, including signs that may indicate someone is at risk of forced marriage and good practice points in relation to safety planning.

[1] ‘[Your Choice: Honour-based violence, forced marriage and domestic abuse](#)’ (SafeLives, 2017)

[2] [Forced Marriage Unit Statistics 2021](#) (UK Government, 2022)

[3] [Multi-agency practice guidelines: preventing and responding to forced marriage](#) (Scottish Government, 2014)

Practice Points

MARACs need to be conscious of the involvement of family members in any action planning, as coercive control may be perpetrated and reinforced by those individuals in cases involving 'honour-based abuse.

MARAC professionals should try to maximise opportunities to speak to the victim-survivor alone to explore dynamics further, especially in relation to coercive control.

MARAC professionals should explore dynamics in more detail and be aware that risks may be in relation to multiple perpetrators. Where abuse has not yet been reported to the police, this should not be taken as a proxy for lower risk, and although it may be appropriate to explore ways to encourage reporting, this should not be the sole focus of action plans.

Professionals should be aware of barriers to reporting for victim-survivors and how cultural stereotypes can influence access to support from services.

MARAC professionals should be conscious of what victim-survivors lose when leaving their family and culture behind and how this may influence their decisions to leave. Action plans need to take this into account and not solely rely on the victim-survivor leaving for support or services to be available.

MARAC professionals need to be equipped with the right tools and knowledge to identify and respond effectively to 'honour'-based abuse. This is particularly important as this form of abuse may be less likely to be reported to the police.

For victim-survivors aged under 16, MARAC may not be the most appropriate forum and child protection processes should instead take precedent.

For victim-survivors aged 16 and over, a MARAC referral may be appropriate to coordinate a multi-agency response to risk. This should be considered alongside any other processes that need to happen in tandem with MARAC to safeguard the victim-survivor, and efforts should be made to minimise potential duplication between processes.

MARAC professionals should also ensure there is no delay for support and safety planning taking place whilst waiting for the MARAC to take place. This might involve contacting the Forced Marriage Unit to explore forced marriage protection orders and, crucially, linking the victim-survivor with specialist support.

Professionals should consider appointing a single point of contact for the victim-survivor to avoid overwhelming them with agency contacts.

MARAC professionals should familiarise themselves with this guidance and the 'one chance' rule. Refer to this when considering what actions MARAC can take to address the potential risk of forced marriage for any cases referred to them. Importantly, there may be specific risks around the use of interpreters which should be considered and addressed in action plans.

MARAC professionals should also consider the intersection of forced marriage and other forms of abuse, as well as the longer-term impact of forced marriage, and recognise that some victim-survivors referred to MARAC experiencing domestic abuse and/or 'honour'-based abuse may have been subject to forced marriage arrangements in the past. MARAC should consider any support needs victim-survivors may have in relation to processing trauma related to forced marriage, even where this is not a current risk or threat.

MARAC professionals need to be aware of the risk of being 'outed' and that the wider community may be a risk factor for LGBT+ victim-survivors.

MARAC professionals should consider the intersecting needs of LGBT+ victim-survivors and be mindful of any 'honour'-related risk for young LGBT+ victim-survivors in relation to their sexual or gender identity, and how this may impact their access to services and support.



Risk Assess

Using DASH & professional judgement.

Consider additional risk factors & risks from multiple perpetrators.

Seek input from specialist services.

In cases involving so-called ‘honour’-based abuse, where primarily perpetrated by a non-partner or ex-partner, referral rates are lower than in other high-risk cases. From our survey of Scottish MARACs ‘honour’-based abuse cases were routinely not recorded, and where they were recorded, they made up less than 5% of referrals. This is regardless of cases involving ‘honour’-based abuse being more likely to be classed as high-risk. It is therefore important that:

- MARAC professionals are skilled in identifying cases involving ‘honour’-based abuse and assessing risk, including being aware of how risk may present differently in these cases compared to other domestic abuse cases.
- Where professionals are unsure or lack the skills or confidence to carry out appropriate risk assessments, they should reach out to specialist services in their area for support and advice. The expertise and skill of specialist services must be recognised and considered when assessing the risk that someone is experiencing and whether they meet the threshold for MARAC discussion.
- MARAC professionals should be aware of indicators that someone may be experiencing ‘honour’-based abuse, including from wider family and/or community members, and should explore these dynamics as part of routine risk assessments.



Be open minded when it comes to hearing a woman's experiences. Cultural practices can overlap across cultures and communities but there can also be differences that influence and shape the abuse. Creating a safe space for the woman when doing risks assessments is so important.

Focus group participant



The idea that honour-base violence ... will only happen in black and brown families. It's like false. I'm sure that happens in lots of different spaces, but there is a lack of willingness to then look at your own culture.

Focus group participant

Victim-survivors may not fully recognise their experiences or situation as ‘honour’-based abuse, or in fact as abusive. Assessing risk in cases involving ‘honour’-based abuse may rely on using professional judgement to a higher degree than for other cases involving domestic abuse, and professionals should use this alongside formal risk assessments such as the SafeLives DASH. Where a risk of ‘honour’-based abuse has been identified:

- Professionals should consider escalation, isolation, and the victim-survivors’ perception of their own risk, in particular relation to contravening family perceptions of ‘honour’, alongside risk factors like physical abuse and/or threats. Coercive and controlling behaviours, such as monitoring agency and social contacts, especially when perpetrated by wider family members, should be taken into consideration alongside other risks such as physical abuse or threats. In fact, focusing solely on risk or threats of physical harm may result in under-estimating risk and lead to missed opportunities for early intervention and to provide appropriate support to victim-survivors of ‘honour’-based abuse.
- Professionals should consider individual aspects of the victim-survivors’ situation and any intersecting needs that may impact their safety and space for action.
- Whilst ‘honour’-based abuse may be considered primarily in relation to victim-survivors from Black, Asian, and other racially minoritised communities, professionals must not risk excluding victim-survivors from other backgrounds (White, Scottish) from accessing support.
- Professionals should be mindful that victim-survivors may use different language to describe what they are experiencing and consider their experiences within the context of family or cultural expectations.

Risk factors to consider

Whilst there is currently no risk assessment developed specifically for 'honour'-based abuse and/or forced marriage cases for multi-agency use, tools like the SafeLives DASH do include sections specifically in relation to so called 'honour'-based abuse. It may be more important for professionals to use professional judgement to assess risk of harm in these cases, alongside use of tools like the DASH. Some professional judgement considerations when assessing risk in 'honour'-based abuse cases include:



NB. This is not an exhaustive list and should not be considered a stand-alone risk assessment for 'honour'-based abuse, rather it is intended as an aide for professionals when using professional judgement to consider whether a victim-survivor experiencing 'honour'-based abuse may be at high-risk and should be referred to MARAC.

Use of technology, social media, GPS tracking devices, as well as children, neighbours, and the wider community, to monitor victim-survivors movement.

Pressure from family members to behave/act in a certain way – also consider potential repercussions of not doing so.

Financial dependency on perpetrator(s) and potential for economic abuse.

Cultural expectations and/or rules – when linked to ideas or perception of family 'honour'.

Language barriers – particularly where family members are acting as interpreters.

Controlling and coercive behaviour, including from wider family members.

Risk of forced marriage, including for LGBT+ victim-survivors into 'straight' marriages and risk of being 'outed' by or to community.

Risk of being subjected to conversion therapy for an LGBT+ victim-survivor in response to sexuality.

Threats to take the victim-survivor and/or any children out of the country – including to be married.

Victim-survivors ' perception of their own risk, and/or what would happen if they contravened spoken or unspoken rules or expectations for their behaviour.

Any intersecting needs and identities – e.g., Victim-survivors immigration status and access to public funds and support, language barriers, sexual and/or gender identity (where this may contravene family expectations of marriage and relationships), and disabilities (including learning disabilities and where this is impacting on a victim-survivors ability to keep themselves safe.

Isolation – is the victim-survivor allowed to speak to or engage with professionals, friends, and family without the presence of the perpetrator(s).



Referral

Signpost and refer to specialist services for HBA victim-survivors.

Refer to MARAC if high-risk, including through professional judgement considerations.

There is very little consistency in the way that MARACs across Scotland respond to ‘honour’-based abuse referrals, with some accepting the referrals while others do not.

For some MARACs, the decision on whether to accept a referral depends on the identity of the primary perpetrator. Some MARACs do not accept an ‘Honour’-based abuse case if the primary perpetrator is a family member rather than a (ex)partner (as per the definition of domestic abuse in the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018). Many of the focus group participants would like to see this aspect of the law changed to include family abuse as a form of domestic abuse.

‘Honour’-based abuse, although distinct from domestic abuse, is a form of gender-based violence and violence against women and girls. As such, cases involving this type of abuse, including from wider family members, are appropriate for referral to MARAC, and cases should be accepted for discussion at Scottish MARACs. This includes forced marriage, threat of forced marriage or any other type of abusive act that constitutes so-called ‘honour’-based abuse.

In cases involving ‘honour’-based abuse, where primarily perpetrated by a non-partner or ex-partner, referral rates are lower than in other high-risk cases. From our survey of Scottish MARACs ‘honour’-based abuse cases were routinely not recorded, and where they were recorded, they made up less than 5% of referrals. This is regardless of cases involving ‘honour’-based abuse being more likely to be classed as high-risk.

Effective MARAC responses should be led and informed by the expertise of specialist services, inclusive from the point of referral through to action plans and follow up after the meeting.





Safety Planning

Sensitive and immediate safety planning.

Consider the risk of forced marriage.

Legal responses.

Signposting and advice.

Effective action planning is one of the key outcomes of MARAC. Whilst we would expect there to be a good level of transferable skills in action planning from other domestic abuse cases discussed at MARAC, we recognise that some MARAC professionals may feel less confident in relation to ‘honour’-based abuse.

Agency representatives should be empowered by their organisations to be able to take appropriate action and commit resources to address the risks identified through information sharing.

Here are some key questions to consider in aiding action planning for cases involving so called ‘honour’-based abuse at MARAC[1]:

[1] Adapted from SafeLives BME briefing



I think there needs to be more robust safety planning for HBV cases. And those safety plans have to be longer term because ... the needs of the women and their children who come to us are considerably more complicated.

Focus group participant

Does family/community control or influence the victim-survivors’ expression of their gender or sexual identity? How does this impact their mental health and well-being? Consider access to appropriate supports around this, but be led by the victim-survivor and their ability to engage at this time.

Can the fire service assist with welfare checks?

Have you considered additional or intersecting needs and/or barriers which may impact on the victim-survivors safety or access to services?

Has any agency had meaningful engagement with the victim-survivor? If not, consider any opportunities for joint working to achieve this. Identify a lead agency that has built a trusted relationship with the victim-survivor, e.g., GPs, other health professionals or third sector organisations.

Are the appropriate experts taking the lead – and a single point of contact nominated? This will normally be the IDAA, but may be a different specialist service or agency, depending on the victim’s priorities and who has managed to develop a relationship with the victim.

Is a specialist support service involved, and if not, can you reach out to one to ensure you’re well-equipped to deal with the issues presented?

Could MARAC agencies (such as the IDAA service or Adult Support and Protection) facilitate engagement with victims, particularly those within rural communities?

Have the victim-survivors’ finances been considered? There may be financial implications when perpetrators or victim-survivors’ visa and/or immigration status are insecure, or there may be no recourse to public funds. There may also be further financial safety considerations not related to immigration status, which should be considered to support the victim-survivor to increase their space for action and rebuild their lives.

Has entry been denied to a professional during a visit (planned or unannounced)? Consider expedited action to visit again and escalate internally to ensure it is followed up appropriately.

Where relevant, have you considered the impact of previous experiences of agency contact, including both inside and outside of the UK? Previous poor responses may impact or influence a victim-survivor’s readiness to engage with and trust agency involvement, especially from statutory services.

Are you considering risks from other family members, the wider family and the community?

Have the victim-survivors’ views been expressed? If not, ensure an organisation is identified that can engage with the victim-survivor, offer support, and seek their views on any safety/action planning.

Have child protection issues been identified, and are the whereabouts and current situation of all children known? Consider any specific support needs for young victim-survivors, including financial support or support to complete or return to education.

Is statutory responsibility being fulfilled? This relates both to the welfare of vulnerable adults with care and support needs and/or experiencing domestic abuse, as well as any children.

MARAC process for cases involving 'honour'-based abuse



Identification

MARAC professionals are equipped to identify victim-survivors of 'honour'-based abuse. Professionals across all agencies have access to training and tools that increase their knowledge and confidence to identify 'honour'-based abuse, respond to disclosures, risk assess and make referrals as appropriate.

Risk Assessment

Risk assessment carried out with the victim-survivor, paying close attention to any professional judgement considerations in relation to 'honour'-based abuse and risk.
Immediate safety planning carried out, including sign-posting or referral to specialist services.
Additional consideration given to any additional vulnerabilities of the victim-survivor - e.g. immigration status, language needs, threat of removal from the county and/or forced marriage.

Referral

If high-risk, including professional judgement considerations, the MARAC referral form is completed and sent to the MARAC Coordinator as soon as possible (within 48 hours).
If not already done, refer to the most appropriate IDAA or other specialist service.
Advise the victim-survivor of referral to MARAC & IDAA, and that IDAA service will make contact.

Independent Representation

IDAA service contacts the victim-survivor as soon as possible after referral is received to explain the MARAC process, offer support, risk assess and safety plan around key risks and concerns. Specialist services supporting 'honour'-based abuse victim-survivors are engaged in the MARAC process, acting as the IDAA and able to represent any victim-survivor referred and provide independent advice and safety planning support.

Research

All agencies carry out research in relation to the victim-survivor, perpetrator(s) and children, including contacting colleagues for relevant information where needed, focusing on potential risks in relation to HBA and wider family and community involvement in any agency contact. IDAA gathers up-to-date information from the victim-survivor about current risks and their wishes from MARAC, including liaising with other specialist services to coordinate support.

Information sharing

Case presented by referring agency, with input from specialist service to advise on any specific risks in relation to HBA and/or forced marriage. IDAA service represents the victim-survivor and shares relevant, up-to-date information. Risks are analysed and potential harm identified for all vulnerable parties, with consideration given to HBA-specific risks and risk of forced marriage for any of the concerned individuals, including when this is not in relation to the primary victim-survivor.

Action planning

MARAC representatives volunteer actions to mitigate risk and increase safety, and the expertise of specialist services is taken into account to guide decisions. Opportunities for coordinated response, including both joint and sequential actions are identified, and a SMART action plan is developed. IDAA service, supported by the MARAC Chair, ensures victim safety remains central to the process, and all actions taken are appropriate.

Follow-up

IDAA service updates the victim-survivor on outcomes of MARAC, where safe to do so. All agencies ensure actions are completed within agreed timeframes, including safely flagging and tagging case files to flag risks and enable re-referral for any repeat incidents. IDAA liaises with other agencies to coordinate the action plan and ongoing safety planning for the victim-survivor. A change in risk or repeat incident results in the victim-survivor being re-referred within appropriate timeframes.

Recommendations



Our engagements with MARACs and specialist practitioners across Scotland suggest there is a lack of confidence from MARAC professionals in responding to cases involving so called ‘honour’-based abuse.

Our survey of Scottish MARACs suggest referral levels for ‘honour’-based abuse cases are low, and there is both a lack of accurate data recording for these cases and inconsistencies across MARAC areas in how these referrals are dealt with.

One of the main barriers for cases involving so called ‘honour’-based abuse being referred to Scottish MARACs is a lack of clarity over whether cases when the primary perpetrator(s) is not a partner or ex-partner are appropriate for MARAC to consider, in line with the Scottish definition of domestic abuse.

It is SafeLives view that cases involving ‘honour’-based abuse, as a form of gender-based violence and violence against women, including where perpetrated by wider family members, are appropriate for referral to MARAC and cases should be accepted for discussion at Scottish MARACs.



Upskill MARAC, and wider, professionals with the knowledge and skills to respond effectively to cases involving so-called 'honour'-based abuse, including where perpetrated by wider family members.



Training and awareness raising for multi-agency professionals to recognise and refer cases involving 'honour'-based abuse to MARAC, including completing appropriate risk assessments.



Increase links to specialist services supporting 'honour'-based abuse victims at MARAC & ensure their expertise is taken into account in risk assessment and action planning.



Better data collection on cases involving 'honour'-based abuse being referred to MARAC in Scotland, including where the perpetrator (s) is not a (ex)partner.



Development of tools & guidance specifically for 'honour'-based abuse, including risk assessments that capture the unique dynamics of 'honour'-based abuse in particular where perpetrated by family members, for use by multi-agency partners.



Ensure appropriate responses and services are available for all victims of 'honour'-based abuse, including developing 'Whole Family' responses, sensitive to the nuances and nature of risk.

Specialist support services

Amina Muslim Women’s Resource Centre

National support and advice service for Muslim and Black, Asian, and racially minoritised women. Helpline: 0808 801 0301

FearFree

Domestic Abuse support for LGBT & male survivors in Scotland

Galop

LGBT Domestic Abuse

Helpline: 0800 999 5428

Hemat Gryffe Women’s Aid

Specialist domestic abuse service for Black, Asian, and racially minoritised women and children in the Glasgow area

Karma Nirvana

UK Honour Based Abuse

Helpline: 0800 5999 247

LGBT Domestic Abuse Scotland

Domestic Abuse project managed by LGBT Youth Scotland

Saheliya

Specialist mental health and well-being support for Black, Asian, and racially minoritised women and girls (12+) in the Edinburgh and Glasgow area

Scotland’s Domestic Abuse & Forced Marriage Helpline: 0800 027 1234

Shakti Women’s Aid

Specialist domestic abuse service for Black, Asian, and racially minoritised women and children in Edinburgh & the Lothians, as well as outreach services in Fife, Dundee and Forth Valley. Including a specific support service for LGBT victims experiencing domestic abuse and ‘honour’-based abuse.