



RememberShafilea

**BRITAIN'S FORGOTTEN WOMEN:
SPEAKING TO SURVIVORS
OF 'HONOUR'-BASED ABUSE**

Case Studies and Policy Recommendations

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With research assistance by René Chan and Daniella Loftus



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About the Author

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About The Henry Jackson Society

The Henry Jackson Society is a think tank and policy-shaping force that fights for the principles and alliances which keep societies free – working across borders and party lines to combat extremism, advance democracy and real human rights and make a stand in an increasingly uncertain world.



Summary

- *Britain's Forgotten Women: Speaking to Survivors of 'Honour'-Based Abuse* documents and analyses the experiences of those who lived within, left, and in some cases returned to, an 'honour' system.
- Survivors of 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage have chosen to leave their families behind, often as a means of staying alive. While survivors have a wide range of different backgrounds and experiences of living in an 'honour' system, there are several common themes that emerge from the survivor case studies profiled as well as wider existing research. These include: the normalisation of 'honour' codes and abuse; feelings of guilt and shame; difficulties and risks in speaking out about 'honour' abuse; and, feelings of isolation.
- Survivors in this report have reported that, while living within an 'honour' system, they were not allowed to feel like the victim, and instead were made to feel like a perpetrator who had 'shamed' their family in the eyes of the community. Survivors have described feeling as if they were living in two different worlds and "trapped between two cultures".
- Survivors reported feeling let down by professionals in social services and schools due to their failure in identifying risk or intervening in cases of forced marriage and 'honour'-based abuse. Some survivors who spoke out to social workers and police officers whilst still living at home reported being met with a lack of knowledge and understanding and felt as if their stories were not believed. This deterred some survivors from reaching out for help in the future, instead remaining in abusive situations.
- Victims of 'honour'-based abuse often suffer various layers of emotional pain. These can include: the trauma of suffering sustained abuse from loved ones; the subsequent and often long-term internalised guilt and self-hatred for having 'failed' their family and their 'honour' system; and feeling trapped in a pattern of abuse.
- Survivors interviewed described their decision to leave home as spontaneous and unplanned, with little emotional or practical preparation. These survivors left behind their previous support networks with very little possessions with them. Some of the survivors interviewed felt at their most isolated and vulnerable after leaving home as their lines of financial support and communication with their family and friends had been severed. Some of the women in this report began to self-harm and develop suicidal feelings as a result of sustained abuse and isolation.
- Despite being in urgent need of emotional and practical support from the professionals (such as social workers and police officers) they came into contact with, many did not receive any support at all. As a result, survivors have said they felt as if they had no other option but to return home, and therefore at risk of further abuse.
- While there has been significant progress in raising awareness of the existence of forced marriage and 'honour'-based abuse in the UK, both in statutory agencies and wider society, a clear gap in support remains for victims leaving an 'honour' system, when many are at their most vulnerable and isolated. Statutory agencies need to fill the gap in support for those who have left home, largely through ensuring all professionals have basic training on how risks involved in 'honour' abuse are often different to other types of child protection issues, therefore standardising provision of care on a national level.

Introduction

Many victims of 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage escape their perpetrators in search of safety, refuge and understanding. However, their perpetrators are often those closest to them: their family members and partners. Therefore, in leaving the 'honour' system, survivors form part of a new scattered community of disowned human beings who are vulnerable and in urgent need of support. Yet, many are still being met with a lack of understanding from local authorities and services.

Thousands of men and women are suffering 'honour' abuse and forced marriage in the UK. In 2013, the government's Forced Marriage Unit gave support or advice related to a possible forced marriage to over 1,300 people. Yet, there has only been one forced marriage conviction since it was made a crime in June 2014.

Those who remain living with an 'honour' system do not always make it out alive. As highlighted in *'Honour' Killings in the UK*, a report by The Henry Jackson Society released in January 2015, many men and women are killed in order for their 'dishonour' to be forgotten by their family and wider community.

This year marks the first ever Day of Memory for the United Kingdom's victims of 'honour' killings. The day was brought about by the 'Britain's Lost Women' campaign, led by Karma Nirvana, a national charity that supports all those affected by honour abuse, and magazine *Cosmopolitan*. It is a day on which survivors will have their voices heard, at a survivors' conference where they will tell their stories to an audience of leading professionals. The annual Day of Memory is 14th July - the birthday of Shafiea Ahmed, a young British woman who was suffocated by her parents, in 2003 when she was just 17 years old.

Britain's Forgotten Women: Speaking to Survivors of 'Honour'-Based Abuse provides a series of in-depth case studies allowing survivors to tell their stories in their own words. The report then provides analysis of both the common and varied experiences of survivors, with a focus on gaps in support provision from statutory agencies including the police, education and social services. The report ends with recommendations about how to fill these gaps in support for victims and survivors going forward.

1. Background

1.1 2015: Progress so far

1.1.1 Forced Marriage Conviction

In June 2015, the UK had its first ever forced marriage conviction, following the criminalisation of the practice a year previously. Following an investigation by South Wales Police, a 34-year-old Cardiff-based businessman was sentenced to 16 years having pleaded guilty to four counts of rape, and one count of voyeurism, bigamy and forced marriage.¹ The perpetrator was sentenced to four years, to run concurrently, for the forced marriage conviction. The defendant will be subject to five years license on release and will remain on the sex offender register for an indefinite period.²

¹ Dyer, E., 'Britain's first forced marriage sentence: a lot more still to do', *New Statesman*, 16 June 2015, available at: www.newstatesman.com/politics/2015/06/britains-first-forced-marriage-sentence-lot-more-still-do. Last visited: 5 July 2015.

² Court cases; crown court; sentence; court legal, thelawpages.com, www.thelawpages.com/court-cases/Reporting-Restricted-15487-1.law. Last visited: 7 July 2015.

South Wales Police, who dealt with the case, were amongst the first police forces to receive specialist police training from Karma Nirvana, a national charity that supports all those affected by honour abuse that has trained 30 specialist officers in South Wales and continues to work closely to tackle 'honour' abuse. According to one of the officers involved in the case, PC Leane Caddick, Karma Nirvana's forced marriage training and specialist risk assessment enabled her to "identify incidents and victims of forced marriage, [and] understand the barriers faced by victims, as well as how to respond, investigate and handle cases, conduct risk assessments and safeguard victims".³

According to Priya Manota, Call Manager at Karma Nirvana, last year's criminalisation of forced marriage enables victims to redirect the blame away from themselves to be able to say "what you are doing is illegal" to the perpetrator. She says that it will also hopefully give families the confidence to stand up to members of their affected community and say "we don't want to go to prison".⁴

1.1.2 HMIC Inspection of Police Forces

Throughout 2015, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) is carrying out an inspection of police forces' response to 'honour'-based violence, including forced marriage and female genital mutilation. The stated aims of the inspection are:

- to report on the effectiveness of the police approach to identify, respond to and protect people at risk of harm from ['honour'-based violence] HBV;
- to report on the effectiveness of the police approach to prevent HBV;
- to highlight and promote effective practice in the police response to HBV; and
- to make recommendations to advance improvements in policing practice in relation to HBV.⁵

1.2 Awareness raising

1.2.1 Day of Memory for victims of 'honour' killings

The UK's first ever national Day of Memory for victims of 'honour' killings takes place on 14 July 2015. The day, which has cross-government support, marks the birthday of Shafiea Ahmed, whose parents suffocated her to death in the presence of her siblings. Shafiea's experiences were rooted in notions of honour, leading her to abuse and eventually murder at the hands of her immediate family members.

On the day, Karma Nirvana and Cosmopolitan magazine are holding a survivor's conference bringing together women who have experienced 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriages to discuss their personal experiences in front of an audience of professionals from statutory agencies including the police, social services, and education. Furthermore, advertising agency Leo Burnett are running a social campaign whereby the public are being asked to channel their messages of support to help physically create a permanent memorial to the victims of 'honour' killings over the course of the day. Using innovative 3D printing technology, a bust of Shafiea will be built in response to tweets from the public which use the hashtag #RememberShafiea.

³ Interview with PC Leane Caddick, South Wales Police, 15 June 2015.

⁴ Interview with Priya Manota, Call Manager, Karma Nirvana, 9 June 2015.

⁵ 'So-called honour-based violence', Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, undated, available at: www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/our-work/so-called-honour-based-violence/. Last visited: 1 July 2015.

2. Case Studies⁶

The following seven case studies are the stories of British 'honour'-based abuse survivors⁷, some of whom are taking part in a survivor's conference on the Day of Memory. All survivors were introduced to this project through Karma Nirvana. The case studies provide a range of personal insights into what is a tiny snapshot of thousands of victims living with 'honour' abuse in the UK. All stories focus on where the gaps of support for victims are, and any additional barriers to independence whilst living in an 'honour' system (such as having a disability).

2.1 Sara

"I grew up in Leeds. My parents were originally from Pakistan: my dad moved to the UK when he was very young and mum came here at the age of 19. My parents would often taking me and my siblings to Pakistan on holiday to visit our family members. While my mum's side of the family was very open-minded, my dad's side were stricter.

"When I was 18, my sister ran away from home to get married to someone of her own choosing. Following my sister's departure, my parents offered to take me to Pakistan to de-stress. During the trip, my parents were looking for someone to blame for my sister leaving, and would constantly inform me that it was one of our friends' fault.

"A year later, I was pressured by the family to marry my first cousin in Pakistan. I agreed to the marriage the following day because I was trying to make the best out of a difficult situation for my father, who needed to save honour in his family as a result of what my sister had done.

"The night before the wedding, one of my uncles – who was unhappy that I was not marrying someone from his side of the family – became very angry with my mum and sister, and at one point held them up at gun point. He had wanted me to marry his nephew in order for him to be granted a visa into the UK (families who moved to the UK are given more respect within the community). My uncle eventually went to calm down. He later told me to just get on with the wedding, saying "you better get married quietly for the honour of the family and if you don't do as I say, you'll have body bags flown back to the UK".

"At first it was a novelty to dress up and meet all of my new relatives in Pakistan. Everyone showed me respect and treated me like a queen, and best of all, my father and I shared a bond. He was so happy it almost felt as if the mistake my sister had made was been rectified, and suddenly I felt important. Despite the initial perceived benefits of getting married, I began to change and become more closed around others, and I felt as if I was losing my social life.

"My marriage was solely based on the concept of sex. I felt like I had to sleep with him whenever he wanted. My mum would remind me that it is part of our culture and my duty as a wife to sleep with him. When it came to sex, I would try and remind myself that he was my husband, and when he forced himself on me, I'd imagine it wasn't happening. However, he soon figured this out and made my life a living hell. I then became pregnant.

"After four months of living in Pakistan, I returned to Leeds without my husband (due to delays in his visa application). Eight months after giving birth to our child, my husband came to live with me.

⁶ Some names of individuals and places have been changed for legal reasons and to protect the identity of the women involved.

⁷ While the women included in the case studies all have different backgrounds and ages, men are also often victims to the same emotional and physical abuse, as well as forced marriage. See: Dyer, E., *'Honour' Killings in the UK*, The Henry Jackson Society, January 2015, available at: henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Honour-Killings-in-the-UK.pdf. Last visited: 7 July 2015.

“Several years later, shortly after giving birth to my second child, my husband’s emotional abuse escalated and he became physically abusive. If a night went by when we did not sleep together, he would beat me up the following morning. He would threaten to go to my family and tell them I was having an affair if I did not sleep with him. As a dutiful wife I allowed the abuse to continue for a ‘peaceful’ life.

“On one occasion, I was beaten so severely that I was left bleeding from my ears and nose, and sustained a black eye. This incident served as a wake-up call. I confided in my neighbour who encouraged me to stand up and fight back. However, when I decided to speak up within the family, I felt as though nobody was listening. The abuse got so bad that one day I decided I had had enough, and I found the strength to look for help.

“I decided to contact the police. However, after my first call to 999, they never followed it up. The lack of response caused me to fall back into a dark hole of acceptance, in which I resigned myself to the fact that help would never come.

“It was a year later when I, again, found the courage to ask for help from the police for the second time. This time I went to the police station where they took a statement from me. The policewoman said to me that I could go and stay in a refuge in London but that it would only be available the following day. I told her I had a male friend who lived in London who I could stay with that night. I was then asked whether this man was a boyfriend, to which I said no.

“I then went to live in the refuge, which was fine, but it felt very alien to me. There was no community, no local shops. During this time, the police did not contact me or conduct a welfare check to make sure I was ok. To this day, they have never followed up on my case, which is a great shame because, as the police, they have powers which could make the difference between someone living in freedom or oppression.

“I asked to move to a different refuge, this time in east London. The key worker there was initially extremely friendly and made me feel very welcome. One day, one of my uncles who lived in the area followed me from the train station back to the refuge. The key worker came to me and said there were some members of my family outside the building and that I should flee the area. I told her I thought it was my uncle and she asked to see a picture of him so she could check. However, when she saw the picture, she realised that my uncle was connected to her family. She began to panic and told me “I can’t have anything to do with this”.

“I got taken to another refuge with my children, leaving most of our possessions behind. We didn’t even have a change of clothes. My friend then went round to the previous refuge to collect my clothes, which the key worker handed over, saying “watch your back, I know who you two are”. She also said my daughter had got lipstick on a wardrobe at the refuge and asked my friend for money to have it cleaned. When I got my clothes back, I realised they had been smeared with my red lipstick. That woman made my life hell, and she was one of the reasons I went back home. I did not feel safe living in London due to worrying that she would tell my family where I was.

“During this time I had also sought out counselling to help cope with the situation, however, the counsellor was unable to relate to or understand my situation. I found myself abandoned halfway through my sessions when the counsellor suddenly dropped out for no reason. This left me feeling hopeless, especially since I thought we were about to make progress. This had put me off pursuing future professional help. Through this experience I found that there is great need for professionals to be trained in basic understanding of ‘honour’-based violence and forced marriages.

"I moved home, thinking it would be better to face my family than to be constantly looking over my shoulder. In doing so, I knew I risked being killed. I went through self-harm and suicidal thoughts. During this time I was getting no support, and I did not realise Karma Nirvana existed.

"I refused to move back into my old marital home. My parents made me stay with them for a couple of weeks. Despite their previous reassurances, they tried to make me go back to my marital home to make it work with my husband. I refused, threatening to leave again.

"Instead I moved into rented accommodation and began working and studying at university part time. My husband came to stay a few times, but when the emotional and physical abuse began again I told him to leave my house. I did not want my kids growing up thinking they can treat people the way my husband treated me. Eventually he agreed and left.

"I was determined to get a divorce. I knew my decision would unleash a storm, yet it was something I was determined to fight, regardless of the consequences. It had been a long time since I last had control over my life, and I would no longer allow anyone to stop me from living my life, for I had endured a life of violence, ridicule, and hatred just so my parents could face society and be able to say they had their daughter under control. To me, everyone around me was selfish, and out for their own happiness.

"As expected, my decision was met with great opposition, even though it was known that my husband had been having an affair with another cousin, a woman he would later marry just three months after our divorce. Although I pleaded with my family and my husband's family, I faced continued resistance. When I asked them "why will you not just make this simple?" They responded: "what will people say?" Eventually, with the help of a solicitor who specialised in sharia, I was granted a divorce by both civil and sharia courts.

"After leaving my husband, I was labelled the black sheep. Feeling all alone and looked down upon, I didn't have the nerve to approach any of my family members and felt extremely isolated and alone. Furthermore, after the divorce, they cut off all support, punishing me financially and emotionally.

"I am still not in full contact with my side of the family or my ex-husband even though he has an excellent relationship with the children. It has been a five year battle living as a single parent, and there are still many obstacles ahead. I have to constantly prove myself in the face of people who are waiting for me to fail as a single parent. Yet, it is such struggles which motivates me to persevere and continue fighting.

"My children are exemplary, and I have even been told by an aunt that I make single parenting look very easy. She also said that she feared I may serve as a bad influence to some girls in the family, encouraging them to also stand up for themselves. My response to her is that I am now fearless to express how I feel, to challenge the conventional behaviour, and that they should too.

"I value my religion, but will never allow my children to go what I've gone through. I know, as a Muslim, forced marriages are prohibited, but the community deafens and blinds themselves from this fact. They do what they think is accepted by society and forget the true teachings of our religion. This is one thing I must highlight. As I always say: if God can accept it then I don't need their acceptance.

"The emotional trauma from the abuse and the divorce meant that I was not able to complete my university degree. I am now in a managerial role working for a respectable public service organisation and also working with an organisation which helps victims of forced marriage and 'honour'-based abuse. I am now with a partner who is very supportive and encourages me to speak up about what I have been through.

2.2 *Ayesha*

"My father moved from Pakistan to the UK in the late 1970s, where he married my mother (who was raised in Britain). I was the eldest of three children, and spent the majority of my childhood in Scotland, where we lived in a flat above my parents' grocery shop.

"Although I had a happy childhood growing up, I knew I was different from my friends at school. My siblings and I were not allowed to do things such as go to sleepovers, have boyfriends, or wear clothing that showed our bare legs. We were always told that Muslim girls were not allowed to do things like that, despite my parents' insistence that they weren't strict Muslims. We knew there was no point in arguing, and my parent's strict regulations made me feel trapped growing up between two cultures.

"When I was 18 I ran away from home. I decided I no longer wanted to live like an Asian Muslim girl and wanted my own freedom, but I knew this was not something I could discuss with my parents as they would never accept it, so one night I packed my bags, got in my car, and left.

"Once my family realised the police could not force me to go home, they repeatedly reported me for crimes such as theft of cash or gold from the family home in attempt to make me return. However, the police did not take these allegations seriously after I had explained the situation I faced at home. Instead, they informed my family that they were unable to force me to come home as I was an adult.

"My family made several successful efforts to track me down. Two of my uncles repeatedly paid me visits at my friend's house, where I was staying, and threatened to kill me if I refused to come back with them. I moved around the country, from one friend's floor to another, yet continued to be found by my family members, even when I moved to London and received temporary accommodation as a homeless person. One of my uncles even ordered individuals, under the guise of working for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Metropolitan Police, to pay me a visit at my temporary accommodation and report back to him. Shortly afterwards, my uncle also paid me a visit with the lady who was supposedly from the DWP, threatening to kill me if I refused to return home with him.

"After three months of being followed, receiving death threats and emotional blackmail, I went back home because I felt physically and mentally drained, this was not the independent life I wanted. I was also told that my sister had found a lump under her arm and my dad's health had deteriorated.

"As soon as I arrived home and saw my uncle, he put his hands around my throat and said he would kill me and "happily do 20 years" for the "shame" I had brought upon the family, warning me to never to pull a stunt like that again. Furthermore, he said that regardless of where I was in the world, he would be able to find me using his DWP and bounty hunter contacts. I sank into depression and started self-harming. I had so much pent up anger inside that this was the only way I knew that could relieve me of such pain, frustration and anger. I kept to myself and refused to go out to meet family or look for a job.

"My parents didn't know how to deal with my depression. Several months after returning home, they suggested a holiday to Pakistan because my father wanted me to see my grandparents, whom I had not seen for over ten years. From day two of my holiday, I was bombarded from almost every female member of my dad's family in Pakistan, urging me to marry a distant relative. I also received phone calls from Scotland in which my aunt and mother repeatedly reassured me that if I got married, my livelihood would be secured (however, they did not pressure me to get married). Eventually I gave in because I felt as if no-one was listening, and that I had no option but to agree to the wedding, or else I would not be able to return to the UK. The wedding was arranged to take place within weeks.

“On the night of my wedding, I pleaded with my new husband to talk to me so we could get to know each other, but it made no difference. Instead, he raped me. I couldn’t believe the position I was in. I was stuck in Pakistan at my in-laws’ house, with people I didn’t know, in a village in the middle of nowhere, where I couldn’t speak the language and where I didn’t know anyone. I had no option but to keep quiet until I went back to the UK.

“I spent the first year of my marriage travelling back and forth between Pakistan and the UK, totalling three trips in that year. Towards the end of the first year of my marriage, we went to the British Embassy in Pakistan to apply for a spousal visa for my husband, presenting my wage slips, letters written in Urdu to each other, and photographs as proof of marriage. He was granted a visa for a year which allowed us to spend the second year of our marriage in UK, living first with my parents for six months until we bought our own house.

“In the second year of our marriage, we started the process of visa re-application as his visa was about to expire. Following rounds of interviews and a show of documents, such as mortgage papers and bank details, he was granted indefinite leave to remain in the UK. My marriage was physically and mentally abusive from the start but it was after he received his permanent visa that his demeanour became worse. “He became more controlling in not allowing me to attend college, visit friends or family, or wear western clothing in public.

“My parents often tried to mediate our arguments, soothing him by making him feel like he mattered more than I did. The first time he was physically violent towards me, my mother was outraged. However, within minutes she turned around to ask me what I had done to provoke my husband. I’d never felt so alone.

“I became bulimic and also turned to self-harming again to escape the daily abuse inflicted upon me by my husband; and also because they were the only things I had control of in my life. These were my secrets, and I never sought any help or support as I didn’t believe that my life was ever going to change.

“Despite the hardships, I could not leave my husband because I felt my family would be really angry at me and no one would understand why I did it, even though many family members knew I was not happy. The lack of support from my parents was even more evident after yet another argument I had with my husband, where he called my parents and told them yet again that he didn’t want to keep me anymore. In response, my mother gave me an ultimatum: “apologise to him and beg him to keep you or get divorced and remarried to an old man, a widower who just needs looking after. You’re damaged goods now and no-one else will want you.

“I wandered about my house in a daze with my mum’s words going around in my head. I knew I couldn’t live like this any longer and made a decision to end my life. As I was attempting to cut my wrists, Steve (a male friend my family didn’t know about) called me and persuaded me to reconsider what I was doing, and to stay with him until I was able to think clearer. Within 30 minutes I had packed my belongings in my car and was on his doorstep. I knew from that moment I would never be able to have any contact with anyone in my family ever again, especially after everything that had happened when I was 18. After being forced to marry a man I did not know and having endured five difficult years full of abuse, I felt like I was fighting a losing battle. I truly believed that death was my only way out, but I was unsuccessful in my attempt. At my weakest moment, someone close to me reached out and I felt that it was fate and that my life was maybe not supposed to end in such a manner at that time.

“Several days after moving in to Steve’s home, we went to visit my close friend Sarah. I believed it would be safer for me to cut ties with all my friends temporarily, as my uncles had been harassing them about

my whereabouts. It was Halloween, and just after midnight when we left Sarah's house. Steve offered to drive us back to his flat, because I was too upset to drive my car. As we got to the end of the street, I saw the number plate on the car in front of us was that of my uncle's—they had been waiting for me to leave Sarah's house. I started screaming at Steve to keep driving because my uncles had found me. We got on to the main road and at the bottom of the road, I could see my husband's car. He had blocked off the roundabout with his car, forcing Steve to drive the wrong way on to a bridge. Between the two cars, they attempted to push my car off the bridge, in what I believe was an attempt to kill us. I also believe that if I had been driving that night, then I would not be here today.

"That night I gave an eight-hour statement to the police, recounting leaving home at 18, my uncles' threats to kill me, my forced marriage in Pakistan, the abuse I faced from my husband for almost five years, and then finally the incident on the bridge earlier that night. Initially, the police treated my case as an attempted murder, arresting my uncles and husband, and seizing their cars for investigation. However, for two weeks, I heard nothing from the police until I was told that my case had been dropped to culpable reckless driving. My family had managed to convince the police that Steve had kidnapped me and they were only trying to stop my car to get me back. They told the police I was happily married and would never have left my husband under any circumstances. I couldn't believe it.

"The police's lack of responsiveness and care was nothing new, the numerous times I approached law enforcement to seek help, I felt I was not being taken seriously and was given the impression that I was wasting their time. The police were not empathetic at all, and instead asked what I expected from them. I just wanted to be safe but they advised what had happened with my family was just a "misunderstanding". Then they told us that my family had managed to find out who Steve was.

"That night we decided to take matters into our own hands. We made plans to leave Scotland together as soon as possible. I knew who we were running from and Steve could keep me safe, even though I was falling apart. Fifteen years later, we are still together. My life changed for the better when I left, but there were still times when I felt alone. Whenever we argued, I was always overcome with a sense of loneliness as I didn't have any support, such as my sister or friends. We couldn't tell anyone new in our life what we'd been through as we didn't feel we could trust anyone. We lived in a state of paranoia over the years and were constantly on guard and watching over our shoulders. We kept a knife under the bed and a baseball bat behind the front door. I had nightmares every night that someone in my family was trying to kill me. I could never feel at peace.

"Somebody once said to me that the police only help their own, and as we hadn't had any luck with help and support from them, I decided to apply for a job as police staff. Once I'd accepted a job offer and then asked for help filling out my vetting forms, help and support came from all directions. If I'd known earlier that this was all it took to get help, I would have applied a lot sooner.

"Since leaving my ex-husband, I have reconciled with my parents and also visited them in Scotland several times. This is not something I would recommend to anyone, due to the potential risks involved. It was only made possible for me by the senior officers I worked with who helped and supported me in making contact with my family safely. It took almost ten years for me to accept that I wasn't able to cope without my family in my life and I really needed to understand why things had turned out as they had. I understand now that my parents only tried their best based on how they were brought up. I don't share their values or beliefs, and I am not making excuses for them, but I couldn't let what happened stop me from living.

"While I sometimes still feel trapped between two cultures, more so when I visit my family, finally accepting the fact that I can't have it all has helped me come to terms with real life and living life. I had to get over it, live my life and find peace, instead of feeling angry and anxious all the time. Although I now

have the independence I wanted when I was younger, it has been a journey full of trials and tribulations, but if I was in the same position now, I would do it all over again. "Although it's taken me a few years to be mentally strong enough, now I use my experiences in a positive way and have been working with Karma Nirvana as a part of their Survivor Ambassador Panel for the last 18 months."

2.3 *Layla*

"I was born in and grew up in Yorkshire. My father came to Great Britain from Kashmir in the 1950s and my mother joined him in the 1960s. I have five siblings, two sisters and two brothers.

"My parents were hard-working, and never deprived me of food or clothes. At a young age, they informed me how our religion, Islam, was the be-all and end-all, how our religion created our culture, and how we shouldn't do certain things because the community would say it was against Islam. While I enjoyed drama and arts, and achieved high grades, my parents never encouraged me to venture out of my immediate environment, or to further my education.

"My sisters and I were not allowed to cut our hair and we were reprimanded by our parents: "That's what the white girls do. Do you want to be like the whites?" Secretly, I did want to be like the "whites", I used to style my hair by placing my scarf in a manner so that I looked cool with a fringe. Other times, I would make skirts out of my scarves, and also fashion a veil like an English bride.

"At the age of ten, my parents sent my older siblings and me to Pakistan under the pretence of a "holiday". I remember feeling excited about the trip, because my mother had prepared three suitcases full of identical clothing for me and my two sisters, aged 15 and 16, who were both arranged to be married. I had originally thought my mother included special clothing for me just to make me feel included. However, I later found out that my mother had arranged for my sisters to marry on her side of the family, and offered my hand in marriage to my father's family in order to avoid conflict within the family.

"My prospective husband was in his twenties, around ten years my senior, but our grandmother refused to approve of the marriage because I wore glasses. In Pakistan if you wore glasses, you were thought to be blind.

"My sisters returned to England from Pakistan as married women, and while my 15-year-old sister returned to school, my eldest sister did not. What was puzzling to me was that no one in the system noticed or acknowledged my sister's absence. No one cared to asked questions, because it was 'Pakistani cultural practice,' and therefore not the business of whites. Despite the rumours of my engagement circulating in school, my teachers never intervened—they just saw it as being part of my cultural practice. This was, however, nothing new, I had seen many girls and boys, aged 15 and 16, forced into marriages with teachers failing to intervene and to understanding their role in safeguarding children.

"Two years later, I came home from school where I was met by my grandmother and uncle, who had come over from Pakistan. Within an hour, our house was filled with local community members, and I was forced to take part in a full engagement ceremony with the same cousin as before. While my father was initially against the marriage, my mother persuaded him to change his mind, because she was frightened of what the community would say if the marriage did not happen, and she feared she would be blamed. I was twelve.

"I sought to hide my engagement from my teachers and peers because I was concerned about what they would think. I feared that if my teachers found out about my engagement, they would think my family was weird, alien, or not human. For me, my school days were my best days and I couldn't let my

engagement destroy that. However, feeling as if my fate was out of my control, my life ambitions seemed impossible and I stopped dreaming. What were the point of dreams anyways?

“Soon after, I was flown out to Pakistan to get married because of rumours that immigration law would be altered to restrict marriage visas. I remember at least ten other ‘victims’ from Yorkshire on the plane to Pakistan. Like many others on the plane, I was an innocent and naive English girl being thrust into an alien world and delivered up to a stranger for marriage.

“After moving to Pakistan I was raped, physically abused, humiliated, and forced to do heavy housework, such as washing heavy clothes in the river, by my husband. On one occasion, I was sweeping and a sharp piece of dust came into my eye, permanently scarring it and damaging my vision. Nobody really took any notice and it wasn’t until I came back to England that I was told how serious it was.

“I remember on another occasion, I was starved for three days, to the point where I was so hungry I was driven to eat food infested by ants. Not only was my husband abusive but he was also unfaithful. I once witnessed him being dragged away by another man after having been caught sleeping with the man’s sister. He was proud of the control he had over ‘a devoted wife from the UK’, and relished in such control by abusing and cheating on me.

“When I was told that my father had terminal cancer, my uncle confiscated my passport to prevent me from returning to England before my husband’s visa was issued. Eventually, I returned to England with my husband, where the emotional, physical and sexual abuse continued. The majority of people thought that I was in the wrong rather than my husband, because English girls are assumed to be outspoken, whereas he was from abroad and therefore assumed by the community to honourable and hardworking. It was difficult for me to find help and support and no one understood what I was going through. On top of that, my family encouraged me to stay with my husband in order to maintain the ‘honour’ of the family and of my late-father.

“On one occasion, my husband physically assaulted me and the police got involved. However, members of the community started a rumour that I was having an affair with the officer. I realise now that they were trying to put up an extra barrier to me receiving support, and it worked. I didn’t go back to the police and they didn’t bother checking on me.

“One day I was standing in my kitchen and my husband spat in my face. In that instance, I looked behind him and saw my eight year old daughter’s face and I told myself, “this was it”. I found my strength and decided that I was never going to let this happen to my daughter.

“Nobody ever understood why I wanted to divorce my husband, they had all forgotten the abuse I had endured, and thought I overreacted to him spitting on me.

“When I spoke out about the abuse, I was further isolated from everyone. Not only did I feel completely alone, I also felt like a failure. But when I look back on all the mental, physical, and sexual abuse I suffered, I am proud of myself to have finally said enough was enough. Finding the courage to stand up to him and the community made him and others realise that I was serious.

“Despite this, when we separated I was still a very vulnerable person, and all alone having been ostracised by the community. Two years later, I entered into a second marriage, and was determined to show my community that I could remarry and have a happy life. However, I suffered abuse by my new husband as well.

"I became convinced that I had to remain living in the same town in order to change people's attitudes because I wasn't going to let the community and family drive me away, no matter how difficult the process would be. It was an extremely difficult time, especially because I had no support from external professional agencies.

"In 2012, as I was divorcing my second husband, I met up with my old school teachers, and they inspired me again. They woke that teenager up inside me and I felt like I could dream again, and as a result I eventually found independence. It was only that following year that I learned how to take a train. I now travel across the UK, as well as internationally, following my passions in drama and acting by performing pieces related to women's issues across the UK. I am now writing a script for a feature film with my old drama teacher."

2.4 Malika

"I grew up in a traditional Asian family. My parents moved from Pakistan to England before I was born. They found living here a huge culture shock and clung onto the long-running family traditions from back home.

"Nevertheless, I grew up feeling independent. I felt loved by my family, and comfortable in my own skin and surroundings. I had male figures, like my brothers, who made me feel protected and safe. My father, the only man who ever understood me, gave me the greatest gift anyone could give: belief in me.

"As the youngest member of the family I had a completely different life compared to my eldest brother's because they weren't as strict with me as they were with him. I also got away with far more than many of my friends in my community – such as having sleepovers going on holidays, being out later in the evening than my other friends. However, I still had boundaries and knew not to push my luck with the extra freedoms I had been given.

"Nevertheless, growing up in a highly populated Asian community was always a battle. It was as if every move I made was being watched and reported back to the male figures of the family.

"I began to pursue my childhood dream of becoming a hairdresser, a profession not many Asian families approved. Working meant I could leave my problems at home: as soon as I stepped out of my family home, I entered a new life and became a different person. I felt like I had a stable life ahead of me, and I was completely oblivious to the horrors that laid ahead.

"A man from Pakistan was then married into our family. Being a part of a traditional Asian family, welcoming a new member to the family was very normal. With a simple marriage a person can leave their whole life behind to set up a new one in the UK. He was welcomed and loved by all.

"At first he seemed like a respectable and honest man, who would regularly give me compliments about how I looked. Due to my innocent and sheltered upbringing, his behaviour seemed genuine to me at first. My family and I trusted him. But by the time I realised what he was really like; it was too late, I was trapped, and his actions would leave me scarred forever.

"He began to emotionally and sexually abuse me. While there are too many incidents to recall, there is one that keeps me awake at night to this day. One afternoon he managed to convince my family to let him pick me up from work. He messaged me to be ready and that he was going to collect me from work for a family meal at a restaurant. However, there was no family meal - lying was his only way to spend time with me.

"I got into his car, which he had parked in a dark and abandoned area. He then locked the doors and started stroking up my leg, telling me it was completely normal. I begged for him to stop, telling him that it wasn't too late to change and that I wouldn't say a word to anyone. He wasn't interested in what I had to say, and told me how I had no way of escaping and that he was 'testing' to see if I was good enough to marry his brother. Having me marry his brother would have kept me in the family and under his control. He began to place his hand down my top. I reacted by biting into his arm and tearing a chunk of his skin off. He felt no pain and laughed at my desperate defence against him.

"I never told anyone about that day; he brainwashed me into thinking that nobody would believe me and that it was all my fault. I felt as if no one would understand me, and even if they did, they'd simply brush it under the rug. I was scared and felt as if I had nobody to turn to as I didn't want to bring shame upon the family.

"A few months passed and things didn't get better – he continued to emotionally abuse me. I knew I had to get away or the torment would never end. I felt so alone. There was a persistent voice at the back of head telling me to go and leave this all behind.

"One day, I finally found the determination to leave my life behind. Before opening the front door to leave I took one last look at my mother who was sleeping in bed. I realised that it may be the last time I would see my family again.

"Taking nothing with me but a small hand bag, I boarded a train and left. As soon as I sat down, painful memories started flooding my mind, and I knew I had made the right decision. I was ready to face my new and hopefully improved life.

"I then moved to a refuge. However, eight days after leaving home I was seen by a family member in the town centre. I panicked and told the police officer who had originally helped me. He booked me a train ticket and moved me to another refuge.

"When I first arrived at the refuge I was extremely vulnerable and worried about my safety. Preoccupied with my safety, I was not concerned of the costs living independently. Initially, I did not get a job as I was worried about the risk of being seen by a family member again. Eventually, when I felt safe enough to start working again, my refuge reminded me that I would have to start paying rent, which they had warned me about when I arrived. I found out that the rent was over £800, despite the fact that my bedroom was tiny cubicle. Everything I earned went towards the rent, meaning I couldn't go out and do things, or save up any money.

"I did not receive emotional support at the refuge. Because I was working, I would get back to the refuge at 6pm, by which time the support worker had gone home for the night. Furthermore, the staff there assumed I was fine because I was able to control my emotions and hide my feelings. No one asked me if I was OK, and under that façade, I felt so isolated and alone. The only support I did get was from my officer, who kept in touch with me while I was at refuge. He gave me that bit of strength that kept me going.

"After three months, I decided to leave the refuge due to the high cost of the rent, and moved into a private apartment. Compared to a refuge, privately rented accommodation was cheaper but it provided no support at all. However, the same financial problem persisted, everything I earned went into my rent. I couldn't save money, go out, or be financially independent. Feeling even more vulnerable and alone, I wanted to go home.

"A worker from the refuge was supposed to come once a week and check to see how I was doing after leaving the refuge. However, the only contact I got was a letter slipped under my door from my support worker saying that she couldn't get hold of me, and that the support would therefore stop. She also said that I owed the refuge rent and threatened to refer me to debt collectors. I couldn't believe it! I'd left home with nothing, worked hard to pay the rent, and just as I was trying to start a new life they were chasing me with debt collectors. They said to me "you have signed the agreement," an agreement I signed out of desperation because I had nowhere to go, agreeing to pay rent when I arrived, which I had, in fact, paid.

"It was difficult starting an independent life, but it was worth all the struggles. I have started a new life, have a new career and met a new group of people who I now call family. I am now back in contact with my family, and visit home from time to time – but under my terms. I also made sure to keep my current location a secret. My police officer and Karma Nirvana still makes sure I'm protected and supported whenever I go back home. My family now understands what I went through, what I had to go through and why I left home. While it was hard leaving such a big family, I am now my own person. I make my own decision and I chose what I want to do with my life.

"I currently work with Karma Nirvana helping support victims of 'honour' crimes and forced marriages. I was lucky to have my story heard. However, there are many faded faces of victims whose stories will never have a happy ending and will never be heard, and we should work to help them be heard."

2.5 Nisha

"I grew up in Germany, before moving to Leicester with my family at 14. As the eldest sibling, I was given a stricter set of rules to follow than my sisters. I was the first one to wake every morning and last one to go to sleep. I did housework rather than play with dolls, which made me feel like the characters Matilda and Cinderella. My parents and brothers would beat me if I made 'mistakes', such as sleeping when I was supposed to have been cleaning or making food.

"I was brought up in a Punjabi family that didn't care very much about religious practices, but cared a lot about societal restrictions. Thus, as a teen, I lived under intense pressure from my family to meet the expectations of my parents who cared very much about what other people in society thought. I was not allowed to wear makeup, pluck my eyebrows, cut my hair, or show off my figure with 'revealing' or 'Western' clothes. While my sisters were allowed to wear skirts, I wasn't, and sometimes I was even forced to wear my brother's clothes. This led me to have very low confidence and self-esteem at school, prompting me to begin having suicidal thoughts.

"Despite suffering emotional and physical abuse at the hands of my parents throughout my childhood and teenage years, I was unaware that it was out of the ordinary. For years and years I didn't think any of my treatment was bad, I just thought "this is normal; this happens to everyone else, all my other friends". Even so, I grew more afraid at home, but I always blamed myself for the abuse, and tried my best not to make 'mistakes'.

"When I told my parents I wanted to go to a university several hours away from Leicester to get a degree in art and fashion, they told me I was forbidden from doing so because the university was too far away, that creative subjects "aren't acceptable in the Asian community," and would lead to more 'shameful' behaviour. Furthermore, they told me that pursuing a career in fashion would not fit in with family life.

"Despite my parent's opposition, I began secretly attending my preferred university every day under the pretence of studying at a university in Leicester. I had to balance commuting to and from university and doing housework in the mornings and evenings. I was exhausted from the pressure to do everything, yet

my family still made me feel as though my efforts were not enough. Above, all my parents continued to physically abuse me, and threaten to force me into a marriage if I misbehaved.

“Throughout my time at university, I received student aid and saved as much money as I could. After my first year of study, I suffered from exhaustion and decided that I wanted to live in student halls, rather than at home with my family. However, when I told my family, they told me that my job was to “stay at home, serve the family and get married,” and that education came second. They attempted to force me to stop studying at university.

“I left home and moved into student halls on the university campus. My decision to leave home was a matter of living my own life. After moving into student halls I began receiving abusive phone calls from my family, pressuring me to come home. Faced with the prospect of returning home at the end of my university term, I suffered from anxiety and depression. I was worried that returning home would mean that I'd be kept at home and stopped from going to university, that my phone would be taken away and I'd be prevented from speaking to my friends. I was scared I would not be allowed to do anything and that I'd be married off.

“There were times when I wanted to go home because it was difficult being away from my family and friends. However, when I attempted to stay with family and friends within the community, I felt they didn't have my interests in mind and were constantly pushing me to get married. I felt as though I could not ask them for advice without being judged. Feeling completely estranged, heartbroken and alone, I finally decided that my only option was to seek help from outside of the community.

“I first called the police as I was worried my family would come and take me away from university, and I thought the police would be able to scare them off. The police came over and went through numerous questions, asking me how long this has been going on for, what sort of action I wanted to take, and what I expected them to do. I tried to explain to them that I have endured a lot of beatings and suffered a lot of abuse, but the police responded to my statement with doubt, asking “where are your bruises, we can't see anything.”

“During the police questioning, I felt lost, they treated me as though I was a disgruntled student who was simply moaning and complaining to them; wasting their time. The questioning could have been more helpful had I been given a choice of speaking to a male or female officer; and to an Asian or non-Asian officer, someone who could be more understanding and relatable.

“The police provided no guidance or advice on possible action I could take, and while they had called my family to give them a warning, they made no follow-up contact. I really wished they had called or came to check-up on me to make sure I was ok.

“I was not offered the option of staying in a refuge, and while I would've stayed in a one if it was absolutely necessary, I did not want to as I've heard from others many negative experiences: intense feelings of isolation, a lack of independence and high rent. To me a refuge made no sense and seemed pointless. After being chucked out of your own home and looking to be independent, why would you then spend all of the money you have worked hard to earn to pay for a refuge? Why then would you bother to try and make a living?

“I then sought help from my university's counselling service, with financial assistance, hoping to get guidance on how to cope with my life. It helped that the university asked me whether I wanted to see a male or a female counsellor. In my sessions, my counsellor allowed me to talk and get it all out.

"In order to avoid having to return home during the holidays, I asked the housing association for some financial support or somewhere to stay. I was told that because I was a university student and under 25 years old, I was not eligible to receive housing benefits. The staff failed to understand the problems I was facing at home. I was mentally and physically drained, but they were not sympathetic and implied that I was fit enough to work and didn't need help. In a state of exhaustion, anxiety and depression, I was left with no other option and was forced to work throughout the summer and my final year of university in order to support myself.

"I am currently still studying full-time and working when I can to support myself. I am now in limited and private contact with a small number of family members, old friends and other members of the community, with whom I do not share any of the same values."

2.6 *Saliha*

"Despite being completely blind, my childhood was relatively normal. I went to school and the mosque as any other child would. In my adolescent years, my family began to operate in an honour system, monitoring and controlling all aspects of my life. I was not allowed to do things deemed 'dishonourable' by my family, such as going out with friends or on school trips. They had absolute control over what clothes I wore. They would say, "That's what white girls do. You're not white. You are an Asian, Muslim girl" and that their "house rules" were in accordance with our religion. I knew that if I didn't follow their rules I would be shouted and sworn at. It was like living under a dictatorship.

"I would repeatedly tell teachers at school of my unhappiness and desire to leave home. Certain members of the school staff were supportive and took steps to inform social services. However, social services showed no understanding or awareness of my situation and insisted on speaking to my family about my problems. At the age of 16, I told a careers guidance counsellor from the former youth support group, *Connexions*, that I wanted to leave home and live in alternative housing. The guidance counsellor took me to the vulnerable victims unit at the local police station, who were very supportive but gave me no other options but to move to a refuge rather than foster care. I was taken to live at a refuge.

"In an unfamiliar city, I felt totally isolated. Unlike my sighted counterparts, I was not able to go out and explore my new surroundings. There, I had no phone and no internet access, restricting me from making contact with the outside world. I was told by my social worker it would take at least six weeks to organise a support package to meet my needs. The refuge put me in touch with a charity for the blind, but the charity was really unaware of 'honour'-based abuse, telling me that sending a guide to help me could put the guide at risk. I did not hear from them after that.

"In my second day of living at the refuge, I began to feel suicidal. I could see no way out of the loneliness and isolation, and wanted to take my own life. I told a member of staff and was taken to hospital and it was only then social services finally made contact. My social worker said to me "there is nowhere to go but the refuge, you're going to have to stay there" and that "this is just the reality of leaving home."

"My family then persuaded me to come home, promising me that things would change. I had one rehabilitation officer from social services who would come to see me at school and home to help me gain independent living skills, such as cooking and cleaning. She was very supportive and did the best she could, telling me I didn't deserve to be treated the way I was.

"Things did not change however, and restrictions placed on me got worse. They began keeping an extra close eye on me, monitoring all my activities: from the books I was reading, to my phone calls and internet use to extent. I shared a room with my sisters, which allowed me absolutely no space or privacy.

"My family took advantage of my disability, telling me that, due to being a blind woman, I would have no independence and would have to rely on them. It also made them easier to check up on my activities; they would creep up on me and watch what I was doing without me realising they were in the room. My family would constantly put me down and shout at me. Standing up to them made it worse. One family member would say to me: "whatever you tell people, it will always get back to me".

"The build-up of everything made me feel really low. I did tell some community members what was going on but they didn't listen, and I was scared they would report back to my family. Two years after moving back home, I called a family member and asked them to pick me up from school to avoid having to go home. I went to live with the family member, during which time the social services or police never visited to check up on me. The lack of support from social services made me more vulnerable to emotional blackmail from my family trying to get me to come home, and I eventually returned home again.

"Going home, again, made me feel worthless and like a failure, but I thought 'better the devil you know than the devil you don't know'. I realise now that, had statutory support been in place, I would not have gone back, because there were better options out there.

"Back home, my family constantly told me that my disability would prevent me from living an independent life, and that I would have to rely on them for my livelihood. They regularly took advantage of my disability and vulnerability as means to control me, and this was something I could not accept.

"A few months after returning home, I started studying at a local university. At the same time, the restrictions at home intensified to the point where every aspect of my daily routine—from the time I went to bed, the books I read, the friends I had, and the phone calls I made—were no longer under my control. I had to justify every time I left the house, and I had to share my university timetable with my family members. This constrained me from participating in extra-curricular activities, severely limiting me from taking advantage of the numerous social and academic opportunities in my university. Exposed to the freedoms of other people of my own age, I felt as if I was living two separate lives: one in university where was I free to live my life as I pleased; and the other at home, where I was trapped, isolated and restrained from doing anything.

"Living with my family, they never stopped taunting me about my disability, making me feel even more worthless, so much so I considered withdrawing from my university courses. On one occasion, a family member took my phone off me. That day, I decided I couldn't take any more and, with the support and encouragement from friends, I left home for the third time, moving into student accommodation. In my tiny room, I felt liberated, and for the first time, my life was my own. It was unfamiliar to me, and it almost felt like a holiday. Having control over my life is still something I find difficult to accept and believe.

"Upon leaving home, the emotional blackmail to get me come home continued, and I received many unpleasant messages from a family member. One of them read: "Why are you blind? He [God] has given me everything and I don't have to depend on others because that is the worst suffering." That message inspired me to strive to become successful and help others going through the same situation. Reading the stories of other women going through the same thing gave me strength as I knew I wasn't the only one. I would never go back home now as I've finally accepted that my family will not change.

"While I now live away from home, I still speak to some extended family members and hold onto certain aspects of my Asian culture, such as food, music and the values my grandparents taught me, such as respect and helping those in need. Having left home for the final time, I became a call handler for Karma Nirvana where I gave emotional support and advice to survivors of forced marriage and 'honour'-based violence. Last year I graduated with a first class honours in Psychology, and am now studying a graduate diploma in Law with a view to becoming a barrister in the field of criminal and human rights law."

2.7 *Asma*

"I was born in the UK, and grew up in a traditional Pakistani household in England. My parents had emigrated from Pakistan between the 1960s and 1970s.

"From the age of about ten, I realised that I would have to conform to a very traditional life of cooking and cleaning in order to be prepared for marriage. At a young age, family members made jokes about my 'marriage' to a stranger, and the fact that I would not have a choice. I didn't find it amusing at all, it was terrifying.

"I was expected to conform to my family's rules at all times in order to avoid bringing shame to the family. I was not allowed to cut my hair or dress in westernised clothing. This would have been seen as disrespectful.

"I was a shy child at school and found it difficult to speak to others. At home I would try to speak up, but I was often hushed and told it was not correct for a girl to speak up. I struggled with communicating my feelings for a long time, leading me to feel very isolated. On top of that, I was struggling with puberty, which made feel even more alone. Many times I wished someone would just ask me if I was okay so I would be able to tell them I was not. I would go to the GP and wished I could tell her about my problems, but was unable to express myself, because I did not fully understand the abuse I was facing, and also because I did not want to shame my family by telling others about my problems at home—it was ingrained into me to 'protect' my family's honour.

"I wanted someone to listen to me and help me understand what I was going through. I wanted someone to speak to my family, although if they had I may have been reprimanded for hurting my family's honour. A small part of me wanted to be taken away from my family because I felt that they failed to nurture or care for me appropriately; however, at the same time, I wanted my family to be my nurturer and supporter.

"Life at home was not always difficult, there were some good days, but the pressure to conform to the traditional rules and expectations was still great. At home, education was not a priority, especially not for a girl, but I knew from a young age that I wanted to learn. I managed to convince my parent's to let me stay and repeat my GCSEs, as I failed half of them the first time round.

"It was during this time I found out that I would never be able to conceive. Conveying this to my mother was one of the hardest tasks I had to do, but I managed to do it with the support of my GP. As difficult as it was for my family and I, this revelation gave me a sense of freedom because my parents had to re-think marrying me off. Despite this news, they found suitors and planned visits to Pakistan. It was a very scary time, because I did not think I would ever return to the UK after going to Pakistan. However, I did come back.

"I patiently waited and negotiated with my family regarding my pursuit of an education, because I wanted to keep my family in my life, and I didn't want to resort to 'running away' in order to continue my studies. After two years of negotiating, I was finally allowed to go to university to follow my ambitions. I trained to be a nurse, because I wanted to offer care and support to people, the care and support that was lacking in my upbringing.

"I have lived in London ever since. Moving to London was exhilarating, I relished my new found freedom. I went to the cinema every night in the first week! It may seem like such a simple pleasure, but it was something I was not allowed to do before, because my family told me that girls would be corrupted by the cinema.

“Things are now very different, in the last 20 years I have found my voice and, to some extent, my family have accepted my choices. They remain very traditional, but our relationship has evolved into something healthier. My family would now say that they would not try and force anyone else into a marriage, however they still remain very traditional, and very much concerned about how their community would view them if traditions, and misguided traditions, are not followed. I do not want to reject my family completely but I want to work with them to improve my life—it is still a challenge everyday but I am working through it.

“Currently, I work at a university where I am able to channel my life experiences, and nursing expertise into teaching and campaigning. I am very lucky to be able to work with amazing people who have encouraged me to share my knowledge and talk about my experiences of forced marriage.

“I am happy to be living independently in London, and have carved out my own life surrounded by loving friends. It has not been an easy journey, but I know that I am a strong and resilient person. My life is a work in progress!”

3. Living within an ‘Honour’ System

3.1 *Background*

An individual living within an ‘honour’ system lives by a strict set of unwritten rules within a family or marriage. These codes vary between individuals, families and communities, but are all broadly based on maintaining the perceived honour of the family within the community through establishing control over the victim’s behaviour, actions, activities, sexuality and even thoughts. According to one survivor, Nisha:

Life was always about what people in society thought [...] I was brought up in a Punjabi family that didn’t care very much about religious practices, but cared a lot about societal restrictions. Thus, as a teen, I lived under intense pressure from my family to meet the expectations of my parents who cared very much about what other people in society thought.

The consequences of breaking ‘honour’ codes include physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse, and forced marriage. In many cases, women have been murdered. This is not only to punish the individual, but to serve as a lesson to the other family members and to undo the ‘dishonour’ brought upon the family in the eyes of the community. Perpetrators of ‘honour’ killings therefore see their ‘honour’ as more important than the lives of their loved ones.

Priya Manota, Call Manager at Karma Nirvana’s helpline for victims of forced marriage and ‘honour’-based abuse, lists the most common behaviours identified by helpline callers that commonly act as triggers for ‘honour’-based abuse as:

[...] having a boyfriend/girlfriend; dressing westernised; wanting an education; wanting a career; wanting independence i.e. going out with friends sometimes who are not from the same community; asking for a divorce; refusing a marriage; having a child outside wedlock; sex before marriage; sexuality.

While victims can be male or female and of all ages, a family’s ‘honour’ is primarily seen as being embodied by younger women, who are often groomed from an early age by their parents and extended family to fulfil the role of dutiful daughter, wife and mother.

While the common perception is that this phenomenon is led by male perpetrators, this is not always the case. According to Jasvinder Sanghera, there are always multiple perpetrators of 'honour'-based abuse. Women, notably mothers, have also played a prominent role in protecting the 'honour' system and their place within it through perpetrating 'honour' abuse and forced marriage.⁸ For example, Layla's mother played an integral role in forcing her into a marriage, which Layla believes she did out of fear that she herself would be blamed by the wider community for not adhering to a traditional practice in the community, therefore bringing 'dishonour' on the family:

While my father was initially against the marriage, my mother persuaded him to change his mind, because she was frightened of what the community would say if the marriage did not happen, and she feared she would be blamed. I was twelve.

This fear of being blamed by the community is perhaps due to the common societal perception that the mother has a more dominant and present parental role, therefore increasing a mother's feeling of responsibility for her children's actions. Layla explains, "if somebody's child did something wrong, it was always the mother's fault. There a lot of pressure on the mother to guide their children in accordance with the community's values". This would help explain why women have played integral and active roles in enforcing 'honour' codes within their family.

While survivors have wide range of different backgrounds and experiences of living in an 'honour' system, there are several common themes that emerge from the survivor case studies profiled as well as wider existing research. This includes: the normalisation of 'honour' codes and abuse; feelings of guilt and shame; difficulties and risks in speaking out about 'honour' abuse; and, feelings of isolation.

3.2 The normalisation of 'honour' codes and abuse

Victims of 'honour' abuse often have to live by strict rules, or 'honour' codes, such as being forbidden from mixing with or dressing like classmates outside the community, or travelling too far from home. Survivors in this report recalled being brought up believing the 'honour' system and codes to be normal and that their peers were going through the same thing. For example, Nisha recalls: "For years and years I didn't think any of my treatment was bad, I just thought "this is normal; this happens to everyone else, all my other friends".

The normalisation of 'honour' codes – being made to feel as though their purpose in life is to follow a path that upholds the family's 'honour' – appears to have heavily informed the decisions, behaviour and actions of the survivors interviewed. In Sara's case, she felt the need to please her family, specifically her father, by marrying her cousin in order to rectify her sister's decision to run away from home and marry someone of her choosing:

I was pressured by the family to marry my first cousin in Pakistan [...] Everyone showed me respect and treated me like a queen, and best of all, my father and I shared a bond. He was so happy it almost felt as if the mistake my sister had made was been rectified, and suddenly I felt important.

She also accepted the abuse in her marriage to avoid confrontation with her family, and because she was informed by her mother that it was her duty and part of her culture to do so:

⁸ Dyer, E., *'Honour' Killings in the UK*. The Henry Jackson Society, January 2015, available at: henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Honour-Killings-in-the-UK.pdf. Last visited: 7 July 2015.

My marriage was solely based on the concept of sex. I felt like I had to sleep with him whenever he wanted. My mum would remind me that it is part of our culture and my duty as a wife to sleep with him.

Asma explains how her role in her family's 'honour' system became engrained from an early age by her family:

From the age of about ten, I realised that I would have to conform to a very traditional life of cooking and cleaning in order to be prepared for marriage. At a young age, family members made jokes about my 'marriage' to a stranger, and the fact that I would not have a choice [...] I also did not want to shame my family because this was ingrained into me to 'protect' my family's honour.

As a result, she felt it difficult to speak out about the abuse: "I would go to the GP and wished I could tell her about my problems, but was unable to express myself, because I did not fully understand the abuse I was facing".

3.3 Feelings of guilt and shame

Due to the normalisation of 'honour' in a victim's life, they are often made to feel as if they carry a personal responsibility in protecting it, and therefore the blame if they fail to do so. Victims therefore often feel guilty and ashamed in going against the 'honour' system. This includes, for example: speaking out about abuse both in and outside their community; seeking independence; wearing 'Westernised' clothes; refusing to marry their promised stranger; and, leaving home, is often viewed as shameful, not only by the perpetrators but by the victims themselves.⁹

As a result, survivors in this report have claimed that they were not allowed to feel like the victim, and instead were made to feel like a perpetrator who had 'shamed' their family in the eyes of the community. Saliha, for example, recalls feeling mixed emotions as a victim, due to wanting things to change at home but feeling guilty at the same time. Nisha blamed herself for the abuse she received from her family members, and whilst feeling that she had to change rather than her family, the abuse continued – leading her to feel as though she would never be good enough. Layla describes feeling like a failure for speaking out against the 'honour' system.

This feeling of internalised guilt is reported on a wider scale. According to Jasvinder Sanghera, who is herself a survivor of forced marriage and 'honour'-based abuse, and has supported thousands of victims as the founder and CEO of Karma Nirvana: "the victims are made to think they are the perpetrator, because they are made to feel that have done this to their family [...] What it means is that what they're doing is abusing you and then using these concepts [of blame] to make you feel even worse".¹⁰

This sustained emotional abuse and internalised guilt can have lasting damage. Survivors interviewed reported taking years after leaving the 'honour' system before they were eventually able to accept the abuse they endured was not their fault. Sanghera echoes this: "I didn't own up to being a victim until I was in my early 20s. Actually my sister actually had to say that I wasn't the bad guy".¹¹

Sanghera adds that this misappropriation of blame can act as a barrier to getting out of the situation: "Being made to feel like a bad person hinders you from making a stand against your family". Malika, for example, recalls how the perpetrator who sexually assaulted her blamed her for his actions, meaning that

⁹ See: Dyer, E., *'Honour' Killings in the UK*, The Henry Jackson Society, January 2015, available at: henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Honour-Killings-in-the-UK.pdf. Last visited: 7 July 2015.

¹⁰ Interview with Jasvinder Sanghera, Founder and CEO, Karma Nirvana, 24 July 2015.

¹¹ Ibid.

she did not want to speak out for fear that she would bring shame upon the family. She therefore suppressed her desire to seek help in order to preserve the 'honour' system:

I never told anyone about that day [...] I was scared and felt as if I had nobody to turn to as I didn't want to bring shame upon the family.

Victims of 'honour'-based abuse therefore often suffer various layers of emotional pain: the trauma of suffering sustained abuse from loved ones; the subsequent and often long-term internalised guilt and self-hatred for having 'failed' their family and their 'honour' system; and feeling, at the time, trapped in their family's 'honour' system. However, some of the survivors interviewed refer to this emotional pain as being what pushed them to leave rather than stay. For Saliha, having her phone taken off her by a family member was the final straw and for Layla, it was when daughter witnessed her husband spit at her. This is echoed by Sanghera: "as a victim, you are either going to internalise that and go with [the perpetrators], or you are going to leave".

3.4 Difficulties and risks in speaking out about 'honour' abuse

Speaking out about 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage carries several risks, which can vary depending on whether the recipient is from within or outside of the victim's community.

3.4.1 Within the community

'Honour'-based abuse and forced marriage is almost entirely based on the social standing of the family and how they are perceived in the wider community. Survivors interviewed reported having had a reluctance to speak out for fear of being judged within or even ostracised from their community. According to Layla:

It was difficult for me to find help and support and no one understood what I was going through. On top of that, my family encouraged me to stay with my husband in order to maintain the 'honour' of the family and of my late-father.

Survivors have also described a fear of information getting back to the perpetrator. Saliha was "was scared they would report back to my family", while Ayesha says she "didn't reach out to anyone within the community because I didn't trust anyone, especially within the Asian or Muslim community". Individuals who have spoken out have faced feelings of complete isolation. Layla recalls: "When I spoke out about the abuse, I was further isolated from everyone. Not only did I feel completely alone, I also felt like a failure.

Survivors also report having been discouraged from speaking out by family members or ignored within their community. Asma did not speak out because "I also did not want to shame my family because this was ingrained into me to 'protect' my family's honour".

Saliha recalls: "I did tell community members what was going on but they didn't listen". This difficulty in speaking out has been used by perpetrators to silence their victim. Survivors have reported being told that nobody would listen to them or believe them if they told anyone. Malika recalls how her perpetrator "brainwashed me into thinking that nobody would believe me and that it was all my fault".

3.4.2 *Outside the community*

Survivors interviewed have also reported a reluctance to speak out to individuals outside of their community. Layla describes a fear of being judged by teachers and peers if they were to find out about her engagement:

I feared that [...] they would think my family was weird, alien, or not human. For me, my school days were my best days and I couldn't let my engagement destroy that.

There have also been many cases in which the authorities have shown a lack of knowledge and understanding about 'honour'-based abuse (see: '3.7 Common mistakes in care'). This can act as a barrier for survivors in reaching out for help or even put them at further risk.

3.5 *Feelings of isolation*

Survivors have recalled intense feelings of isolation whilst living within an 'honour' system, both from people in and outside the community. As a result of internalised guilt and feeling unable to speak out about 'honour'-based abuse, survivors have reported feeling like they had no one to confide in.

Survivors have described feeling as if they were living in two different worlds: one at home where they had to be the dutiful daughter and abide by 'honour codes'; and the other outside the home where they would be exposed to different ways of life and the freedoms of others. One survivor described coming home each day as like stepping through C.S. Lewis' wardrobe to Narnia, where they would take on a different persona and live by a different set of rules. Some have described feeling torn between these two roles: on the one hand, wanting to do what their school friends were doing; and, on the other, feeling as though it was their duty to abide by their family's wishes. According to Saliha:

I felt as if I was living two separate lives: one in university where was I free to live my life as I pleased; and the other at home where I was trapped, isolated and restrained from doing anything.

For Malika, her escape was being at work, where she felt as if her life was going at a different trajectory than the life she lived at home:

Working meant I could leave my problems at home: as soon as I stepped out of my family home, I entered a new life and became a different person. I felt like I had a stable life ahead of me, and I was completely oblivious to the horrors that lay ahead.

Some of the women in this report began to self-harm and develop suicidal feelings as a result of sustained abuse and isolation. Ayesha, for example,

[...] became bulimic and also turned to self-harming again to escape the daily abuse inflicted upon me by my husband; and also because they were the only things I had control of in my life.

Jasvinder Sanghera, whose sister committed suicide due to forced marriage, suggests¹² that these feelings of guilt, shame and isolation may help to explain the increased rates of self-harm and suicide among young Asian women living in Britain.¹³

¹² Interview with Jasvinder Sanghera, Founder and CEO, Karma Nirvana, in 'Honor Diaries', 2013

¹³ 'Asian women in suicide risk', *BBC News*, 12 October 2000, available at: news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/967153.stm. Last visited: 7 July 2015.

3.6 *Repatriated victims and forced marriage*

Victims of 'honour'-based abuse are often taken abroad, in many cases to their family's place of origin, and forced into marriage.¹⁴ Yesmien, for example, was taken abroad to be married at the age of 12 (she later got married in the UK). Those who are forced into a marriage are often subjected to marital rape and other forms of abuse throughout the marriage. Ayesha was taken to Pakistan and forced to marry:

On the night of my wedding, I pleaded with my new husband to talk to me so we could get to know each other, but it made no difference. Instead, he raped me.

3.7 *Common mistakes in care*

Survivors interviewed report that, whilst living within an 'honour' system they were made to feel as if the abuse they suffered was normal. Going against that system can therefore produce feelings of internalised guilt and shame in the victim for 'failing' their family and community. This can lead to feelings of intense isolation and despair due to feeling unable to speak out and therefore seeing no way out of the abuse.

Professionals in frontline agencies such as education, healthcare and police come into regular contact with victims of 'honour'-based abuse, therefore having the unique opportunity of identifying risk and making an intervention before someone is hurt, killed or forced into a marriage.

3.7.1 *Schools*

Children and young people are the age group most at risk of HBV, and therefore schools in the England and Wales have a fundamental role to play in preventing and dealing with this risk.¹⁵

However, this opportunity is often missed. Survivors have reported teachers in their school unaware they had victims in their class, and teachers who choose not to intervene on the grounds that it is a cultural issue. There have also been cases of professionals putting victims at further risk by both failing to take immediate action having been made aware of the risk, and encouraging victims to return home.

Layla recalls her teachers failing to notice when female and male students did not return to school after being taken on trips to Pakistan, or indeed her own engagement:

What was puzzling to me was that no one in the system noticed or acknowledged my sister's absence. No one cared to ask questions, because it was 'Pakistani cultural practice,' and therefore not the business of whites. Despite the rumours of my engagement circulating in school, my teachers never intervened—they just saw it as being part of my cultural practice. This was, however, nothing new, I had seen many girls and boys, aged 15 and 16, forced into marriages with teachers failing to intervene and to understanding their role in safeguarding children.

In another recent case, a student had been missing from school for several weeks before their school went to the authorities, despite existing concerns of forced marriage (the individual's family had refused to communicate or cooperate with the school in helping locate their daughter). The school eventually contacted Karma Nirvana, who advised them to call the police to conduct a 'safe and well' check, and airport security to check if anyone had left the country. While professionals in the school knew to contact Karma Nirvana, the significant delay in taking action is a symptom of the current gap in knowledge and

¹⁴ Dyer, E., *'Honour' Killings in the UK*, The Henry Jackson Society, January 2015, available at: henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Honour-Killings-in-the-UK.pdf. Last visited: 7 July 2015.

¹⁵ Interview with Diana Nammi, Director, IKWRO, August 2014.

understanding relating to the risks involved in 'honour'-based abuse in statutory professional settings, which Karma Nirvana are in the process of attempting to close through training.

3.7.2 Police

Survivors interviewed in this report having been met with very little support having contacted the police. Nisha, for example, went to the police to report the abuse she was suffering, saying that she did not want to return home. However, the officers she spoke to asked her what she wanted to do, rather than telling her what her different options were. She also reported that she felt as if they did not believe her, due to the fact that they appeared to heavily rely on physical evidence of abuse.

4. Leaving the 'Honour' System

4.1 Deciding to leave home

Many victims of 'honour'-based abuse - some are as young as 14 and 15 - make the decision to leave home, and often in secret. As this point, many have phoned the Karma Nirvana helpline "for practical or emotional support, or both". Call Manager at the helpline Priya Manota relays common reasons for leaving:

They are not safe remaining living where they are because of the abuse they are experiencing or the perceived risk of the abuse they may experience. It may also be that their mental health is being affected by the abuse and they wish to leave because of this impact.¹⁶

In leaving home, victims are also choosing to make significant sacrifices such as stability, security, a steady routine, their support networks of friends, family and community, and home comforts. They also knowingly risk being disowned, and face ostracisation from their family and community.

Survivors interviewed described their decision to leave home as one done out of concern for their personal safety, and even as a choice between 'life and death'. Some described their decision to leave as almost spontaneous, when one day they became too frightened for their own safety in returning home, rather than planning their departure over time. This is echoed on a wider scale from victims who call Karma Nirvana's helpline. According to Priya Manota:

Many people will call us at the point where they are seeking information on how to make themselves safe. [...] We also have callers who will call us from a college, for example, as they are scared to return home that night out of fear that they will be harmed.

Those who do make a spontaneous, unplanned decision to leave home are likely to be going with little emotional or practical preparation. They are therefore likely to be in urgent need of emotional and practical support from those they may come into contact with, including statutory services such as the police and social services.

In abandoning their previous support network(s), victims are vulnerable to feelings of intense isolation and an inability to financially support themselves.¹⁷ They may also be at risk of being contacted by their

¹⁶ Interview with Priya Manota, Call Manager, Karma Nirvana, 9 June 2015.

¹⁷ Interview with Jasvinder Sanghera, Founder and CEO, Karma Nirvana, 24 July 2015.

family members and persuaded to come home, often through emotional abuse and blackmail, such as being told there is an illness in the family or that things will change if they return.

However, survivors interviewed who returned home reported a worsening of abuse as a result. According to Anup Manota, Operations Manager at Karma Nirvana, this is not uncommon, with many victims facing similar heightened consequences, including forced marriage, violence and even death. Therefore the first few days after leaving home are crucial for any victim. He adds that, when police officers have received training from Karma Nirvana, they are able to “put things into place” in supporting and safeguarding the victim.¹⁸

Survivors have reported a number of varied reasons behind them deciding or wanting to return home, including: feeling as though they had no other option; being persuaded by family members, partners or people from the community; being told by professionals to return home; missing family members and ‘home comforts’; and, feeling of isolated and unsupported. These reasons are also commonly cited by callers to the Karma Nirvana helpline,¹⁹ and demonstrate why immediate support for the individual after they have left home is vital.

4.2 Options for relocation

Upon deciding to leave home, individuals have various options available to them for relocation. One path is to go through the social services, where they may be recommended to go a refuge, or be housed through the foster system. In other cases, victims have found their own housing either through their university, or through private accommodation. While these processes vary, there are several common experiences shared by survivors interviewed in this report, namely feelings of isolation and a lack of professional and financial support.

4.2.1 Refuge provision

There are currently over 500 refuges and support services in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.²⁰ Refuges are open to women (there are also refuges for men) who are seeking to escape from domestic violence or abuse. Upon entering and residing within the refuge, a license agreement must be signed for the safety of the all residents. The terms usually detail rent, and house rules (i.e. drug/alcohol policy, visitation limits, and phone calls). The agreement sometimes places a limit on the time of stay, though women are usually allowed to stay as long as they want in order to give them time to plan their future.

Survivors have reported various difficulties in accessing refuge accommodation. In order to be eligible to live in a refuge, an individual must be able to pay the service charge and rent costs. This is often difficult or even impossible for those in full-time education or employment due to their lack of access to housing benefits. Meeting refuge costs can also be difficult for some individuals in full-time employment, depending on their salary and the where the refuge is located (and therefore the average rate of rent and living costs). It may also depend on whether or not they have children (and how many), which may hinder their ability to work full- or part-time due to childcare costs.

Nisha, for example, despite trying to find somewhere to live to avoid going back to her family during her university holidays, was put off going to a refuge after hearing of “many negative experiences: intense

¹⁸ Interview with Anup Manota, Operations Manager, Karma Nirvana, 19 June 2015.

¹⁹ Interview with Priya Manota, Call Manager, Karma Nirvana, 9 June 2015.

²⁰ ‘The Survivor’s Handbook’, Women’s Aid, undated, available at: www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic-violence-survivors-handbook.asp?section=000100010008000100320003. Last visited: 6 July 2015.

feelings of isolation, a lack of independence, and high rent". Instead, when she went to the housing association to ask for somewhere to stay or help in paying rent, she was met with a lack of understanding and support:

I was told that because I was a university student and under 25 years old, I was not eligible to receive housing benefits. The staff failed to understand the problems I was facing at home. I was mentally and physically drained, but she was not sympathetic and implied that I was fit enough to work, and that I didn't need help.

The financial strain of staying in a refuge may discourage or prevent women from seeking help and leaving the 'honour'-system. Refuge costs are also likely to act as a barrier to gaining independence after leaving home if individuals are only able to begin saving money and building a new life once they leave. According to Priya Manota, this issue "comes up a lot on the helpline," to which Karma Nirvana can only

[...] encourage somebody to see how quickly they are able to move on from the refuge so they won't have to pay certain charges. What we find is it's mostly when women are out of a refuge that they're able to start saving up a little bit.²¹

As it stands, victims – who are already extremely vulnerable – having become more rather than less vulnerable when placed in refuge provision.

4.2.2 *Foster care and university accommodation*

Individuals in secondary education are eligible for foster care as an alternative to refuge accommodation. Foster care provides a kind of practical and emotional support that refuges currently cannot. For example, young people who are still in school need additional support, such as someone to oversee their homework commitments and ensure they have an evening meal. Foster care provides children with an environment where they can grow and develop.

This can be made available if there is enough evidence that a family member, or the whole family, poses a threat or neglects the child. In such cases social services can request an emergency protection order from the court in order to place the individual under their care. A child placed under foster care through a court order becomes the responsibility of the social services department, and the department is in charge of ensuring that all necessary parental responsibility to nurturing a child is being met.²²

In a refuge, a young person's key worker will leave the refuge in the early evening (usually 5pm), leaving the young person to manage for themselves. For example, Malika would return from work to the refuge at 6pm, an hour after her key worker had left, therefore leaving her with no support. An individual's foster carers can however provide them with full-time support, providing routine, and helping prevent the individual from feelings of isolation.

Foster placement is regarded by Jasvinder Sanghera as "safer and more holistic" to a young person's needs than refuge provision. However, she reports that Karma Nirvana encounters barriers when advocating foster placements for young people: "this is often linked to a lack of understanding and finances".²³

After several weeks of a minor being in foster care, the family can then go to court and appeal the decision. According to Manota, the family will normally appeal as "they want [the individual] at home because they want control over them". In the event of a court appeal, Karma Nirvana can then provide evidence of a

²¹ Interview with Priya Manota, Call Manager, Karma Nirvana, 9 June 2015.

²² Ibid.

²³ Interview with Jasvinder Sanghera, Founder and CEO, Karma Nirvana, 9 July 2015.

threat. Jasvinder Sanghera, the group's founder and CEO, is often called as an expert witness to provide a detailed report in court of the risk.²⁴

Individuals in higher education are eligible for financial support from their university or accommodation provision if it has welfare funds in place. According to Priya Manota, while staff at Karma Nirvana have seen isolated examples of universities allowing at risk students to live in university halls over the summer holiday period to prevent them from having to return home, "Sadly this is a postcode lottery, it depends on where you are studying and how much the university can help you".²⁵

4.3 *Common mistakes in care*

Survivors interviewed felt most isolated and vulnerable after leaving home due to the fact their lines of financial support and communication with their family and friends had been severed.

4.3.1 *Refuges*

Survivors have reported a lack of emotional and practical support provided at refuge accommodation. Saliha, for example, reports having felt intense isolation during her time at a refuge due to having no ability to contact anyone outside the refuge, as she had no access to the internet or a telephone. She had limited contact with professionals of any kind. Saliha reports:

The refuge put me in touch with a charity for the blind, but the charity was really unaware of 'honour'-based abuse, telling me that sending a guide to help me could put the guide at risk. I did not hear from them after that.

The isolation she experienced led her to become suicidal and she was hospitalised. Only at this point did the social services make any contact with her since moving into the refuge. Had the refuge staff and social workers had greater understanding of the 'honour'-based abuse Saliha was experiencing and therefore the isolation she was feeling, as well as the additional barriers caused by her disability, they could have identified and provided the support she needed. Saliha says that, had she had that support, she would not have returned home.

According to Priya Manota, this lack of support regularly comes up as an issue on their helpline for victims of 'honour' abuse and forced marriage:

We do get calls from women that say that perhaps they hadn't got the support they may have expected within the refuge, with respect to practical and emotional support. We do get men and women that call us from refuges where they begin to feel isolated. It can be that the refuge are great and they are supporting them but it's just that they're missing their family. It might be that there are certain occasions that are coming up such as people's birthdays in the family and that triggers these feelings of isolation and missing their family and it's just clear that they need that emotional support at that point.

In Saliha's case, social workers failed to provide her with emotional and practical support, instead telling her that moving to a refuge was her only option and that "this is just the reality of leaving home". A lack of knowledge and understanding of 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage among professionals is a problem on a wider scale. According to staff at Karma Nirvana, their callers have had "very mixed" experiences with social services: "we will often wonder and be quite concerned for the victim in terms of how the social worker is going to be because we often don't get good responses from them".

²⁴ Interview with Priya Manota, Call Manager, Karma Nirvana, 9 June 2015.

²⁵ Ibid.

In some cases, refuge staff have put victims at greater risk. Victims have been encouraged to return home to their families. Priya Manota gives an example of a social worker arranging for a young person to be sent back to their families despite having had threats to kill, risk of forced marriage, physical and emotional abuse, as well as sexual abuse. The individual had initially been removed from home because there had been an assault by a family member. She was then assessed by social services, who determined that - on the basis of the one recorded physical assault - she could be sent back home, without taking into consideration the underlying abuse.

In Sara's case, a refuge key worker refused to provide her with support and even made threats against her upon realising she was related to one of Sara's perpetrators. According to Sara: "That woman made my life hell, and she was one of the reasons I went back home. I did not feel safe living in London due to worrying that she would tell my family where I was."

Victim support is crucial in preventing survivors from returning home. Saliha says that, "had statutory support been in place, I would not have gone back, because there were better options out there." It is therefore crucial that professionals have the knowledge needed to understand these various triggers that can lead to feelings of isolation and a desire to return home.

4.3.2 Social services and foster placement

While foster placement is preferable to refuge provision where the victim is eligible, there is a risk that the individual will be wrongly deemed ineligible for foster placement by the social services, due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of the signs and risks of 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage during the initial identification stage.²⁶

While the individual in this case did not end up returning home,²⁷ Manota reports that they receive "a lot" of calls on the helpline where social workers are wanting to send at-risk individuals back home. She also reports that there are "great social workers who completely get it and want to go above and beyond to help [the victims]", who will, for example, contact Karma Nirvana asking them to provide support of write letters of evidence to say someone is at risk and should be kept in foster placement.

5. Recommendations

In recent years there has been significant progress in raising awareness of the existence of forced marriage and 'honour'-based abuse in the UK, both in statutory agencies and wider society. However, there is still a clear gap in support for victims leaving an 'honour' system, when many are at their most vulnerable and isolated. This is due to a lack of basic knowledge and understanding of 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage, and increases the risk of victims returning home to their perpetrators and likely further emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse.

There are three key stages of care provision needed for those involved in 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage: prevention and identifying victims; safeguarding victims leaving home; and, aftercare support.

²⁶ Interview with Priya Manota, Call Manager, Karma Nirvana, 9 June 2015.

²⁷ According to Manota, the case ended up going to an appeal hearing where Karma Nirvana provided evidence of further risk. The independent panel decided that the individual should not go home and should instead be taken into foster care.

All professionals need to have the basic knowledge and understanding of 'honour'-based abuse to have the confidence and ability in assessing levels of risk appropriately and supporting victims accordingly.

More specifically, all professionals need to have an awareness and understanding of how and why many common signs of risk or standard safeguarding measures applied within other forms of child protection simply do not apply – or apply differently – to cases of 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage due to the specificity of the nature of the abuse. For example, while common child protection procedures would support family reconciliation, this report has provided examples of how this puts victims of 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage in serious risk of further emotional and/or physical harm. Basic training is therefore needed throughout all three stages of care provision in order to prevent common mistakes in care identified earlier in the report.

In order to ensure all professionals receive the necessary basic training, a first recommendation is to:

Standardise provision nationally within statutory agencies

Police

- A consideration of proposals to make basic training into forced marriage and 'honour'-based abuse mandatory rather than optional as part of the HMIC inspection into police forces' response to forced marriage and 'honour'-based violence, in the context of the existing statutory guidance and the proven effectiveness of training packages designed by Karma Nirvana. These proposals would be part of the inspectorate's stated aim of providing "recommendations to advance improvements in policing practice in relation to HBV"²⁸ and would include technical considerations of implementation, such as how this might be incorporated into budget allocation.

Schools

- All schools in England and Wales must be reminded by the Education Secretary Nicky Morgan of their statutory duty to raise awareness among teachers.
- In order to raise awareness throughout schools, Ofsted inspectors should, through an amendment to the framework, inspect schools' compliance in training staff to recognise signs of HBV.
- All teachers should undertake basic training in recognising signs of HBV in order to feel confident reporting any concerns to the schools' safeguarding officer (there is one officer per primary and secondary school). Additionally, safeguarding officers need specialist training in how to investigate a case and take the appropriate actions including, where necessary, police involvement.
- Ensure all teachers entering the education system have a basic awareness of forced marriage and 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage introducing Karma Nirvana's basic training model into teacher training courses, such as TeachFirst and Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE).

Social services and healthcare professionals

- Groups with specialist knowledge and experience in protecting victims such as Karma Nirvana should be given the capacity to design and deliver basic training throughout social services and those working in the healthcare profession.

²⁸ 'So-called honour-based violence', Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, undated, available at: www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/our-work/so-called-honour-based-violence/. Last visited: 1 July 2015.

- Basic training should be included as part of core learning in academic courses taken prior to working in these fields, such as, in the healthcare profession, medicine or nursing degrees.

The following are more specific recommendations for the three stages of care provision:

1. Prevention and Identifying Victims

All professionals need to be able to identify victims and risk assess effectively in order to prevent potential further abuse from taking place. While this needs to be the case within all statutory agencies, schools have a unique opportunity to prevent abuse due to having daily contact with individuals from potentially hard-to-reach communities. Schools therefore have a vital role to play in preventing 'honour' abuse and forced marriage – both through raising awareness among students and identifying existing victims. The following steps should be taken in educational settings:

- Include issues relating to forced marriage and 'honour'-based abuse within the Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) curriculum and pastoral care provision, and engage with external organisations such as Karma Nirvana to support its delivery.
- Where possible and in high risk areas, secondary schools should hold external assemblies with survivors and other individuals who specialise in the area speaking about forced marriage and 'honour'-based abuse. The speaker could increase awareness by distributing information about the Karma Nirvana helpline and building in time to speak to pupils and teachers privately.
- Staff should be active in distributing Karma Nirvana's helpline contact information around schools.
- Boards of Governors, in all grant-aided schools, should be required to ensure that raising awareness of forced marriage and 'honour'-based violence is included in their School Development Plan.
- Individuals studying at university should always be given the option of staying in university accommodation rather than having to go home during university holidays. In order to make this possible, universities would need to put funding aside to help provide accommodation at lower rates for victims.
- Universities counsellors should receive specialist training designed by Karma Nirvana.

2. Safeguarding Victims Leaving Home

Some of the survivors interviewed felt at their most isolated and vulnerable after leaving home as their lines of financial support and communication with their family and friends had been severed. The following steps should be taken to support victims leaving home:

Police

- When victims make initial contact with the police, all officers need to be able to identify that they are victims of 'honour'-based abuse and provide the necessary safeguarding measures.
- Police should take the time to listen to victims, before offering them a full list of the appropriate options going forward.

Social services and foster care

- Foster placement should be considered a first option for young people affected by forced marriages and honour abuse. In order to achieve this social workers need to be trained to: identify victims of 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage; and, effectively assess risk involved. Social workers


need to understand the risk involved of not placing a young person in foster care and must prioritise their safety over cultural considerations.

- All social workers should have the confidence in identifying 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage when carrying out a risk assessment or determining whether a child is eligible for foster care.
- Refuge provision needs to act as a gateway to independence rather than as a barrier. Women with children or those in full-time education or employment need to be able to maintain their independence whilst staying safe. In order to make this possible, refuges need to means assess individuals new to the refuge in order to determine the extent to which they can afford to pay rent. Refuges should be given the government funding in order to adopt a more flexible approach regarding rent costs.
- While living at a refuge, victims should have the ability to request a new key worker if they feel their current key worker is putting them at further risk. All refuge staff and foster carers should be made aware of Karma Nirvana and feel confident to refer to them regularly for guidance and support.

3. Aftercare Support

One common theme in the survivor case studies is a lack of support after moving out of temporary accommodation. Repatriated victims who are taken abroad and forced into marriage also need help and support when they return. This can leave survivors feeling isolated and even drawn to returning home. The following steps should be taken to prevent this from happening:

- Karma Nirvana currently provides limited support through the Survivor Ambassador Panel (SAP), which is a network of survivors that support one another. However, there remains the need to develop a survivor network, support groups and helpline support specifically for those that have left home and are isolated without their family, some of whom have been disowned.
- Survivors need engagement, encouragement and to have their voices heard following their ordeals. We recommend the development of a confidential survivor data base that will also provide regular newsletters and opportunities for survivor engagement.



Survivors of 'honour'-based abuse choose to leave their families behind, often as a means of staying alive. They have sought independence from the system of 'honour' that governs their families and communities. Yet, at a time when they are in desperate need of support and refuge in order to begin rebuilding their lives, countless are met with a lack of understanding and support from local authorities and services. *Britain's Forgotten Women: Speaking to Survivors of 'Honour'-Based Abuse* looks at how the experiences of survivors can help inform policy and action through providing recommendations based on a series of in-depth case studies.

'If you believe in the cause of freedom, then proclaim it, live it and protect it, for humanity's future depends on it.'

Henry M 'Scoop' Jackson
(May 31, 1912 – September 1, 1983)
US Congressman and Senator for
Washington State from 1941 – 1983