

POLICE RESPONSE TO SEXUAL ABUSE FAILS TO SAFEGUARD VICTIMS FROM RISK OF HONOUR-BASED ABUSE

Police officers sometimes do not recognise the potential risk of honour-based abuse for victims of sexual abuse and the service these victims receive is not always good enough, a new report has found.

A police super-complaint submitted by the Tees Valley Inclusion Project raised concerns that the police response to sexual abuse was putting victims from ethnic minority backgrounds at risk of honour-based abuse.

Following a joint investigation into these concerns, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), the College of Policing and the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) found that some forces did not clearly understand the risks of honour-based abuse and, as a result, some victims may be left unprotected and unsupported. Police recording of ethnicity is so patchy and inconsistent, forces are unable to properly monitor the equality of the service they provide to the different communities they serve.

The report makes recommendations for police leaders to work with communities to increase understanding and awareness of cultural differences and how these may inform or affect investigations.

It also makes other recommendations, including:

- the National Police Chiefs' Council, which is currently reviewing data standards for the recording of all protected characteristics, should take the super-complaint into account when proposing changes to address the lack of recorded ethnicity data; and
- police and crime commissioners should ensure that their consultations before commissioning victims' services are fully inclusive and represent all community views. They should then work with local police, safeguarding partners and support organisations to properly understand victims' needs.

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary Andy Cooke said:

"Reporting sexual abuse is difficult enough for victims, and it is unacceptable those at risk of honour-based abuse are not properly safeguarded when they are courageous enough to report these crimes.

"Our report shows that some police forces simply do not have the awareness and understanding to properly identify and manage the risk of honour-based abuse. We found victims are receiving an inconsistent service from police, and our findings were compounded by patchy data recording of ethnicity.

"It is clear real change is needed. If acted on, our recommendations will go a long way in helping to improve the service these victims receive."

Interim Director General of the IOPC Tom Whiting said:

"We would like to thank Tees Valley Inclusion Project for lodging this important super-complaint which shines a light on the additional risks some victims may face when they make the difficult decision to report sexual abuse. We identified a number

of issues with the service these victims receive from the police, including victims struggling to obtain case updates when they need to keep interactions with the police secret.

“The recommendations we have made are an important step in improving this service and we call on policing to respond to ensure all victims receive a service appropriate to their needs.”

College of Policing CEO Chief Constable Andy Marsh said:

“We recognise that many dedicated and committed officers and staff provide excellent support and respond sensitively to sexual abuse victims. Changes are required to ensure there is a coordinated system of tailored support, including for those at risk of honour-based abuse, no matter where in the country victims live.

“This report adds further evidence that ethnicity recording by forces must improve and there is commitment across the service to raise standards for this data collection.”

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- For further information, the HMICFRS Press Office can be contacted at 0300 071 6781 or HMICPressOffice@hmicfrs.gov.uk.
- *How the police respond to sexual abuse when the victim is from an ethnic minority background and may be at risk of honour-based abuse: Report on Tees Valley Inclusion Project's super-complaint* will be published on the HMICFRS website at 00:01 on Friday 16 December 2022.
- The College of Policing definition of honour-based abuse is “‘A collection of practices used to control behaviour within families and communities to protect their perceived honour, or address shame or embarrassment perceived to have been brought to the family.’”
- TVIP were concerned about nine features of policing they believe cause significant harm to victims:
 1. Overuse of voluntary suspect interviews.
 2. Failure to consider honour-based abuse as a concomitant safeguarding concern following sexual abuse reporting.
 3. Failure to keep victims informed following the report of sexual abuse.
 4. Failure to provide information during the prosecution process.
 5. Failure to discuss [special measures](#) and other protective measures with victims/[survivors](#).
 6. Lack of empathy from the police.
 7. Ineffective and inadequate use of police resources.
 8. Disproportionate focus on community impact.
 9. Failure to understand the retraumatising effect of the prosecution process.