

How the police respond to victims of 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. Response from Simon Foster, West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner.

Published in December 2022, this super complaint investigation focused on ethnic minority victims (EMV) of sexual abuse, including those who might be at risk of honour-based abuse. Tees Valley Inclusion Project submitted the super complaint, due to concerns that EMVs of sexual abuse, receive a particularly poor service without proper consideration of their specific risks and vulnerabilities. HMICFRS, the College of Policing and the Independent Office for Police Conduct made four key recommendations:

1) Risk of Honour Based Abuse

It was found that forces within England and Wales do not explicitly include the risk of honour-based abuse in their sexual abuse policies. Whilst the West Midlands Police (WMP) policy on Rape and Serious Sexual Offences has a supporting Equality Impact Assessment and procedural guidance, it does not explicitly call out the risk of honour-based abuse. However, the policy does recognise and make specific reference to the following two points:

1. An individual's circumstances, culture and specific demographic factors may impact upon their ability and willingness to report an offence;
2. Throughout an investigation, the individual and diverse needs of the complainant need to be addressed with particular sensitivity.

The office was also informed by the force, that WMP have a separate policy on honour-based abuse (HBA), which was created in the absence of a national document at the time. There is also [online guidance](#) by the force, on what HBA can look like, as well advice and useful links.

2) Cultural Awareness

The Inspectorate found a general lack of awareness and understanding of different cultures and religions, inhibiting officers from recognising the wider risks of honour-based abuse. It was recommended that to combat this, force officers and staff should be aware of the different cultures within the communities that they serve, taking time to learn about them.

One way in which WMP is doing this, is through the active recruitment of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) or neighbourhood officers. These officers are able to have a greater understanding of local issues, by engaging with under-represented groups. This engagement allows them to have more awareness of different demographics within neighbourhoods and carry out their vital role of creating positive relationships with local communities, so that their concerns are heard.

Additionally, as part of the force's strategy on Diversity and Inclusion, the 'Our Communities' strand lists the following three objectives:

1. Better understanding the identities, needs and history of communities through better collection and analysis of data and information across core strands of diversity.
2. Effective engagement strategies that enable interaction with all communities, fostering strong relationships that build trust and confidence, ensuring that the force's values and code of ethics are embedded in all interactions.
3. Increasing public confidence by being fair, proportionate, transparent and accountable.

Progress against these objectives, are tracked via quarterly 'Our Communities' meetings, which feed into the Diversity and Inclusion Board, that tracks overall progress against the strategy.

Further to this, WMP was one of the original pathfinder forces, involved in the development of Operation Soteria, which rolled out on July 10th. The programme aims to bring more sex offenders to justice and provide further support to victims, putting them at the heart of everything.

The force has developed a bespoke action plan 'We Listen, We Believe, We Care'. As part of the 'We Listen' strand, priority is placed on victim contact and engagement, as well as *risk management* and quality supervisory reviews.

The inspection pointed out that within ethnic groups most at risk, there is a 'labyrinth of familial connections and pressures', which is when pressure from family and communities stops victims reporting crime or leads them to drop allegations.

By having stronger engagement with victims within Op Soteria, victim safeguarding and their individual needs will be better considered, an update and contact plan will be agreed, as well as signposting to other agencies for support. It is hoped that with these changes, victim engagement with police action will increase, which as highlighted within the inspection, is an area of particular concern for EMVs of sexual abuse.

3) Poor Quality Police Data on Ethnicity

Inconsistent police recording of ethnicity, prevent the force from having 'fully informed and evidence-based engagement with all the communities that they serve'. Whilst key ethnic groups, known to be at risk, include Southeast Asian, South Asian, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds, the data to evidence this is patchy and poorly recorded within police reports.

Currently, only around a third of crime reports record the victims' ethnicity. This is not an issue unique to WMP and is part of a national dilemma of recording practices for protected characteristics. Whilst the completion of these fields can be mandated, in order to collect this data, there are wider considerations.

A position on this is currently being discussed at the force 'Our Communities Board' and at a HMICFRS meeting chaired by Scott Green (DCC), in relation to the cross over with wider open recommendations on this matter.

4) PCC Commissioned Services for Victims

There was one recommendation which related to Police and Crime Commissioner's in particular. The Inspectorate recommended that consultation services should be inclusive and representative of the whole community before commissioning services for victims.

As part of the office's commitment towards partnership working, advice on ensuring a healthy provider market is provided via the Victims Commission, which allows providers and commissioners of services to collaborate.

Identifying victims of all types, ensuring that they are getting the specialist help and support needed and that connectivity between services are efficient as possible, are monitored within the Victim's Commission, at which force leads/representatives, members of the victim's team within the office and representatives of commissioned services attend. The force has a dedicated HBA/Force Marriage Lead, who attends the commission when required.

Yours faithfully,



Simon Foster

West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner