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Middle East Centre for Women's Rights and the Kurdistan  
Refugee Women Organisation's Response to ACPO Strategy on HBV

## MECWR and KRWO Response to the Association of Chief Police Officers (Draft) Honour Based Violence Strategy

### Introduction:

MECWR and KRWO are strongly supporting the voices of women's organisations and violence against women (VAW) campaigns that affirm that the UK Government must comply with its international commitment on tackling VAW. This commitment involves the development of a cross-departmental strategy to end all forms of violence against women and to form a National Strategy on VAW including all forms of gender based violence such as domestic violence, honour based violence, forced marriages, FGM, rape and sexual harassment and violence against children and young girls. Meanwhile we would like to contribute to any local or national strategies that intend to tackle any kind of violence against women.

MECWR and KRWO are pleased that ACPO is seeking our views about their (draft) Honour Based Violence Strategy. We are also pleased that this issue is now being thoroughly looked at and appropriate actions will be taken to help victims and punish perpetrators.

The following is both MECWR's and KRWO's response to the consultation questions that were asked, as well as a few additional comments on the Strategy:

### - Page 8 – Aims of ACPO HBV Strategy

We suggest the addition of one extra aim:

"To prepare police force to react effectively to potential cases of HBV; to recognise, be sensitive, understand and be aware of the early signs of potential "honour" related crimes"

### - Page 10 – " The current context" and page 11- " Review the work of ACPO to date on HBV"

We think it is important that the Metropolitan Police Department has a realistic view on what is currently going on and highlights all the positives and negatives in the current work. This is necessary in order to identify the actions that are needed to create more effective responses to potential victims.

Therefore, talking about the current context and reviewing previous work should include the weaknesses that have been identified and experienced with regards to the police response to victims. Shortfalls, such as those that occurred in response to Banaz Mahmud Babakir Agha prior to her murder, must be taken into account.

**- Page 13– Consultation question– Will placing honour based violence within a violence against women framework further alienate young men from protection and access to support services?**

No.

There have been cases of HBV where men or young boys were victims, but this is very rare compared to the number of female victims. It is important to understand that the threats of HBV are not affecting men in the same way that they are affecting women. Women are usually not standing on the same equal grounds like men are. Examples of this can be seen in home imprisonment, deprivation of education and employment, forced return to native country and many other pressures on women that are not equally placed on men. Therefore the amount and level of support services that men require is different from those that women need.

Further, placing HBV within the framework of VAW would not alienate male victims of HBV because the male victims of HBV are already accessing current DV services.

Thirdly, placing HBV within this framework would have many advantages for women who comprise the vast majority of HBV victims. This framework could make the form of violence they subjected to more greatly recognised and addressed within the larger issue of VAW that faces all women in the society.

**- Page 13 – Should HBV sit within the framework of violence against women and /or DV?**

Mainstreaming HBV to DV leads to poor responses to HBV victims. DV framework does not reflect the nature of HBV crimes, the forms of HBV and the kind of services needed to help survivors. The dimensions of HBV are not yet as clear or as concrete as Domestic Violence is for professionals working in the statutory and voluntary services. Placing HBV within the framework of DV could result women who escape HBV being treated less seriously considering the nature of the violence. Women have not been and will not be taken as seriously as they should be by police.

The definition of DV is limited to some family members, so it could not include some instances of HBV, which is much broader in its frame.

However we do support placing HBV within the framework of VAW, because this wider context will advance the service provision for HBV within the government's strategies and policies.

If HBV were placed within the VAW framework, it is important to distinguish between the two. HBV must be given the recognition as a different and

particular form of violence that affects women from communities with particular cultures, religious beliefs and norms

Also within this VAW framework, so called "honour killing" would need to be addressed specifically because of its extreme effect on women that is "taking their lives away".

It is also important to understand that the so-called "honour killing" is rooted in religious beliefs and cultural norms and values. Within the broader context of the international community these norms or cultures are supported by many powerful countries, unlike the general term of "violence against women". Honour killing is recognised in many laws and legislations in many places around the world. This is important because of the intense support that so called "honour killing" has which is affecting the Met Police's international approach to tackle this problem. The Met Police had to understand the difficulties around this issue and have mechanisms in place to deal with overseas cases where laws and governments support or allow so called "honour killing"

#### **- Page 14 – Is there a need for a separate definition of HBV?**

Yes.

Although HBV is part of the international problem of VAW, it is motivated specifically by the notion of protecting "honour". It is violence that takes place in different forms **to control the sexuality of women and young girls and to continue the ownership of women's bodies and minds**. Some forms of HBV are crimes: FGM, forced marriages and honour killing; some are breaches of rights such as home imprisonment, financial abuse, emotional abuse, deprivation from education and employment.

These different forms of HBV need to be identified and specific services are needed to tackle this particular kind of VAW. Therefore the definition of HBV is important to shape the service provision for victims of HBV

#### **Page 15– Definition of HBV**

We suggest adding to the last paragraph "Although HBV predominantly affects women from Muslim communities" or something similar to this such as, "the majority of victims are members of the Muslim Diaspora"

### **Responding to questions in Appendix 1 in the draft Strategy :**

#### **1. Do you agree with these key priorities?**

Yes, but we also suggest adding:

- Analysing previous shortfalls in honour killing cases, in order to develop good practices capable of saving lives
- To work effectively in partnership with women's rights and VAW organisations, in particular those organisations that represent women from communities that are affected by HBV
- Establish cooperation with governments and police forces from Kurdish and Middle Eastern countries, along with countries such as Pakistan and India

#### **3. How should community engagement work be developed?**

Engagement work should recognise all the unique and distinct actors within the community that can affect HBV issues. For example engaging women's organisations and providing the support they need for their work is different than engaging with community and religious leaders and the ways that these actors should be approached.

It is important to identify and select those community organisations that have modern activities for the community, that are active in integrating their clients in the wider society and don't undertake cultural and religious activities that promote discrimination against women and young girls

Met Police need to do outreach work to reach the communities. This can be done through attendance at regular community meetings, festivals, and national and religious celebrations to raise awareness against VAW and HBV. These efforts can be enhancing through leaflets and large media campaigning as well, similar to the ones used for hate crime and homophobic crimes.

In addition Met police could have a very active part in taking the following steps:

- Developing ways of restricting/criminalising any promotion of VAW and HBV by community leaders. The consequences of promoting HBV should be made very clear for the community leaders
- Raising awareness about VAW and HBV in religious schools' curriculum. Schools need to work closely with community and women's organisations in raising children's awareness about these issues
- The implementation of a series of community workshops and conferences to raise awareness about HBV and its implications for the community, its affect on children's lives and families in general
- Any training and education lessons for women, men and children in mosques need to be monitored to make sure they don't promote any discriminatory practices against women.
- Effective support and partnership working between police and women's organisations needed in order to tackle problems within the communities

#### **4. Who should lead on this work?**

There are different responsibilities with this kind of work; the work could be led by a partnership project between the government, the police, community and women's organisations. This would ensure meaningful and effective engagement in implementing the zero tolerance approach to HBV as well as raising awareness and changing discriminatory attitudes amongst the communities. This needs to be strategically planned alongside all the involved parties.

#### **6. Should tracking of HBV cases through the criminal justice system and/or civil justice system be undertaken as part of the data collation and analysis work highlighted above?**

Yes, it certainly should be, as lessons can be learned by tracking HBV cases, and future mistakes, such as those in Banaz's case, can be avoided. A specialist training will also ensure that those involved in monitoring HBV incidents can spot potential 'honour killing' victims and can intervene in the right time to help them.

Data from voluntary and women's organisations should be looked at separately and compared with the incidents reported to police to build a good understanding of the real number of women that access services.

## **7. Should a performance framework for honour based violence incidents be developed? If so, how best could this be achieved?**

Developing a performance framework for HBV will help in making sure that the needs of victims and potential victims are effectively addressed and all the necessary steps have been taken to meet these needs. It is also important to identify who your partners are going to be throughout this process, and what their role is. This will assist in effective service delivery to potential victims and survivors.

This could be achieved by strategically planning. We suggest the following points:

- Ensure that frontline staff are aware of the immediate needs of HBV survivors / potential victims, (the need to be protected immediately, believed, taken seriously, understood, have the risk assessed, with language provision in place, etc)
- Work with your local and national partners across all sectors, and agree in advance who should take care of what needs (shelters, social services, women orgs, etc)
- Have support and clear guidelines in place for police officers; officers need to be trained on how to implement the guidelines
- Have useful information about other agencies that could help with the situation; for example, a list of all the women's organisations with the languages and the services they provide
- Ensure that enough specialist units are available to provide advice and guidance to front line staff when dealing with HBV and that there is sufficient capacity within this specialist unit; the existence of these units depend on assessing the size of the problem in different areas, for example you might need a unit in the city of Westminster but you might need only one unit for another five boroughs or the whole town.
- Regularly monitoring / assessing plans, results and trainings is needed to check if Met Police keeping up to date and properly informed on what is happening
- Women should receive protection regardless of their immigration status

### **Possible checklist for the performance assessment of dealing with HBV:**

- Risk assessment on the victim, their children and any other involved people has been completed (it is important to have mechanism in place to enforce protecting the safety of the victim if they don't realise that)
- If need, a referral to immediate medical help has been made
- Language and cultural barriers have been thought of and any languages issues have been resolved, such as "use of appropriate interpreters and use female officers for interviews and taking statements"
- The suggestion to the victim to have an advocate, a referral could be made immediately by the frontline staff
- The victim was given information about their options and the consequences of each option
- The victim was assisted in making an informed choice of what to do immediately
- The victim has information about all the services available to them

- No assumptions have been made about the victim's community background, every one is an individual and unique in their experiences
- The victim was given advice on how to keep herself (or himself) and children safe from the threat

**8. Should honour based violence be mainstreamed under violence against women or be a distinct, discrete area of work? Please state clearly your reasons for your choice.**

**Note: You will find this answer on Page 2 in this response to question from 13 of the draft Strategy.**

Mainstreaming HBV to DV leads to poor responses to HBV victims, as DV framework does not reflect the nature of HBV, the forms of HBV and the kind of services needed to help survivors. The dimensions of HBV are not yet as clear and as concrete as domestic violence is for the professionals working in the statutory and voluntary services. Placing HBV within the framework of DV would result in women escaping HBV being treated less seriously considering the nature of the violence.

The definition of DV is limited to some family members, so it could not include HBV, which is much broader in its frame.

However, we do support placing HBV within the framework of VAW because it will advance the service provision for HBV within the government's strategies and policies.

If HBV were placed within the VAW framework, it is important that HBV be given recognition as a different and particular form of violence that affects women from communities with particular cultures, religious beliefs and norms.

Also within the framework of VAW, so called "honour killing" would need to be addressed specifically because of its extreme effect on women which is "taking their lives away".

It is also important to understand that the so called "honour killing" is backed by religious beliefs and cultural norms and values. Within the international community these norms or culture is supported by many powerful countries, and are recognised in many laws and legislations that affect women in many places around the world. This is important because the kind of support that the so called "honour killing" has is affecting the Met Police's international approach to tackle this problem. The Met Police has to understand the difficulties around this issue and have mechanisms in place to deal with overseas cases where laws and governments support and legitimise "honour killing".

**9. How can children and young people at risk of honour based violence be best protected?**

First, it is important to generally identify the problems and the kind of risk that are specific to children and young people in relation to threats of HBV such as FGM, forced marriages and early end of education. Also, we must identify the communities that are affected and the areas that are affected more.

Met Police could coordinate with schools by implementing safety plans that:

- Make sure that children are aware of HBV and its different forms
- have specialist surgeries at school for children and young people to report or talk about their experiences of HBV; the need of such service could be identified with the support of the school
- Inform children and young people about this service individually in a confidential environment away from their communities or peers
- Make no assumptions about children and young people, just because they are young (for example, that they want to run away from home, that they are lying, or that they just want freedom from parents – the general assumptions about young people doesn't apply to all and making these assumptions could put the young person at risk
- To make schools aware of the cultural issues facing young girls to avoid putting them at risk of HBV. (Heshu Abdulla Younis - who was 16 and killed on 2002 by her father-, her parent was called by her teacher who reported that Heshu was failing her education because of having a boyfriend.
- Have procedures in place to insure a safe return for children who travel With their parents to home countries
- Secure appropriate places for children to protect them from any danger
- When they escape the threat of forced marriage FGM or honour killing; the current system is placing them in care homes or foster homes which is not suitable for their situation

**10. Is a web based resource tool for all practitioners and for victims and survivors an appropriate method of sharing information and developments in this area of work?**

Yes, a web based resource would be a good method for sharing information and making sure that practitioners have access to all the information needed to support them in helping potential victims. It could simultaneously be practical to raise awareness amongst young people from the affected communities who have access to these resources.

But a web based resource is not practical to help the majority of victims and survivors; because of language barriers, access to IT, as well as other barriers this method can not replace the word of mouth, outreach, large media campaigning, community newsletters and cross sector networking to reach out to hard to reach and marginalised groups of women. Therefore a web based resource tool could be a valuable asset, but awareness must also be raised in other ways.

**11. If so, who should have responsibility for this?**

See Question 4

**12. In addition to the above, how else can the police service ensure that knowledge of honour based violence is cascaded amongst its staff and with partner agencies?**

- Establish "specialist knowledge" units for advice and guidance to frontline staff; this could be found in different bases across the country and police should depend on the expertise and experiences of women's organisations for these units

- Invest time and money in training police officers; training needs the involvement of women's organisations that have the experiences and expertise in dealing with victims and are aware of poor responses from different police stations. Also training packages need to be regularly reviewed and updated to include new case studies and lessons learned from past experiences
- Establish better tools of communication across different sectors, especially those that provide immediate services to women and young girls such as "police, social services, advocacy services, women's aid organisations, refuges, home office and health authorities" to ensure effective service delivery for those under the threat of HBV
- Building trust amongst potential victims and police; this is not only about victims trusting the police and coming forward but also for the police to avoid stereotypes and trust victims when they come forward to report
- Keep in mind that victims could be blackmailed by their immigration status, which may be dependant on their partner, and that could deter them from seeking help; influencing the home office to take HBV cases more seriously is very important
- The police should also work closely with other agencies, such as the Foreign office, to bring back women who have been forced to go back to their home countries for the purpose of forced marriages and threats of honour killing
- Help produce awareness raising campaigns that challenge the precepts that justify HBV

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