

HPSP FACT SHEET

CASTE BASED ABUSE



HARMFUL PRACTICES: DEFINITION AND CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Harmful Practices are forms of violence which have been committed primarily against women and girls in communities and societies for so long that they are considered, or presented by perpetrators, as part of accepted 'cultural' practice. In these cases, religion, culture, patriarchal codes of behaviour and perceived notions of 'honour' are used by one or more perpetrators as an excuse for coercive control, threats and abuse. The most common are forced or early marriage, so called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C) and other lesser reported forms such as faith-based abuse, menstrual huts, acid attacks, so called 'corrective' rape and others. Harmful practices occur across all sexes, sexual identities and genders. They are not unique to a culture or religion. Often one and more forms of harmful practices occur at the same time, escalating risks and resulting in barriers to disclosure.

The notion of 'honour' is as relevant in broader discussions on coercive control and other forms of violence against women and girls globally. It is important that we understand this continuum while distinctively understanding the specific risks (such as multiple perpetrators) and needs of women from BME backgrounds who experience so called 'honour' based abuse and harmful practices. In the UK 'honour' based abuse and harmful practices definitions are shaped by the experiences of global majority/BME women's barriers to access, institutional racism and the specific contexts of escalation of risk in migrant and diaspora communities. Therefore, within the multiagency coordinated community response model of domestic abuse, harmful practices and so called 'honour' based abuse response is more effective when defined, informed and delivered by led by and for BME/global majority women's organizations.

WHAT IS CASTE?

The caste system originated in India as the Varna system within Vedic religion more than 3000 years ago where communities were divided into fixed social groups that aligned with their occupation. Over time this form of social stratification has been an oppressive system of hierarchies, associated with notions of impurity, exclusion and untouchability. Since affiliation is by birth, it perpetuates the fixed hierarchy and privileges[1]. The word caste has its roots in the Portuguese word Casta, meaning "race, lineage, breed" and originally, "pure or unmixed (stock or breed). Within such a system, individuals are expected to:

HPSP FACT SHEET

CASTE BASED ABUSE



- Marry exclusively within the same caste (endogamy).
- Follow lifestyles often linked to a particular occupation.
- Hold a ritual status observed within a hierarchy.
- Interact with others based on cultural notions of exclusion, with certain castes considered as either more 'pure' or more 'polluted' than others.

All of the above can take shape of systemic oppression, serious harm and death in many cases, mirroring a form of racism.

WHAT IS CASTE BASED ABUSE?

Caste-based abuse is a form of violence that is committed by people of higher caste (considered purer) against the people of lower castes (considered 'lesser human beings', 'impure' and 'polluting' to other caste groups). Caste system and caste-based abuse are practised globally[2]; however, it is generally associated with people living in and are from South Asia, particularly India[3], and its diaspora. Caste based abuse involves massive violations of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights[4].

VAWG AND CASTE BASED ABUSE ON WOMEN:

Caste based abuse vastly propagates violence against women and girls through:

- Double Assault: caste-based and gender-based discrimination[5].
- Weaponization of caste- may lead to forced marriage and dowry-based abuse (coercive demands of money and gifts from the groom and family during marriage and after).
- Rejection, backlash and abuse faced by higher caste woman married in lower castes by her own family and community.
- Rape and harassment of women from lower castes by men of higher castes because of lower caste families' social and economic dependency on them.
- Prevention of filing complaints because of fear of violence.
- Using so called 'honour' as an excuse for caste-based atrocities
- High risk of sexual violence, forced labour, slavery, and trafficking.
- Human rights violations, including violations of the rights to food, water, sanitation, healthcare, education, adequate housing, and equal participation in political, economic and social life.

HPSP FACT SHEET

CASTE BASED ABUSE



The UK Government can tackle caste-based abuse through:

- Extending anti-discrimination legislation to cover caste (i.e., using the power in the Equality Act 2010 to make caste an aspect of race).

WARNING SIGNS AND INDICATORS

- Talking about restrictions and privileges around family status, or the lack of it.
- Often caste is revealed in surnames in South Asia and elsewhere, so any fear associated with family name or status difference between families and individuals.
- Religious or ritual exclusion.
- Talking about harm that has been caused to other family members here or abroad.
- Fear of punishment or repercussions for marrying outside caste, or crossing ritual boundaries.
- Expressing that they have been excommunicated or received threats from community/family heads.
- Their movements in the area/home are strictly controlled.
- Family rows.
- A family history of relatives going missing or historical abuse.
- Feeling isolated or threatened within the marital home due to her family status.
- Hypervigilance and accompanied to places.
- Having to do chores and menial jobs in the house due to family they were born into.
- May appear and behave depressed, withdrawn, anxious or suicidal.
- May be noticeable deterioration in the victim's appearance, a lack of grooming.
- Physical injuries apparent, often frequent injuries, with the victim explaining them away as 'accidental'.
- May dress unusually to disguise bruises or injuries i.e., neck scarf in hot weather.
- Signs of financial abuse or unlawful dismissal and harassment as there are caste lobbies in workplaces globally where practising communities are present.
- Sexual abuse and harassment that are perpetuated using caste hierarchies and misogyny.

HPSP FACT SHEET

CASTE BASED ABUSE



DOS AND DONT'S

DO:

- Follow the ONE Chance rule - this may be the only opportunity you have to speak to the victim.
- Take them seriously and be patient in understanding the dynamics of power and risks.
- Consider multiple perpetrators.
- Listen to what the victim wants to happen and be honest if you will need to break their confidentiality.
- Establish safe means of contact.
- Do safety planning and recognise survivors are experts by experience.
- If under 18, follow child safeguarding procedures.
- If over 18, follow adult safeguarding procedures.
- If over 16 consider a MARAC referral.
- Offer specialist by and for support where possible (see agency details below).
- Be extremely careful how information is recorded and shielded within your organisation.
- Be led by survivors in risk management as they are experts by experience and understand their context best.
- **ALWAYS REMEMBER - IN AN EMERGENCY DIAL 999.**

DONT'S:

- Attempt to mediate.
- Send them away.
- Let the family, community or social network know about the disclosure or use them for translation.
- Meet in a place where you could be seen by a member of the family/ community.
- Use members of the family or community to interpret.
- Underestimate the perpetrator/s of Caste based abuse or any form of harmful practices.
- Underestimate the risk even if there have been no previous reports - CBA can escalate very quickly and is often silenced and underreported.

HPSP FACT SHEET

CASTE BASED ABUSE



AGENCIES

You can refer cases and enquire about training on harmful practices via your local P&ACT Ending Harmful Practices Agencies:

Women and Girls Network - Bromley, Ealing & Hounslow

Email: rcc@wgn.org.uk Phone: 0808 801 0660

Phoenix (P&ACT) Project at PLIAS Resettlement - Barnet, Brent, H&F, Harrow & Ealing

Email: shirley.ricketts@plias.co.uk Phone: 07494 091586 or 0208 838 6800

Midaye - H&F, Kensington & Chelsea, Westminster

Email: contact@midaye.org.uk Phone: 07593440944

FORWARD - Croydon, Bexley, Greenwich & Merton

Email: forward@forwarduk.org.uk Phone: 0208 960 4000

Southall Black Sisters - Ealing, Hillingdon & Hounslow

Email: info@southallblacksisters.co.uk Phone: 020 8571 9595

Ashiana Network - Barking & Dagenham, Havering, Newham, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets & Waltham Forest

Email: info@ashiana.org.uk Phone: 02085390427

IKWRO Women's Rights Organization - Camden, Enfield, Merton, Southwark & Sutton

Email: info@ikwro.org.uk Phone: 020 7920 6460

Kurdish and Middle Eastern Women's Organization - Enfield, Hackney, Haringey & Islington

Email: referrals@kmewo.com Phone: 020 72631027

Latin American Women's Rights Service - City of London, Haringey, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark & Sutton

Email: priscila@lawrs.org.uk Phone: 020 7336 0888

Asian Women's Resource Centre - Brent, Barnet, Kensington & Chelsea, Richmond & Harrow

Email: info@awrc.org.uk Phone: 020 8961 6549

DVIP - Kensington & Chelsea, Kingston upon Thames, Lambeth & Wandsworth

Email: DVIP.al-aman@richmondfellowship.org.uk Phone: 020 8563 2250

IMECE - Barking & Dagenham, Hackney, Islington, Lewisham, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets & Waltham Forest

Email: vawgferral@imece.org.uk Phone: 0207 354 1959

HPSP FACT SHEET

CASTE BASED ABUSE



REFERENCES

[1] Rejection of caste, its (by birth) membership or getting membership of a religion which rejects caste does not protect against being perceived as having a caste and be treated as a member of that caste. In addition, caste may be hidden, unidentified or misidentified.

[2] Caste discrimination affects an estimated 260 million people worldwide, the vast majority living in South Asia. Estimates of the size of the low caste population in Britain vary between 50,000 and 200,000 or more.

[3] Notably, even though not all religions in India theologically recognize a caste system, nearly all Indians (98%) identify as a member of a caste, regardless of their religious background. For example, 33% of Christians in India identify as SC, even though Christianity does not traditionally have a caste system. According to Human Rights Watch: Inhuman, and degrading treatment of over 165 million people in India has been justified based on caste.

[4] Statistics compiled by India's National Crime Records Bureau indicate that in the year 2000, the last year for which figures are available, 25,455 crimes were committed against Dalits. Every hour two Dalits are assaulted; every day three Dalit women are raped, two Dalits are murdered, and two Dalit homes are torched. Due to underreporting and hidden nature of these forms of oppression, these numbers do not capture the extent of prevalence.

[5] Dalit* women are particularly hard hit. They are frequently raped or beaten as a means of reprisal against male relatives who are thought to have committed some act worthy of upper-caste vengeance. They are also subject to arrest if they have male relatives hiding from the authorities.

* "Dalits", also known as 'Untouchables,' are the members of the lowest social group in the Hindu caste system. The word "Dalit" means "oppressed" or "broken" and is the name members of this group gave themselves in the 1930s. A Dalit is actually born below the caste system, which includes four primary castes: Brahmins (priests), Kshatriya (warriors and princes), Vaishya (farmers and artisans), and Shudra (tenant farmers and servants).