

HPSP FACT SHEET

SPIRITUAL 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 SPIRITUAL ABUSE?

Spiritual abuse is abuse which is carried out in a religious context. Perpetrators exploit the power dynamics inherent in religious contexts to assert dominance and control over victims. It can include using religion to justify abuse, as well as restricting victims from practicing their faith. Spiritual abuse can manifest in various ways, including the manipulation of religious practices to exert control and intimidate victims. It may be a form of domestic abuse if carried out by a partner, ex-partner or family member, but can also be perpetrated by religious leaders or members of the wider religious community. Spiritual abuse can overlap with other forms of harmful practice such as 'honour' based abuse, forced marriage and conversion 'therapy'.

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Spiritual abuse may include:

- Misusing religious texts or beliefs to justify abuse (physical, sexual, economic, etc.).
- Enforced accountability, surveillance or isolation using religious justification.
- Forcing the victim to take part in spiritual or religious practices against their will.
- Preventing the victim from taking part in spiritual or religious practices or ridiculing their religious, cultural or spiritual beliefs.
- Forcing the individual to convert to a new religion.
- Causing harm, isolation or neglect to someone to get rid of a 'spirit' or 'evil force'(witchcraft).
- Demand that children be raised a certain way or with/without a certain religion
- Refusing to grant or accept a divorce claiming that the survivor remains his wife in God's eyes.
- Requirement of obedience to the perpetrator of domestic abuse, owing to religion or faith, or their 'divine' position.
- Using religion as a justification to attempt to 'convert' someone who is LGBT+.
- Forcing acts that contradict religious observance and/ or religious law e.g., pre-marital sex or abortion.
- Using religious divorce as a means to threaten and control individuals.

WARNING SIGNS & INDICATORS INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:

- No longer attending their place of worship.
- Isolated from friends and faith community.
- Conversion to a religion the individual has previously shown no interest in.
- Rapid increased change in perceived religiosity.
- Individual minimising abuse on the grounds that it is justified in their religion.
- Absence from school or place of work.
- Withholding access to finances.
- Invoking "God" to forgive for abusive behaviour.

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DOS AND DONT'S

DO:

- Follow the ONE Chance rule - this may be the only opportunity you have to speak to the victim.
- Ensure that you see the client alone.
- Be trauma informed in approach and be led by survivors as they are experts by experience.
- Take them seriously and be patient in understanding the dynamics of power and risks.
- Consider that there may be multiple perpetrators.
- Use interpreting services to communicate with client if needed.
- Believe the person and ensure their safety.
- Listen to what the victim/ survivor wants to happen and be honest if you will need to break their confidentiality (e.g., if a child is at risk).
- Establish safe means of contact.
- Demonstrate an understanding of weaponisation of faith.
- Validate the victim/ survivors experiences of spiritual abuse as a method of power and control.
- Offer specialist support (see agency details below).
- Be extremely careful how information is recorded and shielded within your organisation.
- If under 18, follow child safeguarding procedures.
- If over 18, follow adult safeguarding procedures.
- If over 16 consider a MARAC referral.
- **ALWAYS REMEMBER - IN AN EMERGENCY DIAL 999.**

DONT'S:

- Attempt to mediate.
- Send them away.
- Let the family, community, social network or religious leaders know about the disclosure.
- Meet in a place where you could be seen by a member of the family/ community.
- Use members of the family, community or place of worship to interpret.
- Dismiss their faith and ask them to leave their faith or place of worship.
- Underestimate the perpetrator/s of religious and spiritual abuse.
- Underestimate the risk even if there have been no previous reports.

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FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information on 'conversion' therapy or support for LGBT+ victim/ survivors see Galop's website: www.galop.org.uk/types-of-abuse/conversion-therapies-practices

Read more about spiritual abuse:

www.faithandvawg.contentfiles.net/media/documents/Spiritual_Abuse_Guidance_-_Faith_and_VAWG.pdf

Black Church Domestic Abuse Forum: www.bcdaf.org.uk

AGENCIES

Jewish Women's Aid Helpline: 0808 801 0500

Galop: 0800 999 5428

Sikh Women's Aid: 0333 090 1220

Muslim Women's Network Helpline: 0800 999 5786

Restored: www.restored-uk.org

Muslim Women Advisory Council: www.mwacuk.org

You can also 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: vawgreferral@imece.org.uk Phone: 0207 354 1959