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The experience of interactional justice for victims of ‘honour’-based violence and abuse reporting to the police in England and Wales

Natasha Mulvihill ^a, Geetanjali Gangoli^a, Aisha K. Gill^b and Marianne Hester^a

^aCentre for Gender and Violence Research, School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol, Bristol, UK; ^bDepartment of Social Sciences, University of Roehampton, London, UK

ABSTRACT

Interactional justice is concerned with how far victims feel (i) respected by justice officials (‘interpersonal justice’) and (ii) informed about the progress of their case and the justice process overall (‘informational justice’) [Laxminarayan, M., Henrichs, J., and Pemberton, A. (2012). Procedural and interactional justice: a comparative study of victims in the Netherlands and New South Wales. *European journal of criminology*, 9 (3), 260–275; Laxminarayan, M. (2013). Interactional justice, coping and the legal system: needs of vulnerable victims. *International review of victimology*, 19 (2), 145–158]. This paper explores the experience of interactional justice for victims of ‘honour’-based violence and abuse (HBVA) who report to the police in England and Wales. HBVA refers to abuse perpetrated with reference to ideas of ‘shame’ and ‘honour’. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 36 victims of HBVA across England. This paper documents their experience and extends the framework of interactional justice proposed by Laxminarayan *et al.* (2012). First, we identify intersectionality, in particular, the positions of gender, ethnicity and immigration status within the victim–officer encounter, as central to interpreting the interpersonal experiences of HBVA victims with police. Second, we find that how information is used and delivered can be as important as the content and timeliness of communication. Twenty of our sample of 36 participants were happy with the initial police response, but only 9 were happy with their reporting experience overall. We argue that focusing on HBVA victims’ interaction with justice actors could enable us to understand and improve HBVA victims’ experience of, and satisfaction with, the justice system overall.

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KEYWORDS

Honour-based violence and abuse; interactional justice; gender; policing

1. Introduction

This paper explores the experience of victims of ‘honour’-based violence and abuse (HBVA) who report to the police in England and Wales. While there is an established literature on the experiences of victims¹ of domestic and sexual violence and abuse who report (see MacQueen and Norris 2016, for a recent overview), the testimonies of those reporting HBVA is relatively small (Gill *et al.* 2014, Begikhani *et al.* 2015). Figures collated by government, statutory and non-governmental organisations suggest that HBVA is significantly under-reported and cases which are reported to the police infrequently lead to conviction. We consider victims’ experience of the police as critical to

CONTACT Natasha Mulvihill  natasha.mulvihill@bristol.ac.uk

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understanding their perception of justice and in this paper use the framework of interactional justice (Laxminarayan *et al.* 2012, Laxminarayan 2013) to analyse this encounter. The data derives from work commissioned in 2015 by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC).²

There is no separate criminal offence of HBVA in England and Wales and so cases may be flagged under a range of legislation, including injury with assault or harassment, for example. This makes understanding the national picture on the prevalence of HBVA difficult. Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) data for 2014/2015 indicate that there were 216 referrals to the CPS from the police for HBVA-related offences, of which 67% resulted in charges being brought and 182 completed prosecutions for HBVA, with 91 (50%) resulting in a conviction.³

Based on the previous research on the attrition of cases of domestic and sexual violence from reporting to prosecution (Hester 2006, Hohl and Stanko 2015, Hester and Lilley 2017) and indeed evidence that the majority of such victims do not report these offences to the police (see for example, Home Office and Ministry of Justice 2013, Women's Aid 2015, p. 11), we might infer that the annual number of victims in England and Wales affected by HBVA is significantly higher than the 200 or so identified by the CPS figures in 2014–2015. A Freedom of Information request submitted to every police force in England Wales in 2016, asking how many reports of honour-based violence they had received between January 2011 and August 2016, revealed 7048 reports to police, with most incidents recorded as assaults, threats to kill and kidnap.⁴ Karma Nirvana, a leading charity supporting victims of honour abuse and forced marriage, reported in 2016 receiving around 700 calls to their helpline each month.

Using the framework of interactional justice, this paper documents the experiences of 36 victims of HBVA in England and Wales and explores how the victim encounter with police can inform their experience of justice overall.

2. Literature review

HBVA has become increasingly visible as a 'policy problem' (Bacchi 2009) within the UK over the past 10 years (Welchman and Hossain 2005, Brandon and Hafez 2008, Chantler *et al.* 2009, Idriss and Abbas 2010, Thiara and Gill 2010, Gill *et al.* 2014, Begikhani *et al.* 2015, Julios 2015). In broad terms, HBVA relates to abuse perpetrated against individuals who are perceived to have acted contrary to values or norms identified by a community as consistent with 'honour'.⁵ By doing so, individuals are deemed to bring 'dishonour' and/or 'shame' to their family and community. The enforcement of such expectations is targeted most commonly at girls and women, relating, for example, to pre-marital relationships, choice of clothing or make-up, adherence to faith practices or participating in paid work. Abuse is also directed at young men who, for example, seek to marry outside their community or who are not heterosexual.

HBVA ranges from emotional, financial and coercive control to physical, sexual abuse and threats. Consistent with developments in gender-based violence generally (see Henry and Powell 2016), victims are also reporting abuse mediated online. Perpetrators include intimate partners, parents, siblings, relations, in-laws and other non-family members of the community. In some cases, victims have been murdered.⁶ Indeed, we observe how such high-profile cases were part of the impetus for the 2015 HMIC inspection into HBVA and how they create the space for focusing public attention on the wider phenomena of *non-fatal* HBVA in England and Wales. It should be noted that while HBVA in the UK is particularly associated with communities with Asian, Middle Eastern or African heritage, the idea of women and girls being responsible by their behaviour for maintaining the standing of a family or community or the practice of obliging women (and men) to marry to maintain financial or social capital is common to many societies and groups, both historically and in the present (for further discussion, see Gangoli *et al.* 2011).

Although there is an overlap between domestic abuse and abuse perpetrated in the name of honour, HBVA is not simply 'domestic violence experienced within ethnic communities' (see also Reddy [2014] in Gill *et al.* 2014). The invocation of honour in the perpetration of abuse layers

additional constraints and harms for the victim, which need to be separately understood to respond appropriately. This presents a challenge for police officers both in terms of knowledge and judgment (see for example, Belur 2008, p. 433, Idriss 2017, pp. 8–11).

In this paper, we assess the experience of justice for victims in terms of their interaction with the police. The experience of engaging with the justice system can differ markedly. It can improve victims' mental health (see for example, Wexler's (1993) discussion of 'therapeutic jurisprudence') or indeed intensify their distress (see for example, Parsons and Bergin's (2010) review of 'secondary victimisation'). A common approach to analysing victim experiences is to compare process and outcome. For example, Lind and Tyler (1988) identify how *procedural justice* focuses on the fairness of the process by which decisions are made by justice actors, as opposed to *distributive justice* which emphasises the fairness of the decision outcome. Of interest here is the theory of *interactional justice*. Developed in the field of organisational studies by Bies and Moag (1986), this work translates intuitively to victim studies. It combines two elements: informational justice, which relates to how far individuals are given explanations about the process and progress of their case, and interpersonal justice, which refers to victims' personal experience of justice officials (Laxminarayan *et al.* 2012, p. 262).

So while procedural and distributive justice are concerned with fairness, interactional justice assumes that victims of crime are concerned (in addition, or to a greater or lesser extent) with feeling respected and feeling informed (see also Shapland *et al.* 1985, Wemmers 2013). Interactional justice has been linked both to victims' ability to cope (Laxminarayan 2013) and, possibly relatedly, to a sense of self-worth and a sense of belonging within society (Murphy and Barkworth 2014).

Yet different victims may place different value on aspects of the justice process. For example, Hickman and Simpson (2003) found that within their sample of 180 victims of domestic violence, women were more likely to call the police again if they were satisfied with a previous case outcome. This appeared to matter more than how they perceived their interpersonal treatment by police. On the other hand, semi-structured interviews by Elliott *et al.* (2012) with 110 victims of a mix of predominantly violence-related, but also property-related crimes, suggest that while the desired case outcome mattered, procedural justice concerns were at least as important to victims. We note, therefore, the difficulty of making generalisations both across and within groups of victims defined by crime type and of trying to 'measure' the therapeutic (or harmful) effects of HBVA victims' engagement with the police. Indeed, writing from the field of gender-based violence, we note that most victims either do not come to the attention of the authorities or do not see their perpetrators prosecuted.

Thirty-four of the 36 women who participated in this study responded to questions on their satisfaction with reporting to the police. Of those 34, 20 were happy with the initial police response, but only 9 were happy with their reporting experience overall. We start, therefore, from the assumption that what occurs in the encounters between victims and police matters. Our purpose in this paper is to document the testimonies of HBVA victims concerning their initial and ongoing contact with police. This work adds to existing and emerging empirical studies in this area (including Aplin 2017, Idriss 2017) and is part of a broader agenda exploring how justice is sought and experienced by victims of gender-based violence.

3. Methodology

The research team carried out semi-structured interviews with 36 victims of HBVA in locations across England over the period 1 June to mid-August 2015. Victims of HBVA can be 'difficult to reach' in that their movements may be strictly controlled, with access to phone or Internet or association with friends, work colleagues or outside professionals monitored or limited. They may also be subject to insecure immigration status, financial control and language barriers. We were mindful that potential participants were not placed at additional risk (physical or emotional) by engaging in the research. For these reasons, we worked in collaboration with specialist non-governmental organisations

(NGOs) to ensure participants were being supported during and after the interview. We contacted 32 NGOs and were able to organise participant interviews through nine. We also identified a small number of (supported) participants through snowball sampling.

Individuals were initially contacted by the NGO and provided with information about the aims and objectives of the project and an outline of the interview question schedule. Those who agreed to participate then signed a consent form, which included their right to withdraw from the research within seven days of the interview (which none exercised). The participants were interviewed in English or their preferred language by our multilingual research team. Where required, participant information sheets (explaining the background and aims of the research) and consent forms (for participants to signal their willingness to take part and to indicate specific permission to, for example, audio record the interview) were translated into participants' first language. Interviews lasted on average 60–90 minutes. Participants were offered the choice, where possible, of an individual interview or group interview. There were 31 individual interviews and one group interview with 5 participants. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, carefully anonymised and thematically coded using the qualitative analysis software package NVIVO.

The research was granted ethical approval through the University of Bristol.

4. Overview of sample

All of our samples were women. We received no referrals of male victims, despite making extensive contact with relevant organisations. We asked participants to self-identity their country of origin and/or ethnic identity, illustrated in [Figure 1](#). Three participants self-identified as 'Mixed Asian' and we include one further participant in this category, whose ethnicity was not disclosed. Interviews were conducted in nine different languages, including Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi, Kurdish and Farsi.

Where participants were willing to disclose, we noted the force area and/or location of the police station that they attended. We recorded 27 separate locations across London, South East, South West, West Midlands, East Midlands, North East and North West. Participants were drawn from both urban and rural areas.

Participants experienced HBVA (including forced marriage) perpetrated by their husband and wider family or within their community. [Figure 2](#) summarises the types of abuse that they endured.

'Coercive control' refers to ongoing oppressive behaviours used by perpetrators including violence, intimidation, degradation, isolation and control (Stark 2007). For the analysis in [Figure 2](#), we

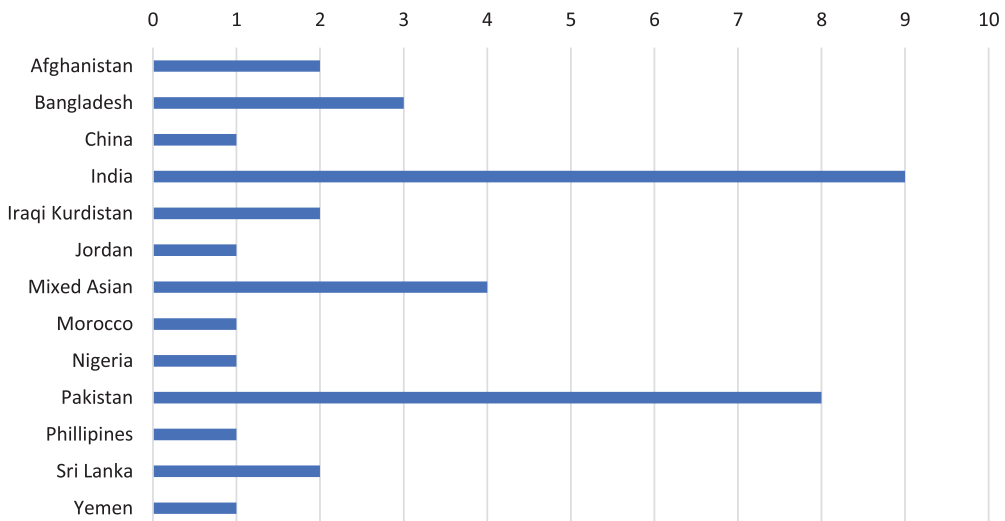


Figure 1. Countries of origin or ethnicity self-identified by interview participants (sample size, $n = 36$).

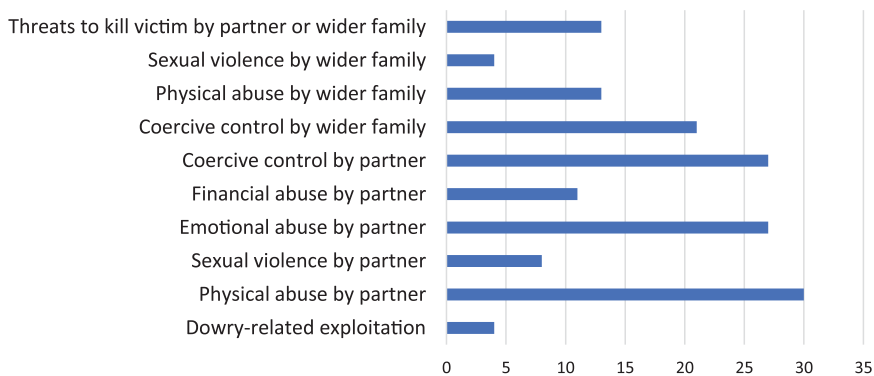


Figure 2. Abuse experienced by HBV interviewees within sample ($n = 36$).

use it to separate out controlling experiences commonly articulated by HBVA participants, including house arrest, removing passport, withholding visa documents and attempts to shame the victim using the Internet, email and social media. ‘Emotional abuse’ included manipulation and blackmail relating to children or to the victim’s insecure immigration status. ‘Financial abuse’ included withholding or taking money from the victim and preventing them from taking employment. ‘Wider family’ included the husband’s parents and siblings and other relatives through marriage (three victims within this category also described abuse from members of their ethnic or religious community). Dowry-related exploitation occurred, for example, where the in-laws made exorbitant demands (in terms of money and/or gifts) on the bride’s family and thereby increased the pressure on victims to stay within the marriage to maintain the family’s ‘honour’.

Common to these experiences was the complicity, minimisation and even participation in HBVA—including physical and sexual violence – by the husband’s family, members of whom often lived in the same house as the couple. A prevalent pattern within this group was that the woman had come from overseas to live with her UK-based and/or UK-born husband.

Poor mental health following the experience of abuse was common to around a third of the 36 participants. Two had attempted self-harm, including suicide, and 11 told us they were currently taking medication for anxiety or depression.

5. Findings

In this section, we present the interview findings under five sub-headings to represent the victim–police encounter from start to finish. These are: the decision to report; the initial police response; risk assessment and safety planning; understanding of the criminal justice process and use of legal measures; and case closure.

5.1. The decision to report

What was immediately clear from the interviews is that the phrase ‘decision’ to report can over-state the agency and intention of victims in that moment. Half of our participants described contacting the police at a point of crisis: for example, during, or within hours of, an incident where victims were under imminent threat of physical harm, including attempts to kill. Three victims contacted the police while locked in the bathroom, with the perpetrators of abuse making threats outside the door.

He hit me three times that day and then say ‘I’m gonna sort you out in a minute’. Then I’m really, really scared, he took my keys from my bag, and he locked front door, he turned the hoover on and my husband he shouting and abused me like he hit me very badly then he go downstairs again and I call one of my friends and I said, ‘I am not safe, please help me’. Then she said ‘Come out, I’m just out, I am outside coming to your house in two minutes’. Then I just ran outside and I ring the police station.

Where reporting occurred in this context of desperation, victims were often too traumatised to articulate what had happened when police arrived at the scene. Some victims would later retract a statement made in this brief period of safety and respite provided by officers, explaining that they felt unable to pursue the matter further, for fear of ‘dishonouring’ the family.

Interviewer: So when you were sitting in the [police] car, did you tell him [the police officer], did you feel comfortable enough to tell him that you were really, really frightened?

Participant: No, I was very, very frightened. I was only able to speak two or three words, then I started crying. My problem is, with that time, because I just stopped thinking at that time. It was not my conscious decision to call the police it was because somebody advised me and I was, when I was in the police van I was like I’m safe, I’m alive and that was enough for me so I didn’t have enough time to talk about my experience.

The police came, I went to the neighbour. I said to the police, arrest him [her husband]. My brother-in-law came and said, don’t arrest him, it is our family matter and we will be dishonoured. I was foolish. I said okay.

It was clear that the mechanics of reporting are not straightforward for victims who were under effective house arrest or for whom all forms of communication were either monitored or removed. Victims identified alternative reporting avenues – including online- or app-based reporting – as critical. Others identified friends, work colleagues, GPs or NGOs and family members – including family members in their home country – as aiding or encouraging victims to report.

Some victims coming from overseas said that they did not know how to contact the police or – and this included UK-born victims – did not see the police as the appropriate organisation to contact, particularly if they perceived such abuse as a ‘private’ or ‘family’ issue, outside the remit of the state.

Participant: My brother sent me a text on ‘WhatsApp’ to ask the police to come and at that time I wasn’t even aware of the police number in England cos I was so new.

Interviewer: Can I just ask, when you were frightened about being in the house and him coming to the house all the time, did you ever call the police to tell them what was happening?

Participant: No. No.

Interviewer: Why was that? Why didn’t you call the police?

Participant: I didn’t know if that was something that the police could help me with.

5.2. The initial police response

A number of participants expressed their relief at the quick response – in many cases, within ‘minutes’ – of the police and the supportive manner of the responding officers. The role of the police in quickly providing safety from physical harm is for victims of HBVA a prized function.

Interviewer: When your son called, did the police come promptly?

Participant: Whenever we have called them they have come very quickly, in a blink of an eye. [...]

Interviewer: How do you assess the police response?

Participant: They were very helpful to me, spoke nicely to me and the children.

Took my husband away from the home.

Several issues were raised about that initial arrival and response. First, it was important that the police acted sensitively while they established what had happened. This included not, for example, attempting to interview the victim in front of the perpetrators, as this put her at significant risk of harm. Similarly, if the police were attending the house as a result of a tip-off from a neighbour, for example, participants suggested that initially the police could use a cover story to be able to access and interview the victim alone, to ascertain the facts. This was because a visit by the police is seen as bringing ‘trouble’ to the family in a very public way, potentially invoking shame within the community, which will have consequences for the victim. For example, this victim relates a visit at 10 pm by a lone male police officer who responded to a report to the police that she had made online, where she had included her name though not her address.

Participant: When [the police officer] entered the house, my mother-in-law was sitting in front of me, and my husband, he was upstairs. I basically said there was no way I could talk with them in the home. [The police

officer] was not aware that they were listening to what's going on ... so I said, 'I can't talk to you here – they're just standing outside', he [the police officer] was just not aware of what was happening.

If the police were unable to see the victim or decided that no further action was needed and left the premises, they could again put the victim at significant risk of harm. HMIC identify these opportunities in the accompanying inspection report as the 'one chance rule' (HMIC 2015, p. 85 and footnote 83). Participants wanted officers to be aware of the significant internal conflict that victims may be experiencing at the scene. For example, if the victim did leave the house with the officers, participants felt that this was likely to be a decision which the woman made knowing that 'there was no going back'.

So this was the biggest thing that could have happened, so they [the police] didn't understand the dynamics of our culture ... how Pakistani family ... and if the police shows up that's not normal, and what they would do to me once they leave.

The gender and ethnicity of responding officers was a knotty issue within participant accounts. For many of the victims reporting HBVA, it was felt important to have access to a female officer.

Yeah, then she gave me another ladies number cos I felt really good with the ladies so, I mean female police officers, so I said I don't like dealing with the male police, I would like to have a lady.

Every time I see a male officer, straightaway it strikes me that my husband said I'm not allowed to talk to men.

Yet others felt that it was the empathetic and informed response that mattered and that this was not necessarily predicted by gender. For example, this participant recounted arriving at a police front desk to report for the first time over a decade of abuse. She became upset recalling the response of the female desk sergeant. This poor initial experience was redeemed by the male officer taking the statement.

But the woman at the desk she was just like, 'So are you going to make a complaint?' She was so flippant and just didn't want to listen to what I was saying. I was standing there, and she was like, 'Well what do you want me to do? Do you want to make a statement?' And I said, 'Well I just need help. I don't know where to go, I don't know what to do'. Because for years I have been controlled by this man [interviewee becomes upset] and I knew I had to get away. [...] So I said 'Yeah, I'll make a statement'. And then I met another police officer and I have to say he was amazing. He said, 'I know this won't be the first time he has hit you, you don't have to say anything you don't want to'. He was really understanding. He said, 'I want to know the basics and how I can help you'. And I felt like 'at last, you know?

In the context of reporting HBVA, ethnic matching between the victim and the responding officer could have both positive and negative impacts. For example, in the following case, this victim described how she was made to feel uncomfortable – even at risk – by an officer who foregrounded their supposed common identity and community ties:

So the [other force] policeman came to [victim's new address, unaccompanied] and he was Asian as well [...] He did the full risk assessment and then right at the end, what really shocked me is, he was Asian, and he's from [location], he goes: 'Oh, you do understand that in [location]' ... he goes, 'because one to one I'm just telling you that in [location], all Asian families they know each other, and they know what's going on ... so for you, when you left, you realise that it's a bit of a ... your honour's basically gone. You do realise that it's gone because everyone else knows, and ...' he [says], 'I know what it's like because I'm Asian as well, because they're your family, that's your mum at the end of the day. So if you feel like ... it's good if you do ever talk to them again [...]'. Of course, then I was like, he's Asian, he's from [location], forget it, I'm not going to, I wouldn't say anything after that so I didn't tell him anything.

For another participant, despite initial misgivings about the ethnicity of her allocated officer, she is relieved to find that the officer can draw on their shared cultural knowledge to provide real insight and support:

So, with her ethnicity that was a big fear, and to be honest I was really scared now to trust anyone who was from a similar ethnicity, because it's really hard ... I know people think, why would you think that way? But I've experienced it loads of times and you really cannot trust anyone from a similar ethnicity. So that was a really big fear, I

was quite scared to meet her. I met her, and basically that's how the whole thing started, and she has been a tremendous help in my case.

5.3. Risk assessment and safety planning

Participant accounts demonstrated the importance of police being trained to recognise common responses of HBVA victims to questioning. Either victims did not disclose the full picture of abuse or they were reluctant to press charges or to move to safe accommodation because of family pressure to safeguard 'honour' by returning to the marital home. None of our interviewees were aware that it was possible for the police and CPS to bring the perpetrator to court, without the victim's cooperation.

Participant: Yeah, they asked me what happened and did he hit me or not. They asked me do I have any friends around to go there. Things like this, yeah. And they asked me to go back and stay there.

Interviewer: So, did you tell them that you can't go back?

Participant: Yeah, I said I don't wanna go back.

Interviewer: Ok, did you feel that they actually they understood the risk you were under?

Participant: No, no, because I myself did not explain enough for them that he punched me and pushed me down the stairs; I just said we had got some arguments; therefore, they didn't take it so seriously and they said go back upstairs.

One participant showed interviewers a document suggesting that the views of the family (the perpetrators) were used as a basis for the assessment of risk. Given the prevalence of familial collusion in HBVA, this approach is problematic.

Interviewer: No action was taken against them at all? By the police?

Participant: No, no, no [...] Because my in-laws were constantly saying, 'We are sending her back to India' [...] And the police said, 'Oh if she's going back to India there is no risk then' [...] That was in the report I read. That the no risk has been assessed, that [name] is here in the country on the basis of spouse visa which was issued to her because of her husband. And so she's now, if she's not living with them she has to go back to India and her husband is giving her a paid ticket.

Another way in which risk assessments⁷ may not accurately capture the specific threats that an HBVA victim may face is the context of intra-familial marriage. This participant explained how the connectedness of families could mean that staying even temporarily with a relative was difficult:

My uncle and auntie [said] 'You come home with us'. But they were frightened that we are all related. [...] So they were scared that neighbours would see the police come and go and talk. So after three days the police took me away.

We identified 13 victims who had insecure immigration status, including having no recourse to public funds, which they felt made access to safe accommodation and support difficult. Some described enduring abuse for fear of being thrown out of the country and/or the threat of separation from children. Their status raised particular cross-border policing issues, where for example, they were receiving threats to kill from abroad. While one police force said there was nothing they could do in this situation: we identified examples within three other victims' accounts where police had agreed to monitor victims' movements in and out of the country. In one of these three cases, police had set up a port warning to monitor a family member making threats from abroad. The precarious situation of women with insecure immigration status is summarised well by this participant:

What many people don't get is that, for me, because I'm not from this country, I really don't have that many rights, because the moment I'm taken out from this country, there is nothing, there is no one who can protect me.

We heard also that the perpetrators of HBVA may tell the police that the victim is making accusations because she is looking for a visa or right to remain. In some cases, our research participants felt this was indeed how they were perceived by the police. They wanted officers to recognise separately their pursuit of justice from their immigration status.

Other participants were moved to temporary and potentially insecure accommodation, while a refuge place was sought. The lack of provision over Friday to Sunday was identified as problematic by a number of interviewees.

Participant: So after three days the police took me away.

Interviewer: Where did they take you? [...] Did they take you to a refuge?

Participant: No. Some woman took me to a hotel. There was a pub below and my room above.

Interviewer: How did you feel there?

Participant: Very bad. I was scared. I didn't go out for two days. They told me there is breakfast at 9 am but I couldn't go. I didn't eat for two days. Then [name of worker] from [NGO] came, she came to help me. She took me from the pub and roamed about with me for so many days to help me.

Interviewer: And so where did they take you?

Participant: To Butlins- it's a holiday resort or something. They took a room there, temporary accommodation. And I took some clothes and all the needs for my son and went there.

One participant was left by police outside a hotel without food or money with her two small children: she did not hear from officers for three days. Another recounted an extraordinary story of being taken to a hotel by police on a Friday night but not having enough money to stay more than one night. She decided the following morning that her safest option was to travel up and down the route of a 24-hour bus, where she was befriended by a lady who brought her back to her house to stay for the night. The lack of accommodation and the lack of police contact meant this participant was at considerable risk from other potential abusers. Pregnant and facing limited choices, she returned home to her husband and perpetrator.

Administrative carelessness also put participants at risk. This participant stressed the importance of safeguarding victims' details.

Participant: Then what happened was that [...] I went to the police station to deposit the house keys of my old house. They asked for my address, and name. The police gave the keys to [the husband] and with that they gave him the address of my new house where I had shifted.

Interviewer: They gave him your address?

Participant: Yes, by mistake. I think if they had taken this matter seriously, they wouldn't have given him the address. [...] They came to me, to my new house and said, 'You are not safe here, we will move you again'. I said to them, 'I am not moving again. You have created this mess, how many times can I keep running away from him? He is sitting there happily, I am running here and there with my children'.

The experience of this participant raises an important issue about safety planning for HBVA (and indeed domestic violence and abuse) victims. The default position is often that women (and their children) are moved to a place of safety, with the concomitant emotional and practical impact, including loss of belongings or moving school, while the perpetrator stays in the family home. Participants who were named on the mortgage or council flat flagged in interviews how this put them at risk of financial loss.

He [the police officer] said, you know, we can get you to a refuge or find you and the kids somewhere to go. And I just thought, well actually, my name is on that house. So is there any way that I can go back to that house? And looking back, I can see his [the police officer's] concern was whether it was safe for me to go back? And I said, 'Well, if he's not there'. So him [the police officer] being quick thinking, he said 'We could arrest him now on the basic details of what he's done. And get him out. And then you can go back'. So that's what we did.

We noted too how victims continued to experience financial abuse in the loss and retrieval of personal effects, following the removal of the woman from the marital home was a recurrent theme in the interviews. In general, although this experience was marked by the threat of harm, police advised women that it was a 'civil' matter. This participant is supported by two police officers to return home to collect her personal belongings but was upset by how her family and ex-husband appear to act with impunity.

[A]nd my in-laws, my husband was there [...] my mother-in-law, she was swearing at me. Even they [the police officers] don't understand, Punjabi, but they can understand English [...] and he [the husband] was totally swearing at me [in English], he was full confidence, and I was with police officer and I was helpless that time as well,

even with police officers. [...] I was with them [the police officers] in the car after 15–20 minutes, I was shivering badly.

Another described how her ex-husband turned up on the day she was moving out of the marital home to stand by and hurl abuse. After taking safety in a neighbour's house, she returned into the house to find a number of items missing, including her dowry jewellery. The police were subsequently unable to find evidence of theft.

Some victims did report positive and cooperative experiences where the police tried to find suitable accommodation and provided interim security measures. One victim, for example, received exceptional care and proactive policing when the police met her at the airport each time she returned from her home country. In addition, a force HBVA specialist noted that on one trip the victim's flight plan had been diverted to India and got in contact to find out if she needed help. The officer's hunch was correct: the victim had been subject to attempted forced marriage. One participant spoke of receiving a personal alarm and another a 'Text Us' phone which made them feel significantly more secure. This was in marked contrast to the participants who were recommended simply to call '999' if they felt at risk.

And I said to [the police officer], I said, and now they are free again. Now like my husband, ex, he have a bad anger, he can do whatever he want now. Because he know my whole family is here in England [...]. She said, 'We can't do anything – if they did [try to do anything], you can dial 999 and your family can [too]'.

In summary then, victims described poor experiences as characterised by no contact at all or for long periods after the initial report, by being directed simply to call 999 if needed or by contact only being maintained through the perseverance of the victim. The impact of no contact by the police meant that some victims were prey to pressure to return to the family, putting them (and their children) at significant risk of harm. As this quote illustrates, given the context of coercive control, police may need to be proactive in checking in on the safety of victims.

Interviewer: Did they [the police] follow up with you?

Participant: No because he asked me to change my number, so the police can't call me.

5.4. Understanding of the criminal justice process and use of legal measures

Knowing the options available through the criminal, civil and family justice systems and then navigating practically through the court processes is a daunting task for most victims of crime in England and Wales. It is additionally hard for those victims who are vulnerable to coercion, fearful for their own and their family's safety and who face financial and language barriers or insecure immigration status.

A number of participants said that they had cases closed without understanding why or that they were unaware of what stage (if any) their case was at. Others relied on a caseworker (provided without cost by an NGO) to update them. One woman, a former solicitor in her home country, was confused as to how her husband could be cleared in court without her attending.

How did he plead not guilty without me? I am the victim. [...] He can't do it ex-parte. Anyone can do that. If I killed someone also I could say I am not guilty, but the other party? They have to listen to both sides otherwise they can't plead guilty or you know?

One victim told us that she had been to court but the perpetrator was found 'not guilty' which she said left her feeling more vulnerable. She did not appear to have been given any advice on other legal measures that could be applied to assure her and her children's safety.

While participants indicated that there were arrests in almost half of those cases which were reported to the police, we recorded three cases going to criminal court and two successful criminal convictions. Of the two convictions, one perpetrator received a fine for domestic violence and a short prison sentence (less than one month) for breaching the terms of an injunction. The other case resulted in a significant prison tariff (more than 15 years) for the perpetrator for offences including rape. Seven participants described civil measures including 'injunctions', 'bans' or 'protection

orders' being imposed against their partner. In at least two of these cases, these orders were secured through victims seeking their own legal representation. We were unable to distinguish the precise instrument (for example, an occupation order or a non-molestation order) used in these seven cases, as participants themselves were not clear on the legal details.

For participants who discussed the use of an injunction within the interview, the lack of enforcement of and/or the time limit of protection orders were problematic. Two victims acknowledged that they had CPS files open and were trying to find the strength to pursue criminal charges in court: others had given up pursuing criminal charges because of the multiple practical and emotional demands they were facing.

5.5. Case closure

In the most positive case of police contact within the sample, the victim received exceptional after-care, maintaining occasional contact with her dedicated officers. In addition, a senior officer marked the close of her court case by meeting her personally. For most of the HBVA victims in our sample (and likely victims of crime in general), understanding where they are in the justice process, being clear on possible outcomes and what, if any, options remain, are crucial to enhancing their satisfaction with the process. Not being kept up to date or treated empathetically can be re-traumatising. For this victim, for example, the case outcome was communicated by text message.

Interviewer: How did that make you feel?

Participant: I don't know. The statement said he [the police officer] tried to contact me but couldn't and then he sent a text. That's maybe because I tried to call several charity places and my phone line was engaged? Anyway he only sent a text [...] So I feel that now that I am the one who faced this problem and I am the victim, it's very unfair and unjust if you do this like this.

6. Discussion

In this section, we assess the interview data using the markers of interactional justice summarised by Laxminarayan *et al.* (2012). We then identify factors specific to the HBVA context which relate to interpersonal and informational justice, before arguing that experiences of justice within the victim–police encounter overall are influenced principally by officers' knowledge of the dynamics of HBVA. We also reflect briefly on the value of the interactional justice framework. Figure 3 summarises our analysis.

The first element of interactional justice is interpersonal justice. Here it concerns the extent to which victims perceive that police officers (i) treated them empathetically and (ii) acknowledged their situation, thereby validating their status as victims of crime who deserve and require redress. We know that this interpersonal element is very important to the victims that we interviewed as almost all could recall in detail the demeanour of the responding officer(s) and the words that they used. For example, one victim recalls how the first officer at the desk

... was just like, 'So are you going to make a complaint?' She was so flippant and just didn't want to listen to what I was saying.

The second officer that she meets demonstrates his knowledge of her experience and anticipates how she is feeling in a way that puts her at ease. Idriss (2017, pp. 10–12) similarly identifies the importance of those first-contact professionals for HBVA victims.

In terms of validation, we identify two counter-examples. First is the victim who recalls that following successful prosecution of the perpetrator, she is invited to the station by a senior officer to thank her for her support for the criminal trial and to mark the close of her case. Second, we note the victim who was very upset that she received a text message from her dedicated officer to inform her that her perpetrator has been acquitted. Although we cannot be sure how far the justice outcome (conviction

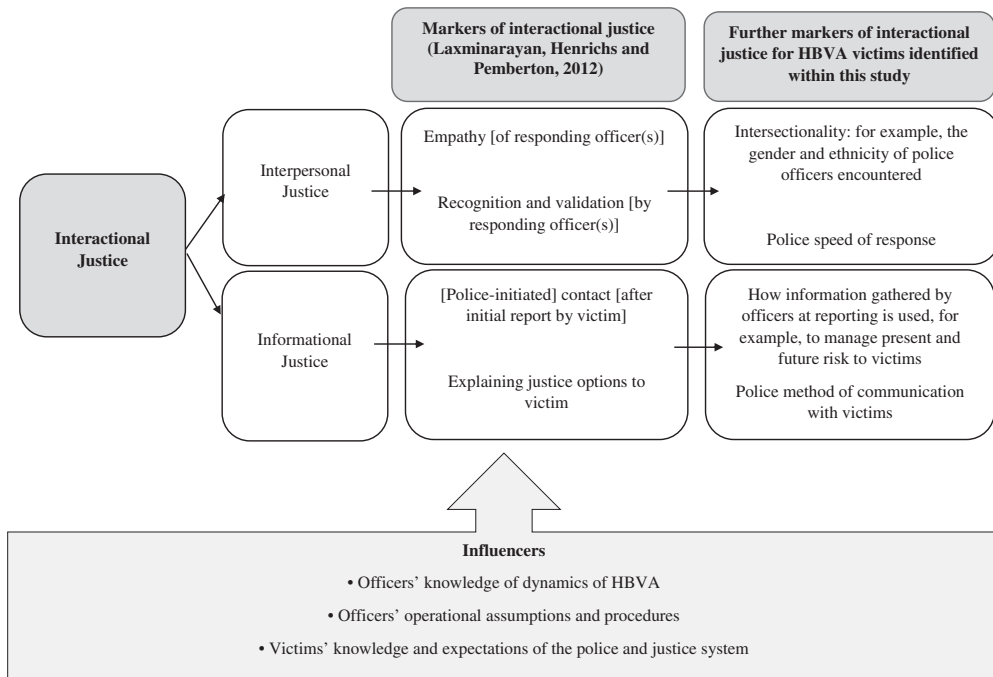


Figure 3. Interactional justice from the HBVA victim perspective.

or acquittal) overlays each victim's response: looking across the data, we would argue that the interpersonal element is important in dignifying victims and validating their experience.

We would label 'speed of response' as part of 'interpersonal' justice because many of those who reported were in a crisis, following a long period of unreported abuse. Following the discussion above, our data revealed that officers arriving quickly on the scene signalled external validation and possibly respite – almost 'rescue' for some women.

We identify two further areas which are identified by victims and which at first sight appear to extend the discussion on empathy: the gender and ethnicity of the responding police officers. For some victims, gender or ethnicity in common suggested that officers would be more appreciative, more perceptive or signified safety. Conversely, shared ethnicity could be a threat.

There is some evidence in the existing literature that victim perceptions of matching ethnicity matter, although the results are equivocal. For example, in the United States, Stover *et al.* (2008) find Hispanic women victims of domestic violence served by Hispanic police advocate-officer teams more engaged in services than African American or Caucasian women. Further research in the United States suggests that many women 'of colour' (see Sokoloff and Dupont 2005 for an overview) are reluctant to report domestic abuse to the police, believing that officers subscribe to racist stereotypes in their handling of both victims and perpetrators. However, shared ethnic background can in some contexts raise the possibility of shared familial and friendship networks and/or the responding police officer subscribing to community norms around 'honour': our research illustrated that both situations can put the victim at risk (see also Gangoli *et al.* 2011).

Existing research has tended to focus on the extent to which gender influences police officer decision-making, rather than why victims may perceive the gender of officers as important, or how gender intersects with other identities, within the process of obtaining justice. For example, Stalans and Finn (2000) found that in a hypothetical scenario, male and female officers in the United States made similar decisions around making arrest in cases of domestic abuse but more experienced women officers were more likely to recommend refuge accommodation to victims

and less likely to recommend marriage counselling. In an Australian study, Stewart and Maddren (1997) similarly found no significant differences in the decision-making of male and female officers in response to domestic violence vignettes. Rather, Stewart argues, both subscribe to gender stereotypes, such as blaming male or drunk victims, over female or sober victims. These and other studies would appear to confirm Alderden and Ullman (2012) claim that 'female practitioners may not necessarily be more sensitive toward female victims despite previous assumptions that this would hold true' (p. 3).

What is of interest in our study is the importance of gender *to the victim* and how gender intersects with *other identities* to give particular meanings to the interaction with police. First, female victims of male perpetrated violence and abuse in general may prefer to speak to a female officer because they expect that officer to be more empathetic (whether or not that is actually the case) or because they feel embarrassed to talk through details of the abuse, particularly sexual abuse, with a male officer. Second, the prevailing context of gender power relations is necessarily implicated in the interaction between a female victim and a male police officer. This is reinforced here by the positioning of the police officer as 'rescuer' and invested with the capacity for legitimate force. For some victims, there will be a psychosocial connection between a male officer and the male perpetrator. Third, cultural or faith values may censure women for talking to non-family members of the opposite sex. This is itself another dimension of preserving 'honour' which may lead female victims to 'close up' when interviewed by a male police officer. By extension, a discomfort with formally reporting a partner (particularly where they are the father of the victim's children) or family members is possible irrespective of cultural background. Fourth, gender and ethnic stereotypes can combine where victims have insecure immigration status or limited English language skills. Police officers may perceive non-White, non-UK HBVA female victims as passive and oppressed (overlooking the prevalence of male violence within British culture) or as 'devious' and seeking leave to remain (see Sharma and Gill 2010 for related discussion). These factors may be pertinent in isolation or in combination in analysing interpersonal justice for victims of HBVA.

The second element of interactional justice is informational justice. This relates to timely updates following the initial report and to officers explaining the justice options to victims. A small number of our sample felt they were 'abandoned' in temporary accommodation; others that they had to repeatedly seek out updates. In terms of being provided with clear information on the justice process and their options, a number of participants said that they had cases closed without understanding why or that they were unaware of what stage (if any) their case was at. Issues of inequality and identity were important here. Victims of gender-based violence in general face difficulties navigating a complex justice system (Hawkins and Laxton 2014). For some HBVA victims, the cumulative effect of poor English language skills, limited social networks and limited cultural knowledge significantly constrained their ability within the police encounter to identify, articulate and obtain the legal remedies available.

We would also identify how information is deployed as an issue of informational justice. In this study, we note how information collected to manage risk is (mis)used. In the first example, a woman and her children are put at risk by poor data handling when the husband (and perpetrator) comes into the police station to collect the house keys which she had deposited before moving to safe accommodation. In another example, the victim relates that police have used information provided by the perpetrators to assess her safety. Idriss (2017, pp. 10–12) identifies similar examples where lack of awareness of HBVA among police (and other professional groups) put victims at risk.

We identify several examples where the *means* of communication are central to victims' positive experiences of justice overall. For example, victims who were offered special measures, such as a personal alarm or 'Text Us' phone felt significantly more secure than those who were told simply to call 999. Returning to the victim who received a text message from the police advising her that the perpetrator had been acquitted, we can see that *how* information is conveyed can be as important as what is said, overlapping interpersonal justice with informational justice.

Finally, looking across the data, we would identify three factors which influence the overall experience of interactional justice for victims of HBVA in their encounter with the police. First, and perhaps most importantly, is the responding officers' knowledge of the dynamics of HBVA. This includes understanding the nature and implications of 'honour', the behaviour of perpetrators, how victims may present at a point of crisis (as uncommunicative, or unwilling to pursue the matter, for example), and the implications of their actions at the scene.

Second, we note how operational procedures or assumptions can be perceived as unfair or inappropriate to victims of HBVA and illustrate how respect and fairness, interactional and procedural justice can overlap. Examples include expecting women to retrieve their belongings without police support; reluctance to recognise extra-national threats; re-accommodating women and children rather than removing the perpetrator or moving victims to reside with other family members.

The interview data also suggests that the expectations or hoped-for outcomes that victims have when they contact the police, including also the context of the reporting, may affect their perception of the police encounter. For example, some victims described calling in a life-threatening situation and simply wanting to be protected. In that moment, interpersonal justice might be the key focus for victims. For victims who have made a more considered decision to report following a long period of abuse, informational justice may matter more as they seek to understand their justice options and expect the police to take forward their case.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, we apply two dimensions of interactional justice identified by Laxminarayan *et al.* (2012) to analyse the experience of victims who reported HBVA to the police in England and Wales. First, in terms of interpersonal justice, we find that empathy and validation are critical in that first (and possibly only) contact with police. In our study, 20 out of 34 participants expressed satisfaction, while only 9 expressed satisfaction with their experience overall. One possible interpretation here is that more victims had a positive personal experience with the police (interpersonal justice), which was then tempered by a lack of satisfactory outcome (distributive justice). A key dimension of interpersonal justice identified in this study is the intersection of gender, ethnicity, culture and faith identities both from the victim perspective and within the dynamic of the victim-police interaction overall. In terms of informational justice, we found that timely contact and updates as well as the provision of information on the justice options available were important to victims. Our data also highlight that the method of delivering information to victims and the way in which information is deployed can affect both their sense of safety and of receiving justice.

As with all theoretical models, we note that in practice, the different elements can interrelate: for example, the situation where an Asian officer who is supposed to be organising a safety plan with a victim but upbraids her for undermining family's honour draws on elements of interpersonal and informational justice. Notwithstanding these definitional issues, the value of interactional justice is in exploring why the police encounter matters to victims; why it might matter more than the justice outcome and how the police can better respond. In terms of the implications for practical policing, further awareness around the intersectional issues identified and ongoing reflection in partnership with survivors on exactly how first response procedures may help or hinder victims, given the specific dynamics of HBVA, would be welcome. In summary, we believe that by focusing on HBVA victims' interaction with justice actors we can better understand and improve HBVA victims' experience of, and satisfaction with, the justice system overall.

Notes

1. We use the term 'victim' throughout this article for consistency, though recognising that individuals may self-identify with either or none of the terms 'victim', 'survivor' or 'victim-survivor'.

2. On 19 July 2017, HMIC took additional responsibility for fire & rescue service inspections and was renamed HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS). We refer to 'HMIC' in this report since the work relates to 2015, prior to the change of name.
3. Crown Prosecution Service Violence Against Women and Girls Crime Report, 2015–2016. Available from: http://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/docs/cps_vawg_report_2016.pdf [Accessed 18 August 2017].
4. *Huffington Post UK*, 12 Nov 2016, Honour Based Violence Reports To Police Reveal Only Minority Of Alleged Crimes Result In Charge. Available from: http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/honour-based-violence-reports-to-police-reveal-minority-of-alleged-crimes-actually-result-in-charge_uk_581a0f81e4b0b7155dbf7f9c [Accessed 7 July 2017]. The figure of 7048 is a consolidated figure derived only from those forces who provided information.
5. The authors recognise the importance of language here and acknowledge the contested positioning of the word 'honour', including previous discussion on the merits of different terms for example, honour-based violence, 'honour'-based violence, so-called honour-based violence and abuse, and so on; see pp. 1–23 in Gill *et al.* 2014). For the purpose of this research, we adopted the format HBVA and we accepted the definition provided by HMIC (now HMICFRS).
6. See pp. 20–22 of the HMIC Inspection Report available from: <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmic/wp-content/uploads/the-depths-of-dishonour.pdf> [Accessed 13 August 2017].
7. We do not know for certain what risk assessment tools were used in each case by police in their interaction with our research participants. The recommended tool is the Association of Chief Police Officers' (ACPO) version of 'DASH' (2009), the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment and Honour-Based Violence Risk Identification, Assessment and Management Model. As first response staff, police are required to ask ACPO DASH questions at all incidents and grade them standard, medium or high risk.

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ORCID

Natasha Mulvihill  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4459-9057>

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