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Evaluating the value of the police Independent Advisory Group (IAG): Honour Based Abuse Crime (HBA), Forced Marriage (FM) and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Abstract

This article examines focus group responses from an England Police Force Independent Advisory Group (IAG). It explores the role played by IAG members in advising police on cultural matters associated with Honour Based Abuse (HBA), Forced Marriage (FM) and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Findings illustrate that IAG members, largely ethnic minority female in composition, possess a wealth of knowledge, skills, and experience. They adeptly scrutinise officer decision-making, provide useful case management interventions and challenge the dominant narrative. They propose that statutory services inadvertently perpetuate racial stereotypes by tokenistic use of ethnic minority professionals. IAGs expose that health professionals hold vital information about FGM adult victims, which under current UK guidance they are not obligated to disclose. IAGs are an untapped operational resource, capable of supporting professionals (and thereby victims) within Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences. Documenting of IAG decisions is necessary to evaluate their consistency, value, and long term impact.

Keywords

Policing, Independent Advisory Group (IAG), Honour Based Abuse, Forced Marriage, Female Genital Mutilation, Culture.

Introducing HBA, FM and FGM

Honour Based Abuse (HBA), Forced Marriage (FM) and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) are a collection of practices **(Home Office 2020)** which perpetrators in some communities subscribe to.

Victims are neither confined to Muslim societies or South Asian communities **(Idriss, 2011)** but come from the Middle East, Kurdish communities, Africa and the Caribbean **(Brandon and Hafez, 2008; Meetoo and Mirza, 2011**), indeed such abuse constitutes a world-wide phenomenon **(Idriss, 2011).**

Being forced into a marriage is globally recognised as a violation of human rights that disproportionately impact on women and girls **(Chantler et al., 2021).** It occurs when an individual is pressurised physically or psychologically into a marriage **(Miles-Johnson and Courtenay, 2021).** In 2019-2020, there were 2024 HBA-related offences[i] recorded by the police in England and Wales. Of these, there were 74 FGM offences and 140 FM offences **(Home Office, 2020).** However, it is clear that these figures represent a radical underestimate, as the Forced Marriage Unit, based in London, dealt with 1355 cases of Forced Marriage in 2019: mostly involving women (1080 cases) and young people aged 18–25 years (485) **(Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2020).** Victims are often reluctant to report hidden crimes of FM and HBA **(Home Office, 2020; Idriss, 2021; Miles-Johnson and Courtenay, 2021)** and thus the statistics are likely to be significantly higher than published data suggests **(HMIC, 2015: 41)**, representing the tip of an iceberg **(Dyer, 2015:14; Aplin, 2019).** Indeed, the prevalence of Forced Marriage in England is estimated to be between 5000 and 8000 real or threatened cases **(Kazimirski et al., 2009).**

Honour Based Abuse is a highly gendered crime with 83% of females and 17% of males as victims **(ONS, 2018:32).** The preservation of family 'honour' is strongly tied to the behaviour of women **(Jafri, 2009:58; Yuval Davis, 1998:29)** who are deemed as the 'vehicle' for transmitting social values from one generation to the next **(Gupta, 2003:8; Jafri, 2009).** Key to accomplishing the

protection of social norms and traditions, from the perspective of perpetrators, is the tight surveillance and control of women and their sexuality **(Akpinar, 2003; Bagness, 2019; Payton, 2011).** Forced Marriage, HBA and FGM are heavily gendered, with Aplin's 100 cases of HBA taken from classified police data delineating victims as 96% Female and 4% male **(2019),** and this directly replicates Kazimirski's FM study **(2009).** Along with obligatory promises to marry daughters to cousins from a young age **(Shaw, 2001)** FM is deemed by perpetrators as the remedy for perceived wayward and non-compliant girls and young adults **(Aplin, 2019:216)**, because the 'problem' of tarnished family honour is then passed onto the new husband. FGM is normalised as a rite of passage for girls reaching adulthood and a prerequisite for marriage **(Home Affairs Committee on FGM, 2016),** heavily associated with being part of "our culture" **(Gangoli et al., 2018:255).** Like Honour Based Abuse, FGM is a hidden crime and in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland there are approximately 127,000 women aged between 15 and 50 currently living with the consequences of FGM, and a further 10,000 under 15 years who migrated to this country having already undergone FGM **(Home Office, 2021).**

HBA, FM and FGM all come under the auspices of Domestic Abuse because there are notable overlaps with traditional forms of domestic abuse **(Aplin, 2017, 2019)**, albeit distinctly culture nuances are also evident, as explored within this paper. Victims are persistently targeted **(Gill et al., 2018)** and such relentless and unwavering perseverance to ensure the demands of the collective are met **(Aplin, 2019)** aligns with high risk cases of domestic abuse constituting coercive control **(Stark, 2007)** or intimate terrorism **(Johnson, 2006)**. However, unlike traditional domestic abuse, victims of such practices do not know whom to trust, as multiple perpetration by close family and

relatives is prevalent **(Aplin, 2019).** On all of these grounds, such crimes demand an enhanced and priority service from practitioners.

There is scant literature exploring the function and efficacy of the Independent Advisory Group (IAG) with only Dixon **(2018)** and Kelshall **(2018)** providing UK empirical research on this topic. The purpose of this article is to examine the views and decision-making by IAG members specifically in the context of policing operations related to HBA, FM and FGM, as no IAG studies have been published in this arena. Through the examination of investigations and situations, the intention is to evaluate the value of the IAG and whether it meets ACPOs strategic aims in bridging the gap between police and communities.

Introducing the Independent Advisory Group (IAG)

Independent expert advice plays a vital role in government and public life by accessing a wide range of knowledge, skills and experience that is not always possible to retain **(Cabinet Office, 2017:10)** in one agency. Independent Advisory Groups (IAGs) were established in January 1999 in the wake of criticisms levelled against the Metropolitan Police Service for losing contact with Black communities, initiated by the Stephen Lawrence murder and the Macpherson Report that followed **(Drewery, 2002; Police Professional, 2008).** The Macpherson Report recommended that more should be done to engender trust and confidence in policing amongst minority ethnic communities **(Report of an inquiry by Sir William Macpherson of Cluny, 1999:375).** However, IAGs are not isolated to ethnic minority communities and incorporates all diversity strands, including LGBTQ; those with disabilities; gypsies and travellers; young people **(College of Policing 2020a; Murji, 2011),** the treatment of asylum seekers and the homeless **(Drewery, 2002).**

The only formal UK document produced on the role of the IAG in a policing context is the 2011 ACPO guidance[ii]. Such guidance is based on extensive consultation with police forces, IAG members and police authorities **(ACPO, 2011)**, which in 2012 were replaced by Police and Crime Commissioners. The role of IAG is to ensure that:

> [Police] policies, practices and procedures meet the strategic aims of the Equality, Diversity and Human Rights (EDHR) Strategy and provide a safeguard against the service disadvantaging any section of the community through lack of understanding, ignorance, or mistaken beliefs as set out by Macpherson **(ACPO, 2011:11)**

Role, purpose and need for an IAG

The function of the IAG is to act as a 'critical friend' to the police, which can be defined as providing a sounding board or fresh pair of eyes that may 'speak truth to power'; someone that provides perspective **(Murji, 2011:259).** Yet such a role can range from being quite challenging and imparting 'constructive criticism' (**Drewery, 2002:1)** to providing general advice **(Murji, 2011).**

IAG strategic aims are threefold, supporting operational delivery by meeting the needs of communities, building an inclusive working environment, and building equality into police operational processes, policies, and procedures **(ACPO, 2011:12).** In assessing how these aims translate into operational practice, there appear to be four broad responsibilities. Firstly, IAGs provide independent advice to improve communications between communities that would not normally enter into dialogue with the police **(Drewery, 2002).** This conduit offers benefits in 'both directions' **(Kelshall, 2018:21)** because when effective communication exists between the police and the local populace, confidence in policing increases **(Bain, Robinson and Conser, 2014).** Day-to-day interactions matter, particularly the case when the public evaluate poor police

performance **(Jackson and Bradford, 2009:496).** Given that the police are representatives of the community and guardians of the social order **(Sunshine and Tyler, 2003)**, this relationship with communities is crucial. The impact of cooperative working between police and IAGs is deemed to engender a more sympathetic policing response **(Drewery, 2002).** Secondly, IAGs are entrusted to provide advice to tactical commanders when managing specific policing operations **(Murji, 2011; Drewery 2002).** Having had 10-years-experience as vice chair of the IAG for the British Transport Police, Kelshall reports greater relationship building between officers and communities due to IAG engagement. She documents a variety of activities that IAGs undertake, including police briefings; planning exercises; training; responding to unfolding protests, arrests; intelligence led operations; home visits to announce sudden deaths and critical incidents - including mass fatality events **(2018).**

Thirdly, IAG members advise the police by preventing incidents from escalating into critical events or crimes **(Drewery, 2002).** Issues of police accountability and legitimacy are often raised in the aftermath of serious incidents and through the Independent Office of Police Complaints (IOPC). Disproportionate stop searches and BAME deaths in police custody are prime illustrations of this **(Baker, 2016; Delsol and Shiner, 2006; IRR, 2015)**. Therefore, the creation of IAGs appears precautionary, as a means of avoiding 'error correction' **(Dixon, 2018; Kelshall, 2018:4)**, preventing adverse incidents, broken trust and/or injustice. Finally, due to their experience and perspective, advisors are more able to anticipate how policing responses might be interpreted by communities, particularly those under-represented groups, and such insights can lead to adjustments in police decision-making around courses of action **(College of Policing, 2020a; Drewery, 2002).** Kelshall notes how IAG advisors engage with BTP officers dynamically and in

‘real time’ (either in person or over the phone) advising on courses of actions that might ordinarily adversely impact on the relationship between police and communities **(2018).**

The strength of the IAG is that they are not ‘nodding donkeys’ **(Grieve, 2009).** They challenge the police and provide an additional layer of answerability. It is suggested that the more robust IAG members are indeed praised by officers for their ‘rottweiler’ approach **(Dixon, 2018:694).** However, it is difficult to wholly accept this explanation, particularly given that the more ‘radical’ a member might be, the less likely that they are to “last” as an IAG member **(2018:694).** Rather than simply ‘endorse’ police practices, the IAG function is that of critical appraisal **(Dixon, 2018).** However, as Dixons identifies, the IAG are an ‘advisory’ rather than an ‘accountable’ body **(2018),** because, albeit officers can accept or reject IAG advice, the responsibility and legal accountability ultimately rests with the police **(Drewery, 2002; Murji, 2011).** Given that the Police can accept or reject advice as they see fit, this does limit the efficacy of the IAG.

IAG meetings, independence, quality of decisions & record keeping

Current research identifies some uncertainties around the role and functions of the IAG, specifically whether the advice given is valuable, consistent, independent and shapes best practice; and whether IAGs fulfil all the strategic aims apparent in the 2011 ACPO guidance**.**

Recruiting IAG members is of concern, as Dixon’s study suggests that existing members are largely already affiliated to the police in the provision of complementary or related services **(2018)**; therefore this questions the degree to which IAGs are wholly ‘independent’. Actual and perceived independence of IAG members is important **(Cabinet Office, 2017).** The suggestion that IAGs have become subsumed into the police culture of that force **(Dixon, 2018)**, if accurate, thwarts the very reason why the group came into existence. Additionally, one IAG member suggests its

membership did not 'come from the groups the IAG was set up to give voice to' **(Dixon, 2018: 694)** which also contradicts the underpinning aims and ethos of the group.

IAG meetings are also deemed to be poorly attended. Dixons research indicates that across an 18 month period only one meeting attracted more than eight IAG members and two meetings struggled to attract 5 members. In summary, of the 31 IAG members 'less than a fifth of the members could be described as active' **(2018:692).** Given the small IAG member numbers it is questionable whether they are truly representative of the public **(Dixon, 2018; Murji, 2011).** Yet ACPO suggest that representativeness is not the intention, as IAG members provide individual perceptions and views **(ACPO, 2011).** Moreover, the bureaucratic, process driven approach of the IAG meetings, as described by Dixon, in which members agree minutes, new matters arising and standing agenda items **(Dixon, 2018)** does little to reflect the 'real time' dynamism evident within Kelshall's evaluation of the IAG role **(2018).** Reflecting and reacting to police policies and procedures within a corporate environment surely fails to encompass and reflect all the ACPO strategic aims that IAGs were created to combat.

There is also little consistency in the way that IAGs operate within and across different force areas **(ACPO, 2011)** and this is reflected in Dixon's research, where four IAGs in one police force operated entirely independently of one another **(2018).** It is also unclear as to the mechanisms by which IAGs are able to ascertain, disseminate and benchmark best practice nationally **(ACPO, 2011).** In addition, ACPO guidance places specific onus on the police to feedback as to how IAG advice is used or the rationale around why the advice is *not* accepted **(ACPO, 2011).** Yet there is absent advice from ACPO **(2011)** for IAGs (or police) around document keeping, in terms of the efficacy, or otherwise, of decisions made by IAGs. This is reflected at government level, with just

under half of all advisory bodies not publishing easily accessible minutes **(Cabinet Office, 2017:7).** This resonates with observations that the advisory content of IAG decisions and their impact on policing operations, are sheltered from public and academic scrutiny, which then impacts on transparency **(Cabinet Office, 2017; Murji, 2011).** Therefore, from a quality assurance perspective, it is difficult to measure whether advice given by IAGs is both valuable and consistent **(Cabinet Office, 2017:6; Murji, 2011)** across force areas.

Methodology

In this study all members of the focus group were affiliated to one Independent Advisory Group attached to one large England police force. Written ethical approval was obtained through the Chief Constable, along with individual signed consent forms from all the participants and the consent of the university ethics committee. The force was anonymised on ethical grounds in order to protect its reputation.

The focus group was arranged through the Force Sergeant strategic lead covering PPIU Public Protection. Focus groups tend to last between 1 to 2 hours **(Denscombe, 2007; Ryan et al., 2013:329**) in this case lasting 1 hr 14 minutes. There appears to be disparity as to the appropriate number of focus group participants **(Berg and Lune, 2012)**. Some suggest between six and nine participants **(Denscombe, 2007; Ryan et al., 2013)**, others suggesting 12 or even 13 participants may be an ideal size **(Hagan, 2006:147; Matthews and Ross, 2010).** The necessity for a smaller groups (5-7 participants) is attributed to topic complexity **(Berg and Lune, 2012:193).**

Nine IAG members, predominantly women, were present in the focus group. Over three quarters of the IAG participants were from ethnic minority communities (South Asian, Black, and mixed

race) which were indeed advantageous. Participants varied in their knowledge, skills, and experience, as well as employment history. Resonating with Dixon's research findings **(2018)** the employment of IAG members indicated a pre-existing relationship with the policing organisation. One worked with South Asian victims of domestic abuse, FM and HBA; a few were nurses or worked in education; one was a member of the clergy; another was employed for an African charity specialising in FGM. One had a wealth of experience and not only advised high ranking officers in another force IAG, but she also counselled central government on HBA, FM and FGM. Because participants are drawn from disparate professional disciplines this is beneficial as it minimises the propensity to conform to 'group think' **(Berg and Lune, 2012; Stewart et al., 2006:116).** All focus group members provided signed informed consent and were provided with a briefing sheet and opportunities to ask questions. They were assured of their privacy and anonymity **(Creswell, 2014)**, ensuring no link could be made between the data and the research participants**.** They all agreed to the meeting being recorded using a Dictaphone.

Focus groups are beneficial in providing large volumes of data quickly from varying sources, relatively inexpensively **(Hagan, 2006; Punch, 2014; Stewart et al., 2006)** and are useful for probing participants attitudes and values. The unique selling point of focus groups lies in the synthesis of ideas stimulated through group interaction **(Punch, 2014; Wilkinson, 2011:169).** Participants make 'live' connections and create new insights during the discussion, which is rarely achievable in a solitary interview situation **(Stewart et al., 2006:43).** The limitations of focus groups are that dominant or opinionated members can monopolise or unduly influence the other participants during focus groups **(Berg and Lune, 2012; Stewart et al., 2006)**; and the same principle applies to the facilitator in needing to employ restraint in order to avoid influencing participants. There was a need to limit the questions to five in order to keep to the timing

constraints of a two hour focus group. The questions focused on how HBA crimes are investigated by police officers; child cases of HBA; victims with a mental health or physical disability; the role of females in perpetrating abuse and good or poor partnership working between the police and other agencies. Thematic analysis was employed in examining the data **(Braun and Clarke, 2013).**

Results and discussion

The IAG focus group expound universal themes apparent in current academic discourse, particularly around a lack of police understanding concerning crimes of a 'cultural' nature. Professionals investigating such crimes sometimes suffer 'race anxiety' and fear racist accusations being levelled, which can result in victims receiving an impoverished service. Akin to the traditional domestic abuse field, perpetrator narratives are often believed to the detriment of victims.

Police officers: cultural deficit, race anxiety, aligning with perpetrators

IAG members concur that some officers are deficient in understanding the culture of some communities, however it is unclear whether this extends to ethnic minority officers or solely White officers:

> I was at a conference - not in this country- and I heard an officer say that we don't know how to engage with the community that's affected by FGM.
>
> Cultural competence within the organisation - and that's what's missing massively (IAG focus group).

Police officers not comprehending British South Asian culture resounds with the current research and is a prevalent factor influencing underreporting by South Asian victims **(Harrison and Gill,**

2017:307). Some academics are skeptical as to whether White professionals from statutory or voluntary sectors are able to understand the culture, customs, and traditions in order to relate to victims more effectively **(Gangoli et al., 2006; Gilbert et al., 2004; Kazimirski et al., 2009).** There is, moreover, a recognition that officers possess heightened sensitivities around culture, in terms of lacking awareness as to how to react appropriately, which then impedes community engagement:

> The cultural aspect is absolutely vital and officers don't understand that. There is a 'fear factor' of going into BAME communities.
>
> I think we've got to move away from having cultural[ly] sensitive staff (IAG focus group).

One IAG member alludes to this 'fear factor' as centralising on accusations of *racism* that might be levelled at police officers:

> I was chair of the IAG for (named police force) and I think in terms of the fear -it's fear of being 'stigmatised' as being racist (IAG focus group).

Such 'race anxiety' **(Burman et al., 2004:332)**, which is fear of making mistakes in the investigative process due to cultural ignorance, not only damages community cohesion **(Kazimirski et al., 2009)** but results in professionals feeling uncomfortable about tackling cultural issues for 'fear of being accused of being racist' **(Chantler et al., 2021; Costello, 2015; Gangoli et al., 2006:8; Siddiqui, 2003:80)**. This form of discrimination is termed "reverse racism" **(Gill et al., 2012:83),** and is where state officials fear being perceived as biased and therefore modify their behaviour **(James, James and Vila, 2020)**, with inertia preferred over action, for fear of the "racist" label **(Siddiqui, 2003:80; Gill et al., 2013).** Both action (racism) and inaction (reverse racism) can be deemed as 'racist' **(Dustin and Phillips, 2008).** More recently the concept of "reverse racism" has been contested as controversial **(Rousell et al., 2019)**, resulting in some

authors retracting the expression and instead advocating the term "the counter bias effect" **(James et al., 2020).**

Conversely, one participant felt that 'a lot of organisations use cultural sensitivities as an excuse' (IAG focus group), to somehow avoid dealing with HBA/FM. This reflects Meetoo and Mirza's contention that services "walk(ing) on eggshells" and fail to challenge dysfunctional practices due to cultural toleration **(2011:60).** Such avoidance behaviours precipitate under policing and under protection, which is just as detrimental to victims of crime **(Aplin, 2019).** Whether 'fear' of treading on cultural eggshells, or racism itself, precipitates state paralysis; the impact of 'race anxiety' can engender a 'hands off' approach **(Carens, 2006:8)** in which some officials avoid taking action. In many ways, the IAG member implicitly relates cultural sensitivity to the theme of 'political correctness' in the language that she uses:

> Cultural sensitivity has gone bonkers basically. So you know, we've got to move away from using that as an excuse (IAG focus group).

This type of language is mirrored in academic discourse, which suggests that over preoccupation with culture acts as a barrier to effective service provision **(Burman et al., 2004; Meetoo and Mirza, 2011:43**), as it inadvertently provides a justifiable but false reason for inaction. Cultural practices should not be used by professionals as an 'excuse' to provide a two-tier 'double standard of justice' **(Brown, 2004:757)** that caters differently between dominant and minority groups. The same IAG member could not fathom why professionals appear to align with perpetrator perspectives instead of supporting victims. Based on her interactions she is convinced that victims readily embrace the notion of professionals engaging with their parents, in order to ensure their own human rights and freedoms are prioritised:

> I'm in touch with many survivors, they're saying- 'but what about my rights, what happened to my rights. You know when the police were actually out there, they didn't take my rights into consideration because my uncle/ my mother/ my father was beating me up and yet they take my parents view on board - and yet, you know, they leave me 'as is'- basically because they're afraid to upset my parents' (IAG focus group).

In preserving cultural rights, the individual rights of victims appear to be forfeited, with the perspectives and rights of perpetrators prioritised and victims often reconciled with their abusers, in line with the traditional 'conflict resolution' model of dealing with domestic abuse **(Edwards, 1986; Grace, 1995; Stanko, 2013 [1989]:60).** This perspective strongly aligns with Aplin's honour based research of 100 cases, in which 22% of cases showed police officers aligning with perpetrator discourses, which were accorded more legitimacy than victim narratives. Equally, in the context of child cases 68% of child victims were returned home to perpetrating relatives (13/22) or sympathising relatives (2/22) by Children's Social Care, with children victim blamed for precipitating discord within the family unit **(2019).**

IAGs challenge the dominant narrative

The IAG are extremely insightful in challenging the dominant narrative and potential 'pit falls' around policing BAME communities; particularly around issues of ethnic matching; cultural bias and the need for authorities to meaningfully and directly engage with communities. The IAG are keen to dispel the myth that professionals being of a certain ethnicity does not automatically equip them with knowledge and understanding in the complexities of HBA, FM or FGM:

> We support south Asian women who have experienced domestic abuse, forced marriage, honour-based abuse, but it took me a long time to be - *I wasn't 'fit' for the position just because of the colour of my skin* - It's took me a long time to kind of 'fit'; to try to understand exactly what this is [honour based abuse].

> An Asian person has come in and there has been some kind of domestic abuse and instantly they'll send me in, who's the Asian nurse, and they'll send me in and say – "Go on you can deal with that"..//..*It might be my mother's language - but I can only speak English* (IAG focus group).

Such excerpts identify presumptions made by supervisory professionals that ethnic matching professional to victim/service user will automatically result in a better outcome. Admittedly, officers of the *same* culture do tend to grasp those cultural complexities and are better able to interpret victims motives, which is often found lacking by some White officers. Yet professionals being of the same culture and ethnicity as the victim can in some exceptional instances impede victim disclosure and investigation **(Aplin, 2021).** The focus group suggest that police officers are specifically chosen to attend incidents *because* are South Asian. Yet there is suggestion from the focus group that culture and 'honour' may be too prominent for some officers to act entirely objectively:

> You are sending an Asian officer in there, you know just because they are of that ethnic minority, I think they will not do their job as they should because that embedded honour is there.
>
> You know they could be a distant relative..//..you know, so that is why they wouldn't follow procedure. And so that is always in the back of their mind, and you know they always think about that 'honour' in the back of their mind.
>
> They think they can understand it better [the crime and the issue of culture], but - it clouds their judgement. It does cloud their judgement, I've seen it (IAG focus group).

This narrative supports the contention that some officers of the same ethnicity with strong honour codes could impart advice to victims which is culturally biased **(Gilbert et al., 2004).** Harrison and Gill go further in arguing that some police officers cultural beliefs may be stronger than their vocational duties **(2017:9).** An IAG member advocates that a 'neutral' person, devoid of culture

and honour codes, is a better alternative to send to the crime scene (IAG focus group). But how would practitioners establish this notion of 'neutrality', and is that proposition even realistic? The logic of this discourse tends to stereotype and 'essentialise' cultural practices, as well as conflate these with persons from a defined ethnicity. It would be equally offensive to suggest that White Officers act in a biased way due to their shared cultural understanding and relatability with White victims. We should not assume *only* minority communities inhabit 'cultures' **(Kelly, 2010)** as well as avoid automatically and intrinsically attributing poor practices to a person's culture and ethnicity **(Razack, 2004),** which reproduces stereotypes. Despite these concerns, the overall message is unequivocal from the IAG, that whether a professional is from an ethnic minority or White, those individuals need training to equip them with the knowledge and skills to perform their role.

The IAG also identify that some statutory agencies can be too tolerant and accepting of dysfunctional and oppressive practices such as HBA and FGM (Ranalvi, 2018), in that they fail to communicate and engage with communities around appropriate messaging. Notably, an IAG member spoke of a Pakistani cultural community event funded by the local council, which advanced inappropriate messages. The event involved children aged 8-10 years performing on stage to celebrate Pakistani independence day. The IAG member, a teacher, was shocked that children used language such as 'let's come together and show these non-believers - let's shed our blood' (IAG focus group). Organisers of the event tried to convince the teacher that these were merely 'traditional passionate anthems'. However, she was disturbed by the display, not only because it advances dangerous and divisive messages to impressionable young children, but it also conflicts with educational principles and the acceptance of all faiths:

> Their parents have allowed them to go to that..//.. Well, if we educate them and say 'this is the reason why we don't want you to teach your children like this'- *you know nobody's even engaging with them at the moment.* Because you know, nobody's even telling their parents that that is inappropriate language for a 9 year old you know; would you allow them to watch an 18 film? (IAG focus group)

Not only does the example highlight misguided cultural tolerance, but it shows IAG members as highly attuned and robust in managing these highly complex and nuanced situations, suggesting that local authorities, in addition to the police, would benefit from an IAG.

The value of the IAG

Many officers are unaware of the existence of the IAG (focus group) and perhaps this indicates that their existence and function should be more widely advertised and utilised within police forces. The benefits are the diverse perspectives that IAGs afford police forces; the capacity to engage with and empower officers; and most importantly, their ability to problem solve by identifying and rectifying sub-standard policing (and other agency) practices within investigations.

<u>The IAG as a community barometer</u>

The diverse perspective that the IAG afford, as a critical friend to the police, cannot be underestimated:

> Having that cultural competence, knowing the different ethnic makeups that are within the Force, knowing the customers and the clients that you serve. An IAG brings richness to a Force, you know we have gypsy Traveller, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Afro Caribbean, Polish, we had everything, lesbian gay, bisexual, transgender, so we have everything within that group, and so we were sort of ISIS, community intelligence.
>
> Also the doorway into the community - so when something happened in the community we help the police understand the logistics of the culture - the barriers (IAG focus group).

These extracts resound with wider research on the value of advisory bodies, in providing a 'unique outside perspective..//..for relatively low absolute cost' **(Cabinet Office, 2017:6).** Another IAG member alludes to the Archbishop of Canterbury coming to the inner city in the aftermath of a gang shooting, when local teenagers were embroiled in guns. What came from the church engaging with those communities through 'day to day conversations', identifies the enormous problem solving capacity of communities, who prior to this were considered as 'voiceless'. Such community meetings, in which the police are invited, stimulates honest debate and the police 'love it..//.. it opens their eyes' (IAG focus group). The IAG explain how they are the channel by which communities are given a platform and a voice to express their views. The content of those issues is then given more validity by officers who appear to listen more readily (IAG focus group). Therefore, the IAG appear to act very much as a community barometer.

<u>IAG enable and empower officers with knowledge and insight</u>

IAG members often engage with PCSO, response and neighbourhood officers that regularly come into contact with communities; and talk of routinely discussing cases, either face to face or on the phone:

> A lot of my work is how to overcome the cultural barriers and its empowering them [police officers] and giving them that confidence, 'you are doing your job, you could be potentially saving a life, when you get that gut feeling - remember the 'one chance rule' (IAG focus group).

Some IAG members agree that the empowerment model of educating young people is effective and sufficient to change mindsets, that this enables victims to resist relatives in trying to force them into marriages:

> We're empowering girls to say 'no'- and boys - we're actually going into schools; we're having that conversation and we're starting that debate. So we're changing that mindset (IAG focus group).

However, this positive, albeit slightly idealistic, perspective contrasts sharply with the stark realities of policing these incidents, with one specialist detective in Aplin's research noting that "Half of the conversations in the office are over –'how could she go back to him after this - how could someone want to go back-after they done that to them?': *Because of the 'hold' -because of the 15 to 20 years before you [police] turned up..//..* You know that's nothing- that that's a 'milli second' in their relationship" **(2019:256).** This familiar narrative is replicated across domestic abuse literature more broadly, rather than being isolated and exceptional to HBA, with professionals frustrated that victims retract complains and return to perpetrating partners **(Edwards, 1986; Grace, 1995; Harne and Radford, 2008).** The implication from this extract is that the training or advice provided to victims of domestic abuse/ HBA by professionals, however helpful, is transient and limited compared to the dysfunctional relationship dynamic between victim and perpetrating family members; in which the psychological 'hold' can unfortunately be far more enduring.

<u>IAG: problem solving, challenges to implementation and effective partnership-working</u>

This section of the paper explores a variety of incidents which IAG members directly advise officers of at the time the incident is unfolding. These cases also identify ill-conceived strategies by some professionals. The IAG consider who is best placed to manage such cases and earmark the use of male professionals in an FGM context as problematic. They reiterate key themes around police being prosecution focused and explore the treatment of vulnerable victims with mental illnesses and disabilities that appear to be under-policed. Equally, the IAG suggest novel

ideas around multi-agency training as well as underlying problems in FGM government legislation around mandatory reporting and information sharing.

IAG members are particularly adept at gauging the community impact of police action. One IAG member discloses how officers investigating HBA sought advice when they were planning on 'raiding' three addresses using ten police vehicles. The IAG advice was to prevent a 'mob handed' approach, as well as avoiding undertaking the operation on a mosque prayer day, as both these factors would provoke community tension (IAG focus group). In another case, the IAG raised concerns about the gender of the professional and whether this was appropriate for FGM victims:

> There was an example where a nurse who was dealing with it, a male nurse- which I have an issue with anyway- he's dealing with women with FGM and from an African perspective; that would be a *no-no* (IAG focus group).

Although the African male nurse is culturally competent, which is undoubtedly key to effective care **(Dean, 2017; Dixon, 2021; NICE, 2019),** the *gender* of the health care professional can influence whether a female is willing to talk about FGM **(Dixon et al., 2021),** which did not appear to have been considered by the health care profession.

The IAG allude to common themes in scholarly literature, such as the prosecution-oriented approach by the police, rather than sensitive engagement, which can criminalise families, drive harmful practices underground **(Costello, 2015; Gangoli et al., 2018)** and exacerbate underreporting. For example, one officer's problem solving suggestion in dealing with FGM is to:

> 'Go in there and arrest the family, arrest the parents, take the kids and put them in care'. And my answer to that is - what message is that going to

> send to the rest of the community? You know, because we have to remember that *that* survivor- *that* perpetrator - is *also* a survivor of FGM; and so I think to effectively police it they have to overcome, they have to work towards an equality policy and objectives, they have to make sure that those policies are fit for purpose (IAG focus group).

This extract reinforces the argument that it is counterintuitive to drive a wedge and divide families by penalising women who have been victims of FGM **(Costello, 2015).** Indeed, in a recent FGM study of Somalian victims it concludes that criminalising approaches actively harm vulnerable populations **(Karlsen et al., 2020).** Instead, alternative approaches of prevention rather than prosecution, community engagement and education of older women who perpetrate or collude in FGM **(Gangoli et al., 2018)** are endorsed, although it is far from clear *which* particular agency should perform this preventative function.

Illustrations of ill-conceived strategies and under-protection by professionals is evident in the arena of vulnerable adult abuse. Extant research identifies that vulnerable mentally ill and/or disabled people are particularly at risk of being forced into a marriage **(HMIC, 2015; Home Office: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2016; Lakhani, 2008; Valios, 2008)**. The IAG appear conversant in advising on such cases. In one case an 18 year old victim was on antidepressants and had already tried to kill herself, as she was being forced into a marriage. This is reported by a male relative of the victim, who is a police officer and resides in another force area. Yet, in the absence of any coherent strategy, *uniformed* officers attend the address where victim and perpetrators are present:

> That's like, it's the one chance rule and she's having to stand there and say -"no we've not called anybody"- and that endangers the life of the person there (IAG focus group).

As a result, attendant officers write off the incident as a non-police matter as 'everything looked fine' (IAG focus group). Consequently, the advice of the IAG is sought. The IAG member suggests an intervention is staged to ensure victim safety, in that police officers should utilise the victim's GP as a cover story to suggest she was due a check-up regarding her current medication (IAG focus group). In a further vulnerable adult case, a 42 year old female has been a patient in secure mental health units most of her life and has recently been married to a 26 year old whilst in Pakistan. Having been left a substantial sum in her parents will, it is common knowledge that this suitor has 'only married her for the money'. Yet the UK authorities are not pursuing action to safeguard the victim, as they argue that she has 'capacity' and 'made her decision in her right mind'. The victim now refuses to take her medication and is drinking alcohol to excess (IAG focus group). This is reminiscent of prior research, where victims with a diagnosed mental health condition or a learning difficulty are attributed 'freewill' by professionals in Adult Social Care **(Aplin, 2018).** Yet the freewill argument cannot be applied to vulnerable victims who legally lack the capacity to consent to marriage. Principle 4 of the Mental Capacity Act legally obliges authorities to make decisions which are in the best interests of those individuals **(Mental Capacity Act Codes of Practice, 2013:65).** The case is still ongoing and another IAG member suggests that the victim requires a lasting power of attorney along with a psychiatric expert examination.

Police training is identified as an important component by the IAG. Although Authorised Professional Practice (APP) guidelines for FGM have been in existence since 2015 **(College of Policing, 2020b)** these largely explain the phenomenon rather than provide specific guidance around police action. Although it is not tenable to pre-empt every possible scenario,

professionals do need hints and tips around the potential pit falls as well as guidelines around necessary action. The IAG specifically endorse the need for multi-agency training, because currently there is a piecemeal approach to managing FGM, because when partners attend strategy meetings there is 'no real joined up approach':

> I believe the only way to manage FGM is a partnership approach- because no one agency will solve FGM; and I'm very keen to have a 'Hydra'[iii] FGM written and the guy who owns it has agreed but not just to have it rolled out for the police, to have 'Hydra' for a multi-agency. That's what I am wanting, where in a syndicate there will be a police officer, a nurse, a doctor, teacher, social worker, so they can 'act out' that scenario in that safe environment taking that partnership approach (IAG focus group).

Therefore, organising multi agency 'Hydra' training is considered a way forward, albeit implementing across several statutory agencies may prove a logistic challenge. By comparison, no Authorised Professional Practice (APP) exists for FM and HBA, with only half a page ascribed to a series of links to documents **(College of Policing, 2020c).** Therefore, officers possess little to no guidance on policing tactics and strategy. Indeed the absence of a cohesive strategy by officials is evident in current research where one South Asian Police Officer is considered to be the expert: "I'd go to strategy meetings and it's always gung-ho..//.. none of them have had any experience of forced marriage. Indeed, people are 'googling' on the phone, and they're all looking to me to lead on it because they have heard that I'm a forced marriage expert..//..There's no quality assurance on the decision-making" **(Aplin, 2019:269).** These examples, raised by the IAG and reinforced by extant research, not only expose police professional uncertainty in dealing with incidents of FGM, HBA and FM, but White professionals appear to ascribe knowledge and expertise to some South Asian Officers based on ethnicity alone.

A final issue identified through the IAG focus group is around disclosure and information sharing between statutory agencies. One IAG member is critical of a male nurse she came into contact with, who had personal experience of eighty cases of FGM which he had not disclosed to ***any*** agency beyond healthcare:

> 'What did you do with that information?' [the IAG member asked him] and he said 'nothing'. So there's eighty families potentially at risk who might have female children of all the ages..//.. they're on nobody's radar, so they're not on education, they're not on police, they're not on social services, they're not part of a MASH team (IAG focus group).

Whilst information sharing is important, practitioners must avoid assuming that past victims will automatically inflict this practice on their children. Insensitive, intrusive, and repetitive questions from health care practitioners to FGM victims not only serves to "put salt on that wound" but makes women feel they are being treated as potential criminals **(Karlsen et al., 2020:4).** Yet, the research evidence is far from clear cut on the point of intergenerational abuse. In Gangoli's study, there is a clear sense in which UK victims of FGM are torn and conflicted by their cultural and family obligations versus the individual violation of both their bodies and human rights **(2018);** which makes it difficult to accept that such practices will cease in families. Such conflicts are evident when mothers assert that they do not support FGM as a harmful practice but then appear almost 'regretful' in no longer having celebrations to mark the event; then defending circumcision as "a pride" for the family and "our culture" **(2018:255).**

The government attempt to expose these hidden FGM crimes by placing a mandatory reporting duty, under section 5B of the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003[iv], on health and social care professionals and teachers, to report known cases in under 18s to the police **(HM Government, 2020:25; Home Office, 2021).** Yet, quite illogically so, the guidance provides no requirement

to refer adult women with FGM to adult social services or the police **(HM Government, 2020:53; Home Office, 2016),** which is inevitably the reason why, as the above extract illustrates, the male nurse did not disclose the information of the eighty cases to partner agencies. According to current statistical data, it is accurate to suggest that FGM impacts on children, with procedures performed on children between 4 and 8 years of age, sometimes in the 1st week of life or at prepuberty, and rarely later than 16 years **(Costello, 2015).** Over 90% of FGM procedures in England Wales and N Ireland are carried out under the age of 18 years **(Digital NHS, 2020)** but such victims are predominantly cut *before* entering the UK **(Ali et al., 2020; Creighton et al., 2019; Gangoli et al., 2018).** Therefore, the real risks to UK based children are significantly lower that previous studies suggest **(Creighton et al., 2019; Karlsen et al., 2020).** Yet the crucial point is that 87% of FGM cases reported come direct from Midwifery, at the point of pregnancy and childbirth, where the average age of victims alerting healthcare professionals is at 32 years of age **(Digital NHS, 2020:5).** Since the majority of these cases appear to be adults disclosing historical child abuse, it is argued that the mandatory reporting provision has a limited impact on the number of cases referred to police and social care. Therefore, it is of little revelation that few new cases come to police attention, with no successful prosecutions of FGM to date in the UK **(Gangoli et al., 2018; Home Affairs Committee on FGM, 2016).** It is entirely incongruous that, due to the 2003 legislative provision, health care practitioners possess a wealth of information which they are currently under no obligation to share with police and social services. This predicament renders statutory bodies, such as the police and social care, unable to proactively identify and protect victims from future harm, as they lack awareness and intelligence of the families perpetrating this practice.

Conclusions

The findings identify that IAG members are an untapped but highly effective police operational resource. Their involvement in policing operations should be more widely advertised to forces internally, because research illustrates that IAG members possess a wealth of knowledge, skills and experience and are highly competent in providing creative and practical problem solving suggestions to police officers and other professionals. The IAG perform the role of community barometer and inject cultural competence to complement police decision-making in situations. As cultural ambassadors they can both inform communities and educate the police, particularly in perceiving some cases as preventative rather than solely prosecution oriented. The findings indicate that IAGs do meet the ACPO strategic aims by bridging the gap between police and communities, but arguably some IAG members appear equally adept at identifying safeguarding and investigative considerations. Therefore, consideration should be given, as appropriate, to IAG member attendance at monthly divisional Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC)[v] meetings to advise on high risk victims of domestic abuse. This will undoubtedly improve the quality of service afforded to HBA, FM and FGM victims and enhance practitioner responses to those crimes, which in a MARAC context extends to victim support, probation, housing, social services, health, and education **(Robinson, 2006).**

IAG members consider the strategic issues around who is an appropriate professional to deal with these harmful practices. For some ethnic minority police officers, honour could "cloud their judgement", being too prominent in their values system for them to act entirely objectively, resulting in the possibility of imparting culturally biased advice **(Aplin, 2021).** However, the same principle applies in other statutory settings, including healthcare, as some health professionals possess their own values and beliefs and may be ambivalent or hostile to the idea

of eradicating FGM **(Bagness, 2019:505).** Therefore, allocating a culturally competent African nurse to FGM female victims is arguably not an appropriate agency response. Tokenistic ethnic matching of some BAME professionals to victims may perpetuate stereotypes **(Kanter, 1977; Aplin, 2021)**, and cultural competence in isolation should not be the sole and overriding factor for public bodies. The gender, cultural competence *and* appropriate training of professionals are all equally important factors when allocating professionals to victims of crime, with IAG acknowledgement that appropriate skills and training are necessary for officers of all ethnicities.

Moreover, cases identified by the IAG underline ways in which front line police responses to FGM, FM and HBA investigations need to improve. Professionals often only have "one chance" to save life **(NPCC, 2015:8; Scottish Government, 2011)** and yet time and again uniformed officers are sent, in the absence of a well-conceived strategy, to speak to victims in the presence of perpetrators **(Aplin, 2019)**, which increases risks to victims and is not accepted practice within a traditional Domestic Abuse context. Equally, some strategies are more dysfunctional than ill conceived, with vulnerable victims lacking the capacity to consent to marriage being attributed capacity and "freewill" by the very professionals who should be safeguarding victims.

Furthermore, the IAG expose that health professionals hold vital information about FGM adult victims, which under current statutory guidance they are under no obligation to disclose to police or social care bodies. This identifies the weakness of FGM legislation, specifically section 5B the mandatory reporting provision which, albeit well intended, is an ineffectual tool for eradicating FGM and identifying those at potential risk. Limiting the reporting of cases to child victims under 18 only is inadequate, as research identifies that a large proportion of children are victims of FGM *before* entering the UK. Moreover, the legislative wording explicitly dissuades

healthcare professionals from reporting adult cases of FGM to social care and the police; and since many of these are victims disclosing historic abuse, this effectively stifles demand and facilitates the proliferation of this intergenerational practice. In order to eradicate FGM, protect future victims, deter perpetrators, and alter practitioner processes this necessitates a change to the current statutory guidance to include mandatory reporting of *adult* cases. However, this is a contentious point, as mandatory reporting is not extended to other forms of child abuse **(Creighton et al., 2019)** and could possibly serve to alienate and stereotype particular communities **(Creighton et al., 2019; Karlsen et al., 2020),** as well as increasing statutory agency responsibilities (health, police, and social care) in the prevention of FGM.

In contrast to Dixons **(2018)** research, it is clear that IAG members in this study play a more proactive and 'activist' function in scrutinising officer decision making and debriefing operations. However, the absence of documenting IAG decisions **(Cabinet Office, 2017; Murji, 2011)** remains a pressing concern. Without effective organisational memory, neither the police, scholars, nor IAGs can assess the value, consistency, or impact of IAG decision-making on police operations or practices.

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Notes

[i] This excludes Greater Manchester Police data, as they are using new IT systems

[ii] Written in 2008 and revised into a formal guidance in 2011.

[iii] The Hydra is an immersive simulated training tool that enables the monitoring of group dynamics, real time leadership and the decision making of critical incidents particularly for detectives **(Hydra Foundation, 2018).** Hydra is effective in examining strategic and tactical multi team decision-making **(Alison et al., 2013).** Hydra exercises use pre constructed case scenarios and are often used by police in training when managing major incidents of rape, murder, terrorism, abductions etc. Students of hydra can be provided with written paper feeds to assist in their decision-making. Hydra is not limited to police and includes expert practitioners in the Emergency Services, Criminal Justice, Military, Government and Humanitarian Agencies **(Hydra Foundation, 2018).**

[iv] Updated by the Serious Crime Act 2015.

[v] Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences.