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## **Investigating Honour-Based Abuse and Other Crimes in South Asian Communities: The benefits, limitations and impacts of ‘ethnic matching’ and ethnic ‘difference’ of police officers**

### **Abstract**

This article considers the benefits, limitations and potential impacts of ‘ethnic matching’ South Asian (SA) police officers to victims, or conversely allocating ‘different’ non-SA officer to reported Honour Based Abuse (HBA) cases and other crimes. To explore these themes, semi structured interviews in one English police force with fifteen police specialist detectives in Public Protection took place.

Lack of cultural competence by some non-South Asian officers was evident, exposing stereotyping and tokenism. Some professional race anxiety features, but to a lesser extent. Cultural ignorance impacts on an officers ability to identify crime patterns; results in misconstruing victim perspectives and means that officers may not recognise cues that victims are at risk. The opposing perspective identifies that there are enormous benefits to ‘ethnic matching’ SA officers and victims when investigating crimes, notably enhanced insight due to cultural competence, excellent victim rapport and the use of foreign language skills. Conversely, findings indicate that in exceptional circumstances, cultural bias by some same ethnicity officers can act as an impediment, influencing officer decision-making and detrimentally affecting victims’ best interests. Extant literature reinforces the contention that victims do not want to be “ethnic matched” to police or other professionals, for fear that officials may leak information to the wider community.

Albeit there are notable benefits to ethnic matching, factors such as training and experience are equally important. Nevertheless the article affords valuable insights into the strengths and limitations of ethnic matching and ethnic difference, which will aid operational supervisory police officers when resourcing such incidents.

**Key words:** Policing; Ethnic-Matching; Honour Based Abuse; Culture

## **Introduction**

Honour Based Abuse (HBA) is linked to a collection of practices, which include Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) (**Home Office 2020**). There were 2,024 HBA offences reported in England and Wales between 2019 and 2020, but victims are often reluctant to report this hidden crime (**Home Office 2020, Idriss 2021**) and consequently the statistics are likely to be significantly higher than published data suggests (**HMIC 2015, p.41**), denoting the tip of an iceberg (**Dyer 2015, p.14, Aplin 2019**).

The key justification for perpetrating Honour Based Abuse (HBA) is based on protecting a value system predicated on social norms and traditions. Honour is not about individual men controlling individual women but is a group entity, built on collective decision-making and community values, social policing and conformity with social and gender norms (**Sen 2005**). The heavy burden of maintaining honour is often disproportionately placed on women, who are symbolically viewed as the vessels that ‘hold’ family honour (**Yuval Davis 1998, p.29, Niaz 2003**). In this way, family honour becomes universally tied to the behaviour of women (**Yuval Davis 1998, p.29, Jafri 2009, p.58, Gill et al. 2013**), whilst ‘shame’ is associated with transgressing these expectations (**Gill and Brah, 2014**). Extant literature tells us that abuse precipitated due to perceived honour violations are not really about ‘honour,’ albeit this is the pretext, but about the need to subjugate women in order to defend the status quo and preserve a patriarchal, essentially traditional way of life (**Balzani 2011, Chesler and Bloom 2012**), what Pitt-Rivers terms as honour as precedence (**1971**). In ensuring the continued survival of the tribe and family institution, women are used as the “vehicle” for transmitting social values from one generation to the next (**Wilford 1998, p.15, Gupta 2003, p.8, Jafri, 2009**). When

daughters deviate from such norms they are perceived by kin and community as responsible for their own victimisation (**Jafri 2009, Welden 2010**) and are therefore punished, hence the term ‘honour-based abuse.’ Paradoxically they become labelled as the transgressors or “outsiders” (**Becker 2008, Balzani 2011, p.87**). In the preservation of family honour, families go to extremes to prevent women from violating tradition (**Niaz 2003, Gill et al. 2013**).

There are various definitions of HBA across international boundaries, however, the UK National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC) (**2015**) definition is herein adopted; as this is non-gender specific and accepts the possibility that males can be victims as well as women being capable of perpetration (**Roberts 2014, p.69**). HBA is defined as an incident or crime involving violence, threats of violence, intimidation, coercion, or abuse (including psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse), which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of an individual, family and or community for alleged or perceived breaches of the family and/or community’s code of behaviour (**NPCC strategy 2015, p.5, Home Office 2020**).

### **HBA is a form of domestic abuse**

Although HBA is a distinct phenomenon (**Chesler 2009**) it possesses many overlapping commonalities with traditional forms of domestic abuse (**Aplin 2019**). Police recorded domestic abuse crime has seen a 9% rise from the previous year (**ONS 2020**) and 19% of all homicides are domestic abuse related (**ONS 2020**), both signify the importance of this topic. The rationale behind integrating the operational policing of HBA within the domestic abuse framework in England and Wales is to avoid a racist reaction from the state (**Welchman 2014, p. xi**). Yet, ironically within the academic field there is call for police practices to be ‘colour blind’ or ‘race neutral’ in treating individuals according to their need rather than their culture, race or ethnicity (**Garner 2017**). Agreeably, the crime

of HBA should not be categorised as a particularly ‘Asian’ (**Khanum 2008**) or “ethnic minority issue” (**Kazimirski et al. 2009, p.55**), because this may engender a reluctance by professionals in intervening in what is erroneously perceived to be a religious or cultural practice (**Khanum 2008**). Yet, it does appear a grave miscalculation to *overlook* the distinctively cultural elements of this crime. HBA is a complex crime (**Roberts et al. 2014, p.39**) demanding a culturally competent understanding by practitioners (such as the police, social workers, educators and healthcare professionals) in order to appreciate *why* such criminality occurs. Belur agrees that an absence of cultural consideration can be debilitating for the ethnic minority victim, because their situation becomes subsumed within a larger box labelled ‘domestic abuse’ without passing reference to the distinctly different problems that South Asian women face (**2008**). Overlooking cultural nuances could result in practitioners applying a “blanket approach” in which there is a tendency to ‘treat everyone the same’ (**Burman et al. 2004, p.348**).

Ethnicity is a more specific term than ‘race’, and derives from the greek word ‘ethnos’ meaning nation (**Garner 2017, Gabbidon and Greene 2016**), in which ethnic groups identify with one another through heritage, shared language, religion, culture, nationalism and geographical region. Although ethnic groups have a similar genetic inheritance, most scholars see race and ethnicity as *culturally* relevant rather than biologically relevant (**Gabbidon and Greene 2016**). The concept of ‘ethnic matching’ officers to victims has already been previously addressed in a domestic abuse context. Notably, Stover et al’s Domestic Violence Home Visit interventions study in Connecticut (**2008**), identifies that Hispanic victims that were ethnic matched with Hispanic officers received more time on their cases and were provided with a broader range of support services than those victims *not* ethnically matched. Indeed, cultural and institutional

barriers were overcome, as victims were reported as more engaged with advocates who, not being impeded by language barriers, could fluently establish the nature and severity of the incident, and thus enable access to resources (Stover et al. 2008). But how might this compare with interactions between UK South Asian HBA victims and SA officers? Although a lack of cultural competence by some officers at incidents is recognised within HBA literature (Mulvihill et al. 2018); addressing the specific benefits, limitations and impacts of ‘ethnic matching’ SA officers to HBA crimes reported by South Asian victims, has not been addressed in any field to date. The purpose of this article is to consider whether ‘ethnic matching’ matters in the effective policing and investigation of HBA and other crimes? Equally, what are the benefits and possible adverse impacts associated with allocating a White police officer to these incidents? Does an enhanced cultural understanding of HBA from an officer of the same culture/faith result in a better policing response, or does this in itself generate its own particular hazards?

The literature review which follows opens with an exploration of the difficulties encountered when non-SA officers do not understand ‘culture’ in a HBA investigation. It examines race anxiety by professionals which can result in under-policing, under-protection and the de-policing of ethnic minority communities. It also considers recruitment and segregated policing. Whether ‘ethnic matching’ is what victims want is evaluated, along with the risks this can potentially pose.

### **White professionals lack cultural competence**

Some academics are skeptical that White professionals from either statutory services or the voluntary sector are able to understand the culture, customs and traditions in order to relate to issues faced by South Asian victims of crime (Gilbert et al. 2004, Gangoli et

**al. 2006, Kazimirski et al. 2009**). Police officers not comprehending the British South Asian culture is deemed to be the “achilles heel” and one of the most prevalent factors influencing under-reporting offences by South Asian victims (**Harrison and Gill 2017, p. 307**).

Moreover, there is evidence of unsympathetic attitudes by police officers when they attend Honour related incidents (**Belur 2008, Gill 2011, Hanmer 2013 [1989]**). Even police simply attending addresses can invoke shame within the community (**Mulvihill et al. 2018**). White professionals sometimes make suggestions around ‘escaping’ the situation that victims consider to be unrealistic (**Gilbert et al. 2004**), often because the officers interpret the victim’s predicament within their own frame of reference, which can exclude cultural consideration. Inept interventions by state officials can leave victims in greater danger (**Gill et al. 2013, p. 251, Patel 2003, Phillips and Dustin 2004**) and thereby dissuade them from reporting in the future.

Research in HBA identifies that victims of sexual assault or rape in some communities suffer a *double* stigma: first the violation itself and secondly the adverse cultural community reaction to the rape. Instead of blaming the perpetrator, the violation is perceived by relatives as dishonourable and shameful (**Eisner and Ghuneim 2013; Roberts et al. 2014**) with raped women de-victimised and perceived as unclean “carriers of pollution” (**Gorringe 2006, p.237, Jafri 2009, p.58**). Additionally, becoming pregnant as a result of rape or incest could warrant the death of the woman in order to expunge the violation (**Meetoo and Mirza 2011**). In some countries the resolution is for perpetrators to marry their rape victims, which paradoxically restores family honour and illustrates the low value placed on women (**Okin 1999**). Of equal importance is recognising the way that victims themselves internalise their situation and adhere to the very honour codes

that bind them (Gill 2006). South Asian women are socialised to believe they are to 'blame' for the violence, therefore it is "self-inflicted" (Burman et al, 2004, p. 339; Pease and Flood 2008, Gill et al. 2013) because they should not have transgressed honour codes. This then results in misguided loyalty, often towards female perpetrating relatives (Aplin 2017). This facet is apparent in a Swedish study where teenage girls suffering HBA were loath to disclose intimidation and physical abuse to counsellors because of family loyalty, believing they are 'destined' to live in this restricted way (Alizadeh et al. 2011). Cultural and community reaction to offending behaviour and victimhood is therefore important for practitioners to grasp in order to improve decision-making at scenes of crime, relate to victim perspectives and avoid 'victim blaming' responses.

#### **Racism, Race anxiety, self-governing communities, under-policing & 'race-workers'**

Strong evidence exists which contends that ethnic minority victims fear and mistrust statutory agencies because they are perceived as "outsiders". Fear of racist attitudes by practitioners inhibits the disclosure and prosecution of offences (Mama 1993, Bernard 2001, Gill 2004, Pease and Flood 2008). When victims do seek help from mainstream authorities, this is seen as an "act of betrayal" (Mama 2008, p.296, Haj-Yahia 2011, p.338) and they are accused of being traitors to their race (Thiara 2013).

Victims feeling as outsiders is exacerbated further when the public and professionals perceive and frame HBA as an eastern issue, precipitated by migrant cultures importing "backward primitive values" (Volpp 2000, p. 104, Akpinar 2003, Gill and Brah 2014) that are alien and threaten 'us' the host nation. This is a form of cultural racism (Bonilla-Silva 2006) which exoticises the discourse (Gill and Mitra-Khan 2010, p.151), providing only a narrow vision of what it is to be British South Asian, resulting in othering



and feelings of inferiority (**Gill, 2006**). Such cultural racism can lead people to conflate “cultural” practices with ethnicity (**Solomos 1998, p.62**). Reprehensible cultural practices, such as honour based abuse, should not result in dominant groups and professionals concluding that *all* minority cultural practices are potentially dysfunctional (**Gill 2006, p.10**).

Equally, some researchers contend that professionals, including police officers, are uncomfortable about tackling cultural issues due to the “fear of being accused of being racist” (**Gangoli et al. 2006, p.8, Siddiqui 2003, p.80, Burman et al. 2002 and 2004, Gill et al. 2013**). Such race anxiety (**Burman et al. 2004**), which is fear of making mistakes in the investigative process based on cultural ignorance, is seen as damaging to community cohesion (**Kazimirski et al. 2009**). It is also a highly politicised issue. Media coverage characterising ‘gangs of Asian men preying on White girls’ (**Carter and Siddique 2012**), as in the case of the Rotherham and Rochdale CSE grooming scandals, serves to ‘weaponise’ and drive a far right narrative, fuelling racial tension, race hate and discrimination (**Cockbain and Tufail 2020**). Rotherham councillors from a Pakistani Heritage acted as a barrier to investigations, because they wanted to avoid giving oxygen to those racist far right perspectives (**Jay 2014, p.93**). As evident in the case of Rotherham, such fears of “racist” accusation, for fear of contravening the culture, ethnicity or religion of the person concerned (**Chantler et al. 2017, p. 30**), may cause professionals to avoid tackling these criminal matters altogether. By contrast, Razack is more forthright in suggesting that race anxiety is a noble but misguided explanation for police inaction, which constitutes racism *masquerading* as ‘respect’ for culture (**2004, p.167**). 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, p.8**), in which some state officials avoid taking action, due to the inaccurate perception

that South Asian communities need no statutory service provision and can “look after their own” (**Burr 2002, p.843**). Ethnic minority victims, in some instances, are abandoned to self-police and self-govern (**Southall Black Sisters 2001, p.1, Burman et al. 2004, p. 344, Siddiqui, 2005**).

Under-enforcement of the law is a key component in ethnic minority communities (**Kennedy 1997 as cited in Brown 2004**) and can result in the withdrawal of proactive crime investigation or “de-policing” (**Cooper 2002 as cited in Brown 2004**); principally caused through lack of identification with certain racial groups (**Kennedy 1997 as cited in Brown 2004**). Over preoccupation with culture by the state can therefore act as a barrier to effective public service provision (**Burman et al. 2004, Meeto and Mirza 2011, p.43**), diluting the policing response, precipitating inaction and under-policing, a form of ‘reverse racism’ that is just as detrimental to victims.

It is argued that police officers from ethnic minorities are better able to relate to the communities they originate from, as opposed to White colleagues (**Weitzer and Tuch 2006, Shjarback et al. 2017**). A considered resolution is the recruitment of more ethnic minority officers to ensure policing is more representative of the community it serves (**Shjarback et al. 2017**), which might then mitigate some of the above concerns. Yet, equally it is contended that ethnic minority recruitment can lead to ‘segregated’ policing, with Black officers patrolling race based zones and White officers patrolling White areas (**Brown 2004**). Ethnic difference between dominant and ethnic minority groups should not be used by professionals to provide a two-tier “double standard of justice” (**Brown 2004, p.757**). Such a dual system of policing, with ethnic minority officers being relegated as token raceworkers to manage race problems and race relations (**Brown 2004**), is only slightly discernable in UK research. Belur recounts that despite a victim

being assaulted by her husband, two White female police officers ejected the perpetrator rather than arresting. They deflected the issue to the South Asian domestic violence officer to manage the following day when she came on duty (**Belur 2008, p.430**). This ‘ringfencing’ approach, allocating the issue to an officer of the same ethnicity, could be deemed as an avoidance strategy, due to officers fears around treading on ‘cultural egg shells’, but equally this could be operational expediency with officers deflecting workload onto other departments (**Aplin 2019**).

### **South Asian victims want “outsiders” - not ethnic matching**

‘Ethnic matching’ professionals to victims raises legitimate concerns around victim trust and issues of confidentiality. Researchers are doubtful that a shared racial background automatically guarantees a positive interaction between minority officers and minority citizens (**Shjarback et al. 2017**). In an HBA context, victims fear potential breaches to confidentiality and this dictates the choices they make about which professionals to trust and whom to disclose to. This is evident in Burman et al’s study, where service-users in a mental health study specifically avoided specialist South Asian services, particularly those with identifiable links to their own community (**2002**). There is equal reluctance by victims to disclose sexual abuse to SA police officers, instead preferring to speak to White officers to minimise the risk the account may be recounted to the community. There exists a strong “fear that the cultural beliefs of some South Asian police officers were stronger than their job vocational duties” (**Harrison and Gill 2017, p. 310**). This factor is evident in Mulvihill et al’s study where the SA police officer focused on his shared cultural identity with the victim and contravened police procedure by encouraging a reconciliation with perpetrating family members (**2018**):

So for you, when you left, you realise ..//.. your honour's basically gone..//.. I know what its like because I'm Asian as well; because they're your family, that's your mum at the end of the day  
(**Mulvihill et al. 2018, p.7**)

As a consequence the victim was loathe to “tell him anything” (**Mulvihill et al. 2018, p.7**) because the officer shared familial and friendship networks, subscribing to and accepting those cultural practices as norms. This lack of trust in engaging with ‘culturally relatable’ services is evident in the aftermath of the murder of Kurdish woman Banaz Mahmud in 2006, where sister Bekhal was insistent to seek support from Southall Black sisters rather than the third sector Kurdish charity (IKWRO) (**Goode 2019**). Similarly one HBA survivor facilitated her own escape by opting for ‘White’ cabbies, rather than Asian taxi services, for fear of her location being traced through community networks (**A Survivor’s story 2019**).

Although General Practitioners (GPs), nurses and doctors can be the first to identify signs of HBA when undergoing routine health checks (**Khanum 2008**), mistrust of practitioners of the same ethnicity extends to such professionals, including interpreters. Focus group participants in Gilbert et al’s study discuss an Asian GP who disclosed details of a medical issue to the parent of the patient, breaching patient/doctor confidentiality (**2004, p. 124**). Such a violation of trust by a GP is replicated in Gangoli et al’s study (**2006**).

It is particularly important for victims to be able to communicate with law enforcement and emergency personnel through interpreters. However, victims are reluctant to use interpreters from the same culture, due to the fear of gossiping through the ‘community grapevine’ (**Chew Graham et al. 2002, Burman et al. 2004**) which can bring shame on the family name (**Khanum 2008, Wellock 2008**). Consequently, victims would prefer to

be questioned by “outside people” (**Wellock 2008, p. 185**). The need for anonymity means that interpreters from outside the local area are necessary to avoid the overlap between SA professionals and service users (**Burman et al. 2002**). However, limited resources and tight financial constraints mean that the police often have to rely on those local services. This effectively compromises victim disclosure, as victims remain concerned about alerting the family that the matter has been reported to the police (**Kazimirski et al. 2009**). Such studies highlight the mistake practitioners have in assuming ‘ethnic matching’ officers and victims will routinely result in the best outcomes for victims.

## **Methodology**

The research question central to the study was to critically explore discretionary policing practices and decision-making at reported honour-based abuse incidents. Therefore, symbolic interactionism was a valuable theoretical tool in exploring police, victims and suspect interactions. However, the researcher was keen to consider a problem solving and evidence-based ‘what works’ (**Lilly et al. 2011, p.331**) real world research approach. Therefore, the approach was pragmatic and intended to benefit practitioners (**Gray 2018**), less preoccupied with theoretical frameworks and wanting to focus on the research problem itself (**Creswell 2014**).

Because HBA is a specialist crime area, random sampling would not have yielded a reliable or valuable sample (**Miles and Huberman 1994**). Therefore, the researcher employed non-probability purposive sampling where individuals were sought out where the processes studied were most likely to occur (**Denzin and Lincoln 1994 as cited in Silverman 2006, Bryman 2016**), notably within Public Protection Investigation Units

(PPIU). Although linked to a larger data set examining 100 cases taken from classified police incident data (phase one), this article solely focuses on the second phase of the research which involves fifteen qualitative semi structured interviews with specialist police officers from detective constable to detective Inspector rank from one police force in 2016. Fifteen interviews is deemed as sufficient to identify patterns across data (**Braun and Clarke 2013, p. 55**). The sole qualifying criteria was that officers must have had investigative involvement in HBA and/or Forced Marriage (FM) incidents.

To access the PPIU environment a meeting was arranged with the Chief Superintendent governing the Public Protection Division (PPD) and the study was outlined to her and HBA strategic leads. All participants were obtained through sending an initial email of interest and asking for volunteers. Participants were geographically located from seven of the eleven divisions of one police force. Fourteen of the fifteen participants were qualified detectives previously or currently investigating HBA and Forced Marriage (FM) cases (including domestic abuse and child abuse cases) as specialist PPIU officers. Eleven of the fifteen participants were female. Twelve participants were White British, with three of the participants of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indian heritage (see table 1). The length of service ranged from eight to 29 years, with the mean average being 15 years-service. Officers cumulatively had 228 years of policing experience.

**Table 1: Details of Police Officers interviewed**

	Rank	Length of Service	Role	Gender	Ethnicity
1	Detective Sergeant	29	HBA Force Strategic Lead	Female	Pakistani
2	Detective Constable	12	PPIU officer	Female	White

3	Detective Constable	10	PPIU officer	Male	White
4	Detective Sergeant	11	PPIU officer	Male	Bangladeshi
5	Detective Sergeant	15	Ex PPIU Sgt	Female	White
6	Detective Inspector	19	HBA Force Strategic Lead	Male	White
7	Detective Constable	12	PPIU officer	Female	Indian
8	Detective Sergeant	24	Ex PPIU Sgt	Female	White
9	Uniformed Constable	9	NPT officer	Female	White
10	Detective Sergeant	15	PPIU officer	Female	White
11	Detective Constable	18	PPIU officer	Female	White
12	Detective Constable	8	PPIU officer	Female	White
13	Detective Constable	16	PPIU officer	Male	White
14	Detective Constable	15	PPIU officer	Female	White
15	Detective Inspector	15	Ex PPIU Sgt	Female	White

Although Honour Based Abuse is not confined to solely Muslim or South Asian communities and includes victims from the Middle East, Kurdish communities, Africa and the Caribbean (**Brandon and Hafez 2008, Reddy 2008, Meeto and Mirza 2011**), the findings of this research identify the diasporic origin of victims and perpetrating relatives (which was overwhelmingly the same) were largely of South Asian heritage (62% from Pakistan, 13% from Bangladesh, 8% Indian, 5% data omitted, 3% Iraq, 3% Libya, 2% Somalia, 2% Kurdistan, 1% Macedonia, 1% England). Given that officers involved in the study were predominantly White officers, with three of South Asian heritage, this is the rationale for the focus on ethnic matching SA and White officers with victims of HBA.

All participants agreed to the recording of interviews using a Dictaphone and the average interview lasted one hour. Qualitative interviews were beneficial in providing a “richer picture” (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008, p.72) with data exuding “thick description” (Geertz 1993, p. 10) that were nested within a particular situational context. A schedule of thirteen interview questions were devised, which were wholly based on the thematic findings from phase one classified incident data. This approach was taken because explicit questions are said to lead to better research (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Secondly, this ensured the theory was progressively built and ‘grounded’ from the data itself in accordance with grounded theory principles, rather than derived from the literature review or other unrelated ideas. However, significantly, no questions were posed in relation to race, ethnicity, national culture, tokenism or ethnic matching. Questions were around police service provision; the efficacy of policing; policing HBA compared to policing traditional forms of domestic abuse; and partnership working with other agencies such as children social care. Recurring patterns were analysed and categorised to encourage theory building (Strauss and Corbin 1998) with codes and categories under constant revision when examining data from phase one and two, which is deemed appropriate for qualitative research (Bryman 2016). From developing the instrument, collating and housing the data, subjecting it to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2013) and creating charts and statistics took over fourteen months.

There was no ethics committee and therefore ethical approval to access data (Creswell 2014) and interview police officers was formally granted in writing by the Chief Constable as authorising gatekeeper. Consent was also obtained through the university ethics committee. The force was anonymised on ethical grounds in order to protect its reputation. All officers 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. Names, collar numbers of officers, crime numbers, addresses, divisions, victim or perpetrator details were all stringently edited out. Interview participants were attributed a letter (interview A to O).

Conducting interviews with police across a wide geographical area to a degree aided in improving external validity (**Bryman 2012**). The positionality of the researcher was also beneficial to the research process, because as a prior detective Sergeant of 20 years she was cognisant of the distinctive linguistic register of police occupational culture(s) which meant she readily made sense of and was able to apply a “common stock of knowledge” (**Atkinson and Coffey 2011 p.85-86**) to the data. Although this was advantageous it made replicating the study difficult. Other limitations including being unable to generalise the results as representative across all police forces. Having 43 autonomous police forces with different systems, departments and procedures indeed complicates analysis (**Broden and Ellison 2013**). Interviews provide non-standard unique responses that are often difficult to replicate in other contexts, which affects reliability (**Denscombe 2007**), concerned with whether measures applied are consistent (**Bryman 2012, Perri6 and Bellamy 2012**). Despite this, interviews can have a strong and persuasive impact on the research reader and are useful in gleaning valuable insights and current preoccupations that police officers have about blockages to professional practice.

## **Findings**

The findings thematically expose two polarised perspectives. Culture blindness by officers exposes themes of stereotyping, tokenism and that HBA victims are often unfairly measured using a comparative white middle class ‘yardstick’. Perspectives and motives of victims appear to be misconstrued due to lack of cultural competence by some professionals. Professional race anxiety also features, but to a lesser extent. The opposing perspective identifies the double edged sword of ‘culture’, in that there are found to be enormous benefits achieved by ‘ethnic matching’ officers and victims. Conversely there is also some limited evidence of cultural bias, with some SA officers prioritising culture and community over the professional and legal obligations to their role.

### **Exoticising, ethnicity and stereotypical labels**

Specialist officers recognise that frontline officers often equate HBA and Forced Marriage with minorities from a South Asian heritage (Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi), rather than appreciate that such criminality can occur across many cultures and geographical regions:

Officers have ‘still got blinkered vision looking at it in Asian families and they’re not seeing it in what appear to be white European families- we’re not getting a grip at all.’ (police officer h, White)

I don’t think they [frontline officers] have enough input as to how the two marry up with each other and not just Asian communities, but like your Romanian communities, your different cultural backgrounds. It’s not just about Asian families, it’s not just about Bangladeshi families, it could be from any point of view, you could have any honour based within any background. (police officer k, White)

HBA is a ‘big issue in relation to Eastern European families.’  
(police officer h, White)

Police officers are sometimes a little too quick to assume the matter is ‘honour’ related, simply on the basis that the informant is Asian:

Sorry did you say they are Asian? ‘bump’ - and jump off - and we're on honour based violence and forced marriage... because there has been mention of a holiday or whatever then we just suddenly ‘jump’ to the other end of the scale ... I suppose we’re in danger of doing the same thing now with human trafficking or modern day slavery ... we immediately jump to - because you are from Eastern Europe, immediately it must be modern day slavery. (police officer m, White)

Expecting all South Asian people to be victims (or perpetrators) of HBA is an enormous generalisation. An over preoccupation with ethnicity and ‘culture’ can result in some frontline officers prematurely applying a stereotypical “label” to an incident, without necessarily conducting a thorough investigation:

I'm sure that when you was a teenager growing up that you may have a discussion with your parents about marriage... Whereas if you were of a certain ethnicity and had an argument over that, that then means, people seem to think, without asking any more questions that you are going to be taken abroad [for a Forced Marriage] ... it doesn't mean that the tickets are booked and ‘they're off’ again. It's for us [police] to go and ask those questions... but not necessarily ‘just bowling in there’ and putting all the labels in - I think there needs to be more investigation. (police officer m, White)

This narrative closely resonates with Kanter’s work on assimilation (1977), whereby police officers within the dominant group, possibly in an effort to understand cultural issues, simplify, generalise and even caricature individuals if they possess particular core characteristics, such as being from a particular region or ethnicity.

### **Tokenism**

There is an implicit assumption that allocating an HBA incident to a SA police officer will result in a more culturally sensitive response. Officers provide anecdotal evidence of SA officers being sent to HBA and FM incidents simply because they are from the same heritage as HBA victims. One ethnic minority practitioner as a British officer of Pakistani descent, well qualified to train in this arena, was seconded into Public Protection to write the HBA/FM force policy due to her accredited training background, having taught on

Domestic abuse courses for specialist detectives, as well as the CID course (ICIDP). She reflected on two male Muslim police officers being asked to deliver central police training on HBA and Forced Marriage, simply on the grounds that they are of Muslim faith:

It's appalling. It's really bad, the trainer sold it to me as 'they are two Muslim officers,' so I said - "what has that got to do with the issues?" ..//.. It's just happening on a 'wing and a prayer' all around the force [training]. People putting themselves up as experts in the issues..//..they came in, sat in front of the class and started speaking Urdu. Now the point of that was - 'did the class feel isolated from the conversation'. To me, that's got nothing to do with Honour Based Abuse.  
(police officer a, South Asian)

This approach assumes that Muslim SA police officers, by virtue of being racially and religiously aligned to victims, are automatically equipped with specialist knowledge in this gendered arena of HBA and Forced Marriage and are more effective problem solvers, comparable to White officers. The notion that ethnic minority officers are more capable of problem solving and conflict resolution, simply because they are of the same race is based on stereotypical reasoning (**Brown 2004**). Moreover, this approach implies tokenism (**Kanter 1977**) which is defined as being done for effect and as a symbolic gesture, to pretend to give advantage to those who are often treated unfairly. However, this is done to show that organisations are following the rules, rather than because the course of action is the right thing to do (**Collins Dictionary 2021, Cambridge Business English Dictionary 2021**). Providing a training function for ethnic minority officers solely based on their race and religion does not aid in furnishing police officers with knowledge and understanding of HBA/FM.

### **Lack of cultural competence: South Asian victims treated 'same' as White victims**

There is evidence of police and social care professionals treating victims the same as other domestic abuse victims, thereby *excluding* cultural consideration:

I know obviously there's a lot of religious implications and sometimes you need to pick up those points and question perhaps around someone's belief system more than you would someone in a DV thing; but they're [HBA victims] still just people at the end of the day, at risk, so for me I try and treat them just as you would with anyone else.  
(police officer p, White)

This reinforces the work of Burman et al in which statutory services applied a “blanket approach”, in which there is a tendency to ‘treat everyone the same’ (2004, p. 348). On occasion, comparisons between White female rape victims and SA rape victims leads officers to identify similarities between HBA and domestic abuse victims, whilst not necessarily recognising the key cultural *differences* between such groups. One officer suggests that rape victims of any race would react in the same way:

I think that would be the same with anyone wouldn't it; they wouldn't want it being well known; or ‘what are you off work today for’?  
(police officer m, White)

Yet as exemplified in the literature review, community and family reactions to rape allegations do have an adverse impact on victims (Jafri 2009, Meeto and Mirza 2011, Eisner and Ghuneim 2013, Roberts et al. 2014), placing victims in danger or leading to reports being suppressed before they reach prosecution. This is evident where an adult victim with learning difficulties undertook an ABE interview with UK police, stating that both her brother and uncle, at different points in time, raped her whilst in Pakistan. In this case the officer described the pressure relatives placed on the victim to retract the complaint (police officer o, White). Equally, this same pressure to withdraw support for a case is evident a further case, whereby a non-accredited schoolteacher within the South Asian community is found to be sexually abusing four or five children in the same class. One of these children, a 13 year old victim, admits sex with the teacher claiming he is her “boyfriend”. Yet when the police visit the victim to progress the complaint, the reaction by parents is one of prevarication and denial:

‘No this can’t ‘get out’, I’m not interested if it’s happened or if hasn’t happened, she is not going back there [to the tutor], that’s it, it’s done’. Dad would not give a statement; Mum would not give a statement; not allowed to ABE video interview the child – done.  
(police officer o, White)

Rather than concern about the physical and psychological impact of sexual abuse on the child, the *cultural* reaction by parents is to conceal the violation which is dishonourable and shameful (Eisner and Ghuneim 2013; Roberts et al. 2014) in order to avoid being ostracised by the community. It is therefore unsurprising that victims retract sexual assault allegations because of the adverse cultural stigma associated with sexual assault, akin to a contagion (Jafri, 2009) where the rape victim, like a person with disabilities, is perceived as tainted, soiled or “damaged goods” (Aplin 2018, Aplin 2019, p.63). From the perceptions of the community, acknowledging such victimhood stains family honour and inhibits the opportunity for an appropriate future ‘suitor’. Therefore, even if officers do grasp cultural complexities, culture itself can inhibit victims from instigating a prosecution. Police and CPS advocates certainly must be mindful not to apply generic Domestic Abuse procedures and need to have an awareness of such cultural factors when trying to rationalise why victims might retract complaints.

Ethnic minority practitioners suggest that some professionals *lack* cultural competence and tend to respond reactively to an isolated “incident”, such as an assault, without necessarily recognising the underlying cultural causes and patterns that trigger the violence or the psychological abuse:

They [social services] haven’t even recognised that side of it. They’ve seen it as an assault or they’ve seen it as mum slapped the girl, but what they haven’t looked at is the deeper side of why- Is it because she’s becoming too westernised, is it because she’s got a White boyfriend, is it because she is going out too late, what is it that has caused that?  
(police officer a, South Asian)

The implicit suggestion is that culturally competent professionals are more able to recognise iterative themes and underlying motives, therefore more proficiently able to gauge the heightened risks HBA victims face. This above extract reinforces prior research, as victims becoming “sexually active” and acting “too westernised” are the top key triggers for Honour Based Abuse and Forced Marriage (**Aplin 2019, p.59**). Westernisation is the most dominant reason for Honour Based child abuse, evident in 50% (11/22) of all child cases in phase one of this study. The sanction for such described misdemeanours in an HBA context can be harsh, involving beatings, false imprisonment and threats to kill from close family members (**Aplin 2017, 2019**). This fear of westernisation is explored within Cantle’s 2001 assessment of the Oldham riots, in that certain communities intentionally self-segregate in order to resist ‘unwholesome’ western influences (**The Institute of Community Cohesion 2001**).

### **The White middle-class yardstick: Victim ambivalence misunderstood**

Police officers from a SA background, particularly officers in receipt of HBA training, tend to have a nuanced understanding of victimology, illustrated in the excerpt below:

Officers need to realise that you’re *not* dealing with normal adults [victims], you’re dealing with adults that are quite likely to have come from a very dysfunctional adolescence. So they may not have got onto a bus before, they may never have visited one of the key cities in the U.K. Yet you’re expecting them to go to a refuge [to escape HBA] in Birmingham and get their own transport...this is a regular thing in police culture I find, is this repetitive *comparison, yard stick* with how ‘I’ grew up – ‘Well I wouldn’t have done that’ ... [officer says to HBA victim] ‘Just get on the bus. I’m sorry but you’re just going to have to get on the bus. I did it when I was 18’... so the yardstick came out. (police officer d, South Asian)

This extract illustrates how difficult it is for victims that are overcontrolled and stifled by family members in a sheltered home environment, not empowered to do things for themselves, compared with the enormous freedoms they possess once they have fled an

HBA situation and may be in a refuge. Although learned helplessness is undoubtedly a feature within domestic abuse more broadly, making individual agency and escape difficult to foresee (Maier and Seligman 1976, Walker 1979, Aguilar and Nightingale 1994); the key issue here is that some officers misunderstand victim perspectives due to an absence of a cultural lens to adequately interpret what they encounter. Some officers lack an appreciation for the subjective life histories and cultural upbringing of South Asian female victims and arguably this situation is not solely isolated to culture and race but includes class. An officer of SA descent is critical of officers who make constant comparisons between their essentially White working or middle class upbringing and the behaviour and attitudes of HBA victims. Such comparisons make it difficult for officers to rationalise why victims may take seemingly ambivalent courses of action:

Those [officers] who have no idea about whatever culture, background, religion you're dealing with, and you've got this yard stick where you think ...why has this person made this decision - which is going against their own safety, why are they putting themselves in danger?  
(police officer d, South Asian)

To illustrate this point further, one officer fails to consider *culture* or the loss of a victim's 'honour' and her "shame" in rationalising why an Asian woman may be reluctant to admit committing adultery in marriage:

White women are more likely to talk to each other - One case that I dealt with, it was domestic abuse from a husband, and she'd [Asian victim] done a statement and she'd said "He assaulted me"- it was only later on - she said to me 'Actually the reason all this started is because I've had an affair'- and that's massive for her. She said 'The shame that I've brought in my marriage'. I said - 'Why didn't you tell me that 6 months ago?' She said 'I can't do that. It's not right'. I think another woman would have gone 'Well, I've had an affair and he's found out'. They're [White women] more likely to tell you the truth.  
(police officer b, White)



Moreover, this extract resonates with Garner's work in which White communities represent themselves as law abiding and decent contrasted with "others" who are presented as criminals, unreasonable and reluctant to contribute (**Garner 2007, p.177**). The propensity of the officer to reach generalised conclusions based on race/culture is also reminiscent of Kanter's seminal work on Tokenism theory (**1977**). Kanter's original focus lay in gender discrimination against women attempting to enter male dominated workplaces, but latterly academics such as Gustafson (**2008**), Strohine and Brandl (**2011**) proffered that tokenism was too narrowly examined within the confines of gender and applied this within a race context. Kanter propounds that assimilation occurs when dominants in a group distort the social characteristics associated with tokens in order to 'fit' the shared stereotypes and generalisations of that group (**Kanter 1977**). In this extract, the officer identifies "commonalities" that White women are more expressive and 'tell you the truth', and thus makes an implicit generalisation that South Asian women are different and "lie". In this way, the officer exaggerates the difference between White victims and South Asian victims. The impact of this results in polarisation whereby the token minority is isolated from the network and retained on the "outside" (**Kanter 1977**). Kanter suggests this occurs because the dominant group feel 'threatened' by the token (**1977**), but this is not necessarily apparent in the extract. Moreover, the comparison between what White victims 'would' do and what ethnic minority victims 'should' do in that same situation seems to be drawn in an attempt to relate and better comprehend the victims motives. Yet, this lack of a cultural lens in which to view the problem results in that officer coming to somewhat stark and stereotypical assumptions. This is reminiscent of Payton's observation that when South Asian victims fail to subscribe to the normative (and a cultural) values and forms of "White" society, they become rooted in "othered" identities. This can allow a xenophobic discourse to emerge (**Graham 2007, Payton 2014**,

p.2367). Indeed, some are sceptical as to whether it is possible to confront patriarchal violence in Muslim migrant communities without descending into ‘cultural-deficit’ explanations (Bano 2011).

### **Race Anxiety: Fear of ‘race card’**

Whilst some professionals treat victims ‘the same’ regardless of religion or culture, the findings also indicate an over-preoccupation with culture, which can impede safeguarding and dilute the proactive response of police officers. The perception is that officers avoid asking direct questions due to feeling uncomfortable about ‘culture’:

It’s hard I think generally for officers because -if they don’t know about cultures and stuff like that; there’s load of different religions and cultures out there, which can be different from one to another.  
(police officer g, South Asian)

You can be respectful and be careful when you’re dealing with other cultures or communities- that if you could be aware of what could offend them. (police officer i, White)

Ethnic minority police practitioners consider that some frontline officers are not direct enough when questioning victims around the issue of ‘honour’ and whether the victim had “done something in your community to offend your family to offend your parents” (police officer a, South Asian). This could possibly be due to worries about dealing with a case appropriately and also because some officers are “too concerned about that racist card” (police officer a, South Asian):

Our concerns are making sure that the other culture is respected and you’re not being accused of either being racist or not understanding the culture and not dealing with it correctly. I think there’s always that concern at the back of an officer’s mind. (police officer i, White)

These findings reaffirm extant research (**Gangoli et al. 2006, Siddiqui 2003, Burman et al. 2002 and 2004, Loftus 2009, Gill et al. 2013**) with some practitioners exhibiting race anxiety and avoiding proactive management of complex investigations for fear of contravening the culture, ethnicity or religion of the victim (**Chantler et al. 2017**); instead becoming overly preoccupied with institutional political correctness (**Blum et al. 2016**).

### **The Double edged sword of ‘culture’: Understanding culture and language**

There do appear to be practical operational benefits to officer and victim being ethnically matched. Officers of the same culture are valuable in acknowledging cultural considerations around removing shoes, knowing when it is time for prayers and avoiding inconvenient visiting times (police officer m).

Social services – would look at it like – ‘any 14 year old girl deserves a slap for doing that’ – of *course* the parents are going to get mad. But my attitude and my explanation to them is – yes – any child, whether they are South Asian or White British, carries on in that way, the parents are gonna be mad – they might get a slap: [But] which parent is more likely to kill that child – which parent is more likely to act in the name of ‘honour’ – and that’s the bigger picture. So – it’s about education.  
(police officer a, South Asian)

Ethnic minority officers are also adept at recognising when other officers, lacking cultural competency, fail to instil confidence in victims due to their attitudes and behaviours. One practitioner suggests that South Asian victims can sometimes mask underlying issues, preferring to develop trust and a relationship with a police officer before divulging key information. This may involve reporting something seemingly unrelated to the key issue. i.e. a theft or ASB. The SA officer describes a case in which a mother, flanked by two supportive female relatives, reports misuse of her husband’s credit card by the son to a White police officer. Instead the officer is “blindsided” by a much more complex issue:

Why would any mum from our community be grassing up dad or son... they don’t grass their own up... for me that’s fishy... she was

about to report 30 years of domestic abuse, including psychological, emotional and financial - and unfortunately rape... but when she opens her mouth, the police officer says, 'If you want to report domestic abuse, you need to go to the police station'. (police officer d, South Asian)

Due to the complexity and seriousness of the allegation, the officer effectively 'cuffs'<sup>1</sup> the crime. The practitioner considers the mindset of the officer:

'You know what, I thought I was just going for a theft. An easy job, deal with it. I'm now dealing with this. It's not for me... Had I known that she was going to report this, maybe someone else would have gone'. And the other part could be 'This is too hard to deal with. I don't know, because this now is far higher up the scale than this little theft.'  
(police officer d, South Asian)

As a result the female would not give her complaint:

'No thanks' and the two flanking females said 'No, carry on, carry on' having a go at the officer saying - 'You need to take this complaint'; she herself said 'No thank you, I told you this was a bad idea, and it is a bad idea.' And that officer laughed, but that problem there resonated like a large stone in a lake. It just rippled; and I 'got it in the neck'. So then I put the wheel back on and sent two detectives to the address, well you can imagine what happened, she said 'No, I'm not interested.'  
(police officer d, South Asian)

The victim had been 'psyching' herself up for days and did not want to be 'seen' at the police station. Due to the officer's attitude 'she had no confidence in going any further' (police officer d, South Asian). This excerpt reinforces the work of Mulvihill et al, in that the interaction between officer and ethnic minority victim fundamentally impacts on whether a prosecution is pursued, affecting victim confidence in the justice process (2018). It is wrong to speculate that an officer's 'whiteness' may be related to the inappropriate discretion applied by "cuffing" the crime, but had the officer possessed an enhanced cultural understanding of HBA, this may have resulted in a victim willingness to cooperate with police. Cultural competence is a highly prized asset, evident in the related arena of health care and the treatment of victims of Female Genital Mutilation

(FGM) (Dean 2017, Dixon 2021). In addition to cultural competence, understanding another language (police officers i, j, m, White) is a key benefit when investigating HBA:

Every time I've responded to an honour based violence job, I've either been on my own or in company with another officer who the majority have been Asian officers; but I had no concerns with them, they spoke in English, helped with the translation a bit when some foreign members didn't speak any English, so I have had no qualms about them. They did a good job helping out (police officer i, White)

One officer, recalled a SA Sergeant overhearing a conversation over the telephone between the victim of a Forced Marriage (to someone in the UK) and her family back in Pakistan. He recalled how the conversation moved from her family fully supporting the victim by offering to pay for a flight home, to suggesting that she was being a 'bit hasty' and that she 'should stay' (police officer i, White). Therefore, the language skills of the SA Officer aided police officers in better anticipating the support that may or may not be afforded to victims by the family collective.

### **The Double edged sword of 'culture': Culture as an impediment?**

Findings indicate that culture can sometimes be a double edged sword, particularly when some SA police officers prioritise culture and community above police procedure and the law. One officer was highly critical of a SA colleague because he inappropriately applied discretion by avoiding following police procedure in a shoplifting case:

The shoplifter was going to be allowed to leave without [police] taking her home to confirm details and he [the South Asian officer] said 'we don't need to go to the home address' and I said 'well, we do, we'll drop her back there and make sure she lives where she is'...He said 'we shouldn't be going back to her home address it will bring shame upon her family'. I said 'well she shouldn't have been shoplifting in the first place'.

Oh I took her to the home address, I wasn't having anyone changing that, I don't agree with it. We've got a job to do. We've got policies, procedures and there are laws in place... But at the end of the day she's

committed an offence, she shouldn't just 'get off with it' and get sent home without even having her ID checked. (police officer i, White)

Understandably the SA officer is aware of the strict cultural ramifications of "shoplifting" for the SA perpetrator, were she to be sent home by police to the shame of family members. However, the officer prioritised honour norms above his vocational responsibilities. This excerpt reinforces extant research which suggests that some professionals may impart advice to victims which is, in itself, culturally biased (**Gilbert et al. 2004**). A further case of attempted murder also supports this contention. The officer of SA descent did not follow the regular protocols, such as searching the suspect prior to placing him in the police van, failing to log the significant statement in his pocket notebook and failing to formally caution the suspect:

Dad had stabbed son multiple times in the back, he was quite lucky he didn't kill him; neck and chest I think it was like 6 or 8 times he stabbed him.// he [SA police officer] was talking a lot in the same language with the dad - the offender.//.. this officer took the dad away and I noticed they were doing a lot of talking and I was saying to him 'have you searched him'? And he was saying 'no it's fine'. I said 'I haven't seen you search him' and they still kept talking [in their native tongue] and every so - and then, it's like they were communicating - and I was saying 'what's he just said? Have you written that in your pocket notebook? What's going on?' The full conversations of everything that was had with him- none of it was recorded and I still don't know what was said to this day.

I even said to him, 'right you're going to have to put a statement in with all the conversations you've had' - and he made all the excuses under the sun not to put a statement in and I don't think he ever put a statement in to this day.//.. you don't want to just discriminate against someone in the police force because they're there to do a job, but at the same time I don't know, with some officers, I think they'll find it difficult.  
(police officer i, White)

The implicit suggestion in the above discourse is that some SA officers find it difficult to act impartially and might prioritise 'culture' over the law and procedure. But is this the case? Should the failure to follow procedure implicitly relate to culture? An equally valid

contention is that the White officer has reached cynical conclusions based on identity closeness and ethnic matching between officer and perpetrator, as no one can attest to the exact conversation between SA officer and perpetrator. Surely White officers investigating White perpetrators would find the argument they acted in a potentially biased way due to their shared 'culture' an *unreasonable* line of argument? It is worth noting at this juncture that studies show how White officers (and the white populous more broadly) frequently construct themselves as 'raceless' individuals lacking a 'culture', a position requiring no qualification, compared with other non-Whites, who are primarily perceived as raced members of a collective (**Garner 2007**). We must avoid suggesting only minority communities inhabit 'cultures' (**Kelly 2010**). Moreover, in doing so we risk attributing particular behaviours and responses to 'culture' and 'ethnicity' when indeed other factors are at play. The White officer certainly appears mildly irritated by the lack of control over the situation, especially as the communication was in a different language. She suggest that officers who lack integrity can sometimes inappropriately apply discretionary practices. Although she is keen not to label all South Asian officers as being influenced by honour codes. Such a reservation by White officers is also reflected in the excerpt below, where officers are unduly concerned about the strength and adverse influence of 'culture' on police officers:

You're going to have these deep set, or what you hear off other family members that are still going to influence you - so yeah, you think sometimes it does make me cringe when it's 'I will send him [a SA officer] to that, because he'll know what's going on,' that there is a danger and I think it's more recognised recently, in that, like I say, we used to send two [officers] so both can influence each other in some way.

**Researcher:** To set it on the right track so that you've got lots of different perspectives and considerations rather than just one [which] might be a narrow mind-set?

Exactly - that's a good way of putting it. I don't for a minute want to put across he [the SA officer] can't be trusted or anything I think; it's just like you hit the nail on the head there. (police officer m, White)

This excerpt reflects the polarity in this debate. Officer from ethnic minorities may be culturally competent, but equally in some exceptional cases professionals may be unduly influenced by honour codes that they themselves subscribe to, which could adversely affect decision-making and victim care.

Continuing with this same theme, this final case illustrates how a police officer of SA descent prioritises 'honour codes' above his lawful duties, by violently attacking and kidnapping his own sister. This perpetrator took on the mantle as head of the family to exact retribution for his sister's choice of partner, even though she had been living with her boyfriend for over three years:

She was just on her way to work. She thought it was the postman or something like that. She opened the door and the minute she did he [brother] just barged in and proceeded to paste her round the house for several hours. It was really quite a nasty job...After he'd pasted her- and I really mean pasted her- he bundled her into the car. Essentially he kidnapped her, and we did get charges for kidnap / false imprisonment. So he bundled her into the car and took her to the family home. The way that the girl's statement read, it was almost like he presented her in front of the family and said 'Look what I've done. Haven't I done well' - and the rest of the family looked at him as if to say - 'Get her out of here'. 'What have you done to her? We don't like her for the decisions she's made, but we're not particularly comfortable with what you've actually done'. So whereas they weren't comfortable with what he'd done and they wanted no part of it, they wouldn't stand up for her either. (police officer e, White)

The perpetrating SA police officer bought chemist supplies for his sister in an effort to tend to her wounds and tried to implicate her boyfriend as the perpetrator of the violence. The officer was served his notice of dismissal from the force whilst being held in police



cells and was imprisoned for five years. Although the sister went through restorative justice, this did not give her the closure she needed:

After he was convicted and he was in prison, it took months to try and set up an RJ meeting...She wanted answers. She didn't get them...He wrote a few letters in the lead up because that was part of the RJ process, but when she met him she said 'He was just cold. Like it wasn't my brother'. I think she felt worse having done it. (police officer e, White)

Despite the perpetrator being a university educated British Muslim, this case illustrates the power of culture and 'honour codes' over the law, even by the very officials tasked with upholding the law. All the extracts illustrate that culture can, on occasion, act as an impediment to the SA officer who may feel torn between their loyalty to community and the requirement to follow police procedure and legal obligations. Sometimes this results in culture and the patriarchal status quo being prioritised above the law and a victim's best interests. Indeed, these findings resonate with Harrison and Gill's research which propounds that some SA police officers' cultural beliefs are stronger than their vocational duties (2017).

## **Discussion**

The findings show that some police officers, including some specialists interviewed, lack cultural competence in HBA. This aligns with research on domestic abuse within South Asian communities, with police officers considered as culturally ignorant regarding the complexities and dynamics within family power structures and intergenerational conflicts (Belur 2008). Lacking a cultural understanding of HBA victimhood by officers of any ethnicity is detrimental, as this adversely impacts on the interaction, rapport and fluent understanding between police officer and victim, particularly because there is often only "one chance" to get the investigation right (NPCC 2015, p.8).

There are several limitations when officers of any ethnicity are ill-informed of culture and the complexities of a particular crime type such as HBA. Findings show police officers in the dominant group categorise and label an incident when trying to interpret a situation, often based on the ethnicity of the victim / perpetrator. Likened to Kanter's work on assimilation (1977), some police officers both accept, as well as create "scripts" (Garner 2007, p.20) which are simplistic in stereotyping and generalising groups of people that may possess particular core characteristics; for instance South Asians are at risk of HBA, Eastern Europeans are at risk of human trafficking; White women are more likely to tell you the truth, SA women are more likely to lie. Indeed these very crude scripts or "markers" show some evidence of polarisation, in which the difference between minority and dominant groups attitudes and behaviours [including SA officers and White officers] are exaggerated. This is reminiscent of Razack's research (2004) in that when ethnic minority victims (and police officers) make seemingly poor or irrational decisions, this is collectively attributed to their culture and ethnicity, with evidence of "othering". Yet by comparison, poor policing practices and 'problematic' victims are rarely attributed to their "Whiteness", with this instead depicted as aberrant isolated deviance (Razack 2004, Garner 2007, Miah 2015 cited in Cockbain and Tufail 2020). This facet may, in part, contribute toward explaining *why* state professionals may lack sympathy for (Belur 2008, Gill 2011, Hanmer 2013 [1989] and fundamentally misconstrue ethnic minority victims motives and perspectives (Aplin, 2019).

These very crude "markers" may cause officers to overlook the more nuanced and complex patterns of abuse, as well as fostering stereotypical or unfair judgements about victims. A female victim committing adultery or having been raped may seek to hide, deny or dilute such perceived "shameful" elements, but this can have a detrimental effect

on the way the victim is perceived by professionals. Officials rarely perceive that victims internalise shame and are socialised into believing they are wholly to blame for the HBA, which leads to a reluctance in prosecuting perpetrating relatives. Extracts on occasion identify a victim blaming discourse, with victim legitimacy, reliability and credibility being undermined by some officers; often because cultural elements are not being considered by professionals. Cultural comprehension of these crimes is therefore essential in order to understand victims and perpetrator perspectives and motives. This can make the difference between a pursued and an abandoned police investigation.

Moreover, in adhering to such scripts, some officers can employ a 'one size fits all' blanket approach (**Burman et al.2004**), for instance by applying the same strategies used when managing traditional forms of domestic *and* child abuse to HBA situations. We should not "splinter" and divide the experiences of women (**Thiara and Gill 2010, p.35**), but neither should we conflate Domestic Abuse and HBA as the same by overlooking cultural specificities. In investigating these crimes practitioners need to understand the facets of domestic abuse as well as possess cultural competence. Such a blanket 'one size fits all' way of treating victims as 'all the same' overlooks diversity and the cultural specificities associated with HBA crimes; but moreover in this study it has significant and adverse ramifications in the effective and long term safeguarding of young South Asian victims. However, it is difficult to determine whether this more nuanced understanding is grasped through training or, in part, is attributed to officers themselves being imbued with that enhanced cultural understanding due to their own racial and ethnic positionality.

These predominantly South Asian victims appear to be measured against White British norms, with little consideration given to the heightened risks due to their culture and the perpetrator beliefs that they have transgressed 'honour' codes; and this can ultimately

impact on how victims are perceived by practitioners. Lack of a cultural understanding by professionals can also hinder the recognition of 'risk'. Professionals do not identify those subtle cues that children are at risk, arguably because statutory services perceive some of these issues as trivial, such as girls possessing cigarettes, condoms, mobile phones, talking to boys, wearing makeup and being late home etc. (**Aplin 2019**). When implementing interventions, professionals should not universally apply a comparative "yardstick", by bench marking behaviour and practices of SA victims against how *White* officers were reared in childhood. Such findings are reminiscent of Bernard's in-depth study of black mothers responses to the sexual abuse of their children, in which professionals applied an Anglo centric focused lens as the standard by which to judge what constitutes 'acceptable'; pathologising ethnic minority families and conversely using white nuclear middle class families as the normative standard (**Bernard 2001, p.14, Payton 2014**). Bernard contends that practitioners generalise findings regarding White families and apply it to ethnic minority families, without appreciating the intersecting multiple inequalities that those victims face (**2001**). Such a tactic overlooks the cultural specificities and inherent differences in HBA and Forced Marriage and could leave both adults and children in risk predicaments.

Race anxiety, considered a form of reverse racism, can precipitate avoidance behaviours and under-policing (**Burman et al. 2004, Siddiqui 2003, Gill et al. 2013**) and these findings indicate some uncomfortableness of officers around 'culture' and feared accusations of racism. Cultural nuances should be considered without using culture as a justification or shield for criminal practices (**Aplin 2019**). Moderation is require by the investigating officer in neither overlooking culture (by treating everyone the same) nor becoming overly preoccupied with it so that it leads to race anxiety, which could result in

paralysis, inaction and under policing. Political correctness should not eclipse victim safeguarding as the priority.

The research also identifies the benefits that South Asian officers can bring to HBA and FM investigations, particularly when trained in HBA. Understanding the concepts and impact of honour and shame on victims is key. Findings indicate that having shared cultural knowledge gives those officers enhanced understanding and relatability to victims. Being conversant in the language is beneficial, as SA officer can identify issues that a White Officer may not have garnered. Albeit such language skills should not be used by police officers to justify circumventing the use of an approved and impartial interpreter (**Aplin 2019**). However, findings also indicate that racially aligning police officers with victims could precipitate unanticipated obstacles. Firstly, it is wrong to automatically assume that ethnic matching makes ethnic minority officers well equipped to understand the complex arena of HBA/Forced Marriage by virtue of ethnicity alone. Secondly, fronting the investigation with SA professionals who do not have knowledge of HBA and gendered abuse ringfences this a 'South Asian' problem requiring SA officers to resolve; indicative of segregated policing (**Brown 2004**). This is also indicative of tokenism and role encapsulation (**Kanter 1977**) where SA officers are forced into employment which limits career opportunities and perpetuates stereotypes simply on the basis of their ethnicity. Thirdly, there is a clear reluctance by victims to be ethnic matched to professionals, as they fear that disclosed and confidential information will be leaked into the "community grapevine" (**Chew Graham et al. 2002, Burman et al. 2004**) which heightens the risks to victims. Finally, it is specious to assume that professionals of the same ethnicity (Interpreters, GPs and other health care professionals) will always de-facto act in the best interests of victims. Extracts support the contention that victims are right to

be concerned about the impartiality of some SA professionals. However, this is limited to exceptional cases where professionals subscribe to those harmful cultural practices, by imparting culturally biased advice when decision-making, such as encouraging reconciliation with family or dangerous partners, rather than adhering to force policy and legal procedures. This has concerning implications for the safety and well being of HBA and FM victims.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The findings, combined with extant literature, depict a polarised picture of the current situation. There remains a post code lottery service provision for victims, dependant on the kind of officer allocated to investigate. Some South Asian victims receive satisfactory treatment from White officers and others experience stereotypical and unhelpful judgements, with some conversely wanting support from South Asian professionals (**Burman et al. 2002**). So although academic discourse presents an insistent voice of “racism” within policing and a lack of understanding by White practitioners, which is discernible in this research, findings also indicate there are risks associated with ethnic matching SA officers and victims. There is no firm conclusion as to who might be the ‘best fit’ for dealing with victims and investigating these crimes. The key component is for officers to have received training and to feel competent working in this crime area (**Burman et al. 2002**), as well as ensuring that officers adhere to and act *within* the constraints of the law and current policing best practice guidance. This article serves to raise insights into the strengths and limitations of ethnic matching and ethnic difference, which may be beneficial to operational supervisory officers when resourcing these incidents.

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<sup>i</sup> “Cuffing” is an informal term used when police officers fail to investigate and record incidents reported to them (**Tilley, Robinson and Burrows 2007; House of Commons PASC 2014, p.8**). By “cuffing,” police officers are inappropriately utilising their discretion by concluding that the offence either did not take place or is not worthy of police intervention (**Myhill and Johnson 2016**). In taking such a course of action, crimes remain un-investigated and the rationale for filing the incident is often absent and breaches NCRS (**Aplin 2021**)