



**KARMA NIRVANA**

Supporting victims of honour-based abuse  
and forced marriage

# COVID-19 Impact on BAME Domestic Abuse and Honour Based Abuse Services

2020



## About Karma Nirvana

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### We want to make sure that:

All Victims and Survivors of Honour Based Abuse have access to bespoke support and guidance;

All frontline professionals have access to the highest standard of advice and guidance when responding to incidents of HBA;

All safeguarding frontline practitioners are able to recognise and respond appropriately to HBA, keeping victims safe;

We elevate the voice of victims and survivors, sharing their experiences with opinion leaders to influence positive societal, legislative and political change.



**Karma Nirvana exists to shine the spotlight on Honour Based Abuse.**

KN has over 25 years experience in supporting victims and survivors experiencing HBA and Forced Marriage (FM) and are recognised globally for championing the victims ‘voice’ change in this sector.

KN provides the only accredited national helpline available to all victims and survivors of Honour Based Abuse and Forced Marriage. Last year we provided confidential support to nearly 2000 cases, generating over 11,500 contacts across the UK. The support we offer is extensive and includes providing callers with guidance relating to their rights and options, safe accommodation, advocacy, and ‘moving forward’ coping strategies. The advice and guidance provided is rooted in empowerment, enabling our service users to make empowered decisions for themselves.

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### Glossary of terms

**BAME** – Black Asian Minority Ethnic

**DA** – Domestic Abuse

**FGM** – Female Genital Mutilation

**FM** – Forced Marriage

**HBA** – Honour Based Abuse

**HBV** – Honour Based Violence

Karma Nirvana launched its Covid-19 impact survey on 6th May 2020 to connect with the BAME Domestic Abuse, Honour Based Abuse, Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation sector. We wanted to hear first-hand about how Covid-19 is impacting service delivery and reach at a grassroots level.

The survey closed on 18th May. A total of 18 services responded, 12 of which were charities and 6 were statutory agencies.

## Summary

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Survey findings evidence that the Covid-19 lockdown is having a significant impact on the specialist BAME Domestic Abuse and Honour Based Abuse sector. The survey highlights that many BAME victims are more reluctant to leave during the lockdown linked to the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on BAME groups.

The findings evidence community based and out-reach support as suffering the biggest impact due to the lockdown, with many services being moved online or by phone where possible.

There is a sense that refuge services were initially struggled with managing the logistics of Covid-19 lockdown, social distancing and the health and safety of both staff and residents, however accessing refuge has remained consistent in the main.

The survey also evidences the consistent level of resilience voluntary services must maintain to meet the changing support needs of BAME victims during Covid-19 lockdown. During Covid-19 lockdown, BAME services are providing more support to victims of DA, rather than HBA/FM/FGM, which reflects the high profiling of DA in the media and lack of HBA/FM/FGM coverage.

BAME victims of HBA/FM/FGM are reporting increased levels of abuse whilst in lockdown with their perpetrators, with many services users making plans to 'leave in the future', rather than during the lockdown period.



## Key Findings

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- Victims are fearful of going outside and contracting Covid-19 due to being more “at risk” as a BAME person
- The specialist sector is seeing more victims of domestic abuse coming forward and less victims of Honour Based Abuse, Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation coming forward
- All responders to the survey identified that Emotional Abuse and Coercive Control have increased during the lockdown
- 162% average increase in caseloads by 12 services
- 67% of services are unable to reach potential service users due to lockdown
- 50% of services felt they are unable to effectively provide support to their service users during Covid-19 lockdown.
- 20% of services feel that they do not have adequate staffing levels under lockdown
- Safeguarding statutory professionals\* are referring less cases of Honour Based Abuse, Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation when compared to the pre-lockdown period

\*Police, Social Workers and Teachers

## The survey explored 10 key areas

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- The range of issues organisations cover
- Types of service delivery
- The impact of COVID-19 on organisation
- Staff levels and its ability to support service users
- Changes in case numbers pre/post lockdown
- Types of issues service users are facing under lockdown
- Change in levels of abuse type service users experienced under lockdown
- Change in levels of how victims are being reported to organisation under lockdown?
- Thoughts on how lockdown restrictions impact on BAME victims differently to non-BAME victims
- Recommendations to government to improve BAME response

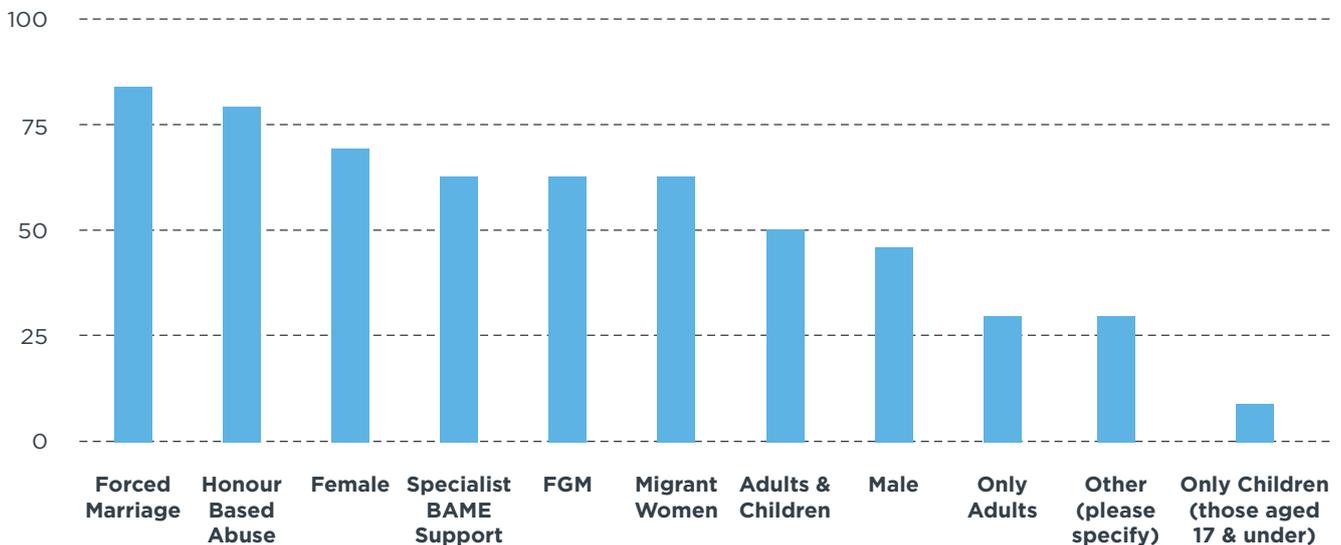
Responding services were located across the following police force areas. Two services provided national support covering all force areas.



## The range of issues organisations cover

15 organisations identified as supporting victims of Forced Marriage and Honour Based Abuse. Some of the other issues covered by organisations entailed; abuse linked to faith and breast flattening.

Issues Covered?



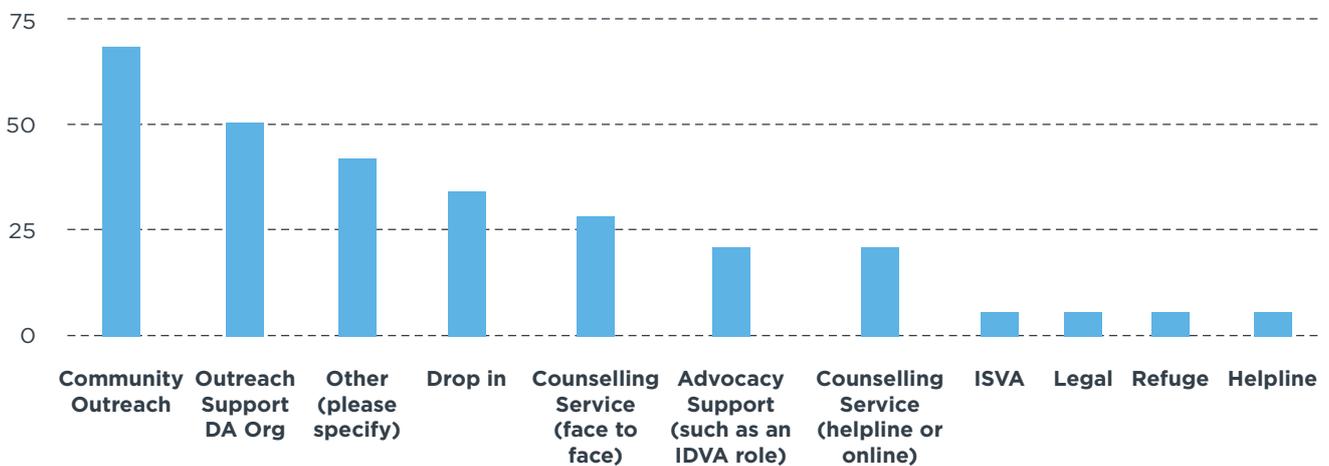


## Types of Service Delivery

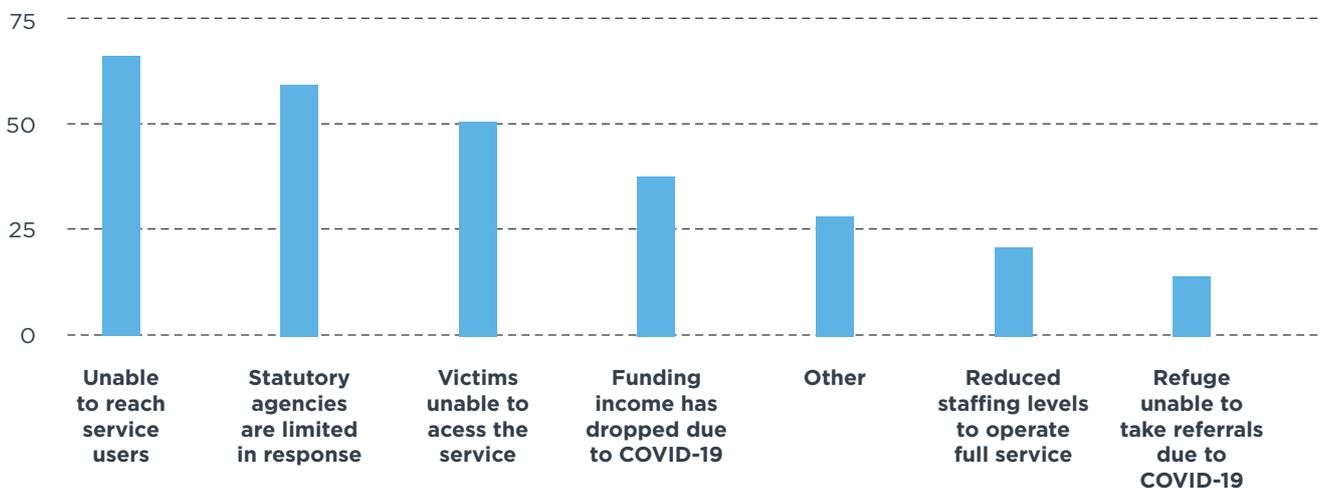
12 services were able to or adapt to provide support victims both online via webchat/ email or via a helpline. 4 services provided refuge accommodation. Over half of services provided face to face support in BAME communities pre-lockdown.

Not surprisingly, all services providing face to face support in the community have been most effected by the Covid-19 lockdown. 50% of services felt they are unable to effectively provide support to their service users during Covid-19 lockdown.

### Services that have been negatively impacted by Covid-19?



### Impact of COVID-19 on services



The biggest impact of the lockdown on specialist service provision has been the inability to reach out to victims who are not 'in service' but need support.

The second biggest impact evidenced through the service is a 'reduced response' from statutory services during Covid-19 lockdown.

All the services supporting BAME communities provide support in a community setting, either via outreach support or drop-in sessions.

Each service reports concerns that migrant women are not able to access support during lockdown and that they are unable to reach potential victims.

50% of services felt they were unable to provide effective support to their service users due to the lockdown. However, 80% of services reported having adequate staffing levels.

Services providing refuge were particularly concerned about victims not being able to access safe accommodation. Refuges also reported staffing difficulties and the provision of PPE, limiting the service they could provide at the start of the pandemic.

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No refuge spaces locally and  
Students with no access to  
public funds

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Refuge is full and DA calls  
have gone high for help



## Changes to caseloads

To establish the change in caseload numbers the periods queried in the survey was pre-lockdown 17 Feb to 22 March and post lockdown period related to 23 March to 24 April.

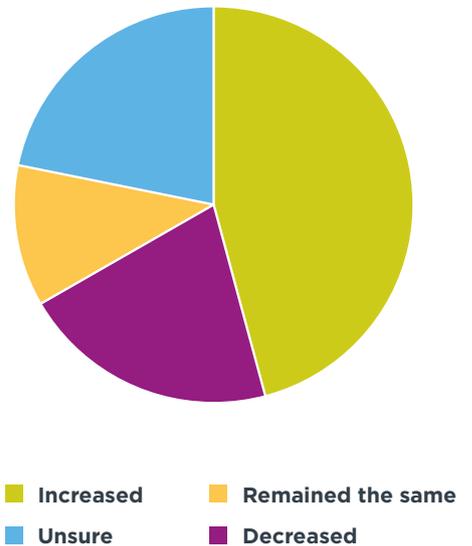
An 162% average increase was reported by 12 services in caseloads. The 6 remaining services were unable to provide any case numbers due to not having numbers for the post lockdown period or not having a direct role in supporting victims.

All but one community outreach support services experienced an increase in caseloads.

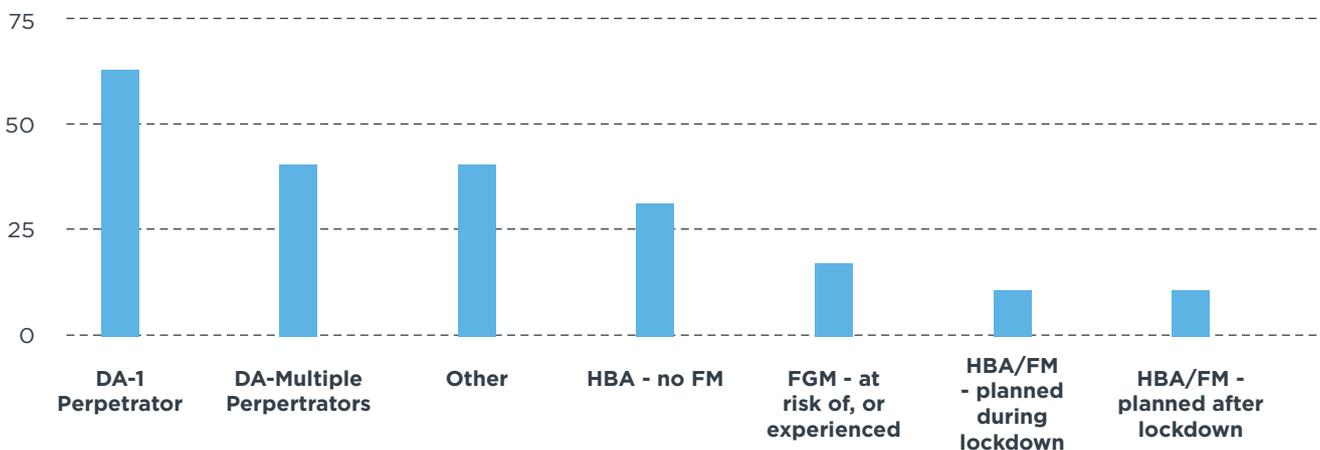
Services experiencing a decrease in caseloads are supporting victims of forced marriage & migrant women in the community.

Two services providing both community-based support and counselling, have not experienced a change in caseload levels.

**Changes to caseloads due to COVID-19**



### What issues victims are experiencing?



All contributors responding to the survey identified as supporting BAME victims of DA and HBA. The survey highlighted that the highest numbers of victims who are accessing support during Covid-19 lock-

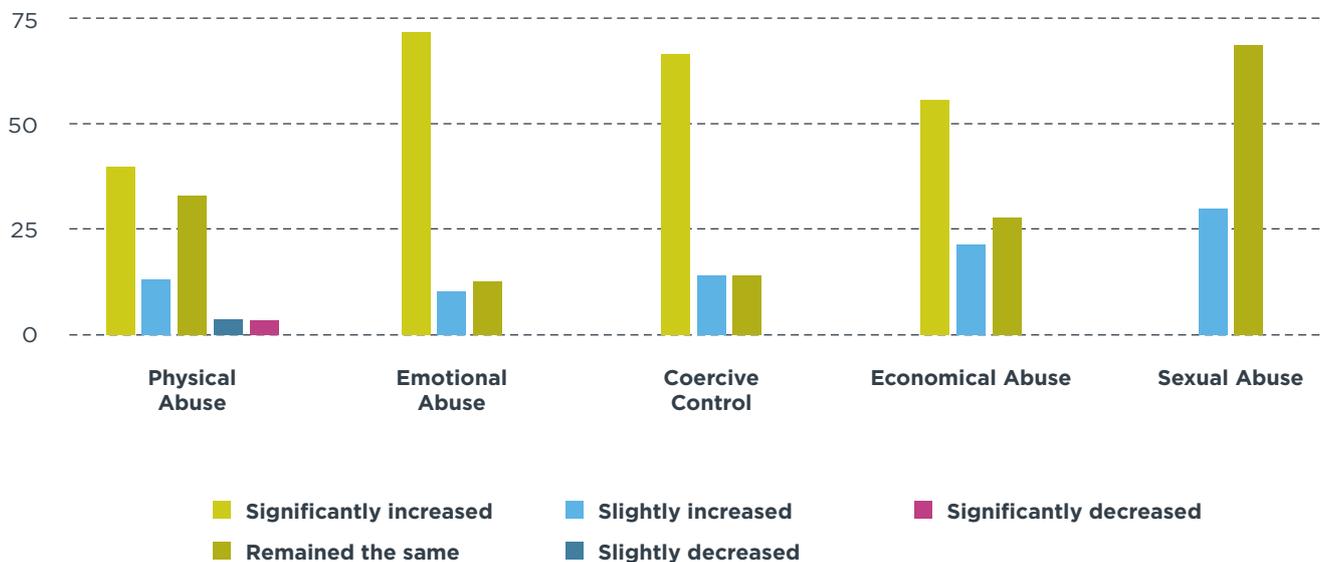
down are victims of Domestic Abuse with 1 perpetrator. Other issues victims have experienced are faith related abuse, child sexual abuse, domestic violence between families and working with children.



**We are just not getting the referrals. The few referrals have been related to FGM**



## Change in types of abuse experienced under lockdown



This question explores how BAME victims have experienced abuse during the lockdown, looking at whether the types of abuse have increased, stayed the same or decreased.

The data showed a 400% increase in both emotional abuse and coercive control, which is a commonly recognised feature of HBA.

Interestingly, economical abuse increased by 200% with services seeing abuse increasing slightly or significantly. Reports from the national HBA and FM helpline have highlighted how victims have lack of control over their finances even more during lockdown due to reduced income in the household and supporting wider family networks.

Victims of sexual abuse report either no change to the level of abuse they are experiencing or a slight increase.

Even though overall physical abuse did increase this was the only abuse type that services reported a decrease from the victims they supported during lockdown.

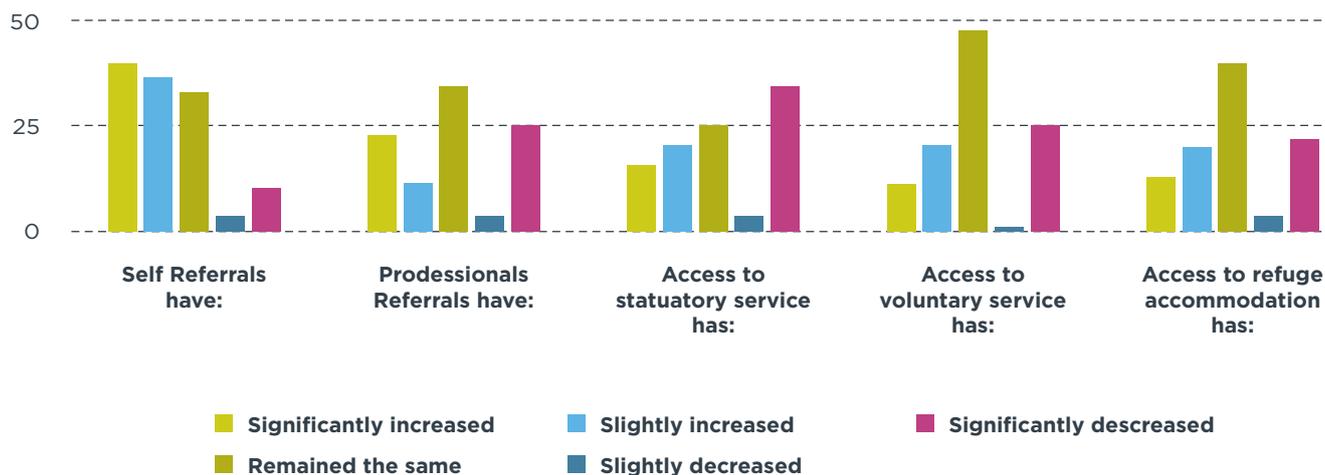
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**Sexual abuse takes a long time for a woman to disclose**



## Change in levels of **how victims are being reported** to organisation under lockdown?

### COVID-19 Service impact



Respondents were given 5 options and had to respond by selecting from 5 ranges between significantly increased to significantly decreased. We asked respondents to tell us about any changes they were experiencing to service delivery during Covid-19 lockdown.

Self-referrals from victims has seen the largest increase by 61%, suggesting that victims are still reaching out for support, especially from voluntary agencies. Many organisations indicated that referrals from statutory services had dropped when compared to pre-lockdown.

The most striking find is that respondents report access to voluntary service support has largely stayed the same, whereas access to statutory services has significantly decreased, which suggests that voluntary agencies have responded quickly to changes in the working environment, whilst keeping service accessibility the same overall.

**We asked respondents to tell us how Covid-19 lockdown affects BAME victims of abuse differently to non-BAME victims.**

Responses included:

**Victims who are BAME women who would normally access support services in the community are now isolated with their perpetrators**

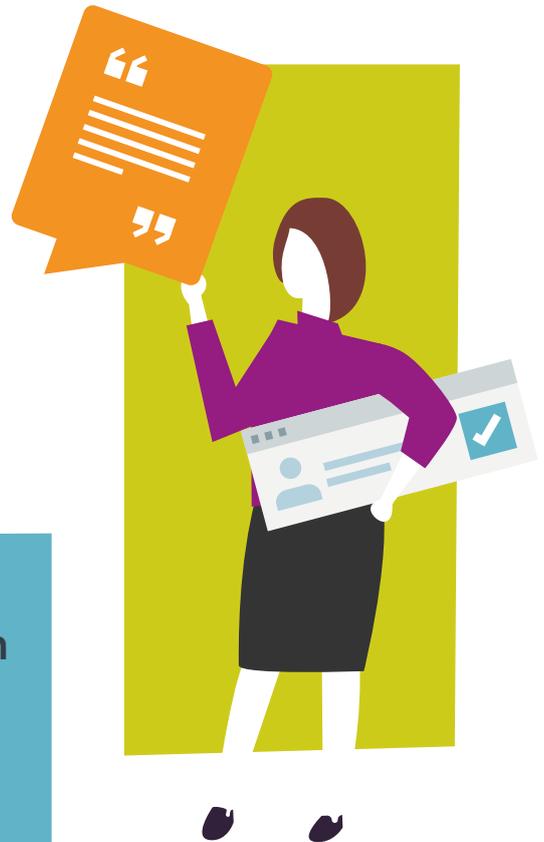
**Young BAME victims are not able to access support through their peers or teachers, are increasingly isolated and have limited access to support**

**Language issues, not IT literate or access to smart phones etc. so are stuck with multiple perpetrators**

**A lack of recognition for BAME victims in the media**

**Victims who access services that are not BAME specialists unable to meet their support needs**

**Victims who are international students and have no access to alternative accommodation, are being forced to return to their country of origin**



**We asked respondents to provide one recommendation on how the government can improve responses to BAME victims of abuse.**

Responses included:

Ring-fenced, flexible, and unrestricted funding for by and for BAME and migrant specialist services

Tailored messages for different BAME groups on different platforms and funding for specialist organisations providing support services

No compulsory reporting on immigration status to the home office for survivors of DA

Children service to respond to children facing HBV with Appropriate SAFE responses. And not to mediate with family members

Funding that has recently been cut to be reinstated for BAME services

Promote national specialist helplines and provide us with data from national helplines for us to understand trends for BAME victims



## Conclusion

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BAME services are experiencing an increase in victims self-referring for support during Covid-19 lockdown. However, their staffing levels have been significantly “stretched” during this time that they feel unable to provide the same level of support as they would in ‘normal,’ circumstances.

The responses suggest that the increase in referrals, however, is not for victims of HBA/FM/FGM, but seems to reflect more for victims coming forward to report Domestic Abuse.

BAME specialist services are not experiencing the same increase of referrals for HBA/FM/FGM with some citing these referrals as “reducing” during the lockdown. The survey highlights victims of HBA/FM/FGM

as particularly vulnerable and hidden and that they have since the lockdown “become invisible”. Some contributors raised concerns that the Government and media have not put a spotlight on these issues to encourage victim reporting in the same way that victims of domestic abuse have been.

The survey reveals that victims are experiencing increased levels of abuse and that services know that there are victims in their communities that they cannot reach who are suffering. Services want to see more commitment from the Government on supporting specialist services who understand and respond appropriately to the complex needs of BAME victims experiencing HBA/FM/FGM, not just during the current pandemic, but also post pandemic.

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### We would like to thank the following organisations for taking part in the survey:

A2 Dominion	National FGM Centre
Anah	Oxford Against Cutting
Galop	RISE
Humraaz	Roshni Birmingham
Independent Yemen group	Savera UK
Latin American Women’s Rights Service	Self
Loughborough University	Stop Domestic Abuse
Manor Gardens Welfare Trust	The People’s Buddhi
Muslim Council of Britain	Thirtyone:eight

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