

A landscape review of the prosecution of ‘honour’-based abuse
by the Crown Prosecution Service
Scoping document

A. Introduction

‘Honour’-based abuse (HBA) is a collection of practices which are used to control behaviour within families or other social groups to protect perceived cultural and religious beliefs and/or ‘honour’. Such abuse can occur when perpetrators perceive that a relative has shamed the family and/or community by breaking their code of ‘honour’. It is an umbrella term used to encompass various offences that are prosecuted under existing legislation. These crimes are often carried out by the victim's family, extended family, or members of their community.

At present there is no single legal definition that covers HBA and it is not a specific criminal offence. However, in August 2025 the Government announced its intention to introduce a statutory definition of HBA that is expected to be introduced in 2026.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) currently defines HBA as:

"An incident or crime involving violence, threats of violence, intimidation, coercion or abuse (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."

HBA includes the specific offence of forced marriage (FM) contrary to s.121 Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014, and a range of other offences which are prosecuted under more general legislation for offences such as assault, threats to kill, controlling and coercive behaviour, stalking and harassment. Consequently, HBA offences can be prosecuted in either magistrates’ courts or the Crown Court. Within the CPS, FM and female genital mutilation (FGM) offences are always prosecuted by Complex Casework Units, whilst other offences involving HBA are usually prosecuted by their volume crime units (magistrates’ court, Crown Court, and Rape and Serious Sexual offences units).

The CPS monitors these cases by identifying and flagging all cases of HBA and FM on its case management system. These are two separate monitoring flags. Prosecutors should flag cases appropriately, identifying flags for monitoring HBA and FM as well as any other

flags that may be relevant such as domestic abuse (DA). Note: not all FM cases will meet the definition for HBA. If a case involves both FM and HBA then it should be flagged with both FM and HBA.

Both the police and CPS have local specialist HBA and FM leads whom they can consult for advice and guidance on the handling of these cases.

B. Background

CPS

In June 2025 the CPS launched internally their new five-year strategy for tackling violence against women and girls (externally November 2025). The strategy included several commitments including:

- To implement a joint National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) and CPS HBA and FM investigation and prosecution protocol,
- To introduce National Scrutiny Panels for HBA cases that have been finalised,
- To develop and roll out new training modules on HBA, FM and FGM,
- To update prosecution guidance on HBA,
- To develop an HBA, FM and FGM action plan, including hosting a national multi-agency conference to share best practice, raise awareness and promote partnership working.

Since then, the CPS has made significant progress including:

- Published refreshed and expanded guidance on HBA and FM on 26 February 2026,
- Co-hosted with the Home Office and the NPCC the second national HBA multi-agency conference on 4 February 2026,

- Developed an HBA, FM, FGM and Harmful Practices action plan,
- Maintained a live case log that has been expanded to include FGM components and FGM Protection Orders,
- Held the first national HBA Scrutiny Panel in December 2025,
- Updated its external facing webpages,
- Held quarterly meetings with HBA leads in CPS Areas,
- Mandated the inclusion of FM and FGM in monthly meetings held by the Heads of Complex Casework Units to improve oversight of cases.

By the end of 2026 the CPS intends to:

- Launch new training modules for HBA/FM,
- Publish the new HBA/FM Joint Protocols.

Central Government

In December 2025 the Government launched its new Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy that includes HBA, including FM and FGM. The strategy explains how the Government plans to deliver on its ambition to halve VAWG in a decade. The Government is also currently consulting with agencies on the new statutory definition for HBA.

HM CPSI

Within our 2025-26 Business Plan, HM CPSI indicated an intention to conduct an inspection into the CPS's handling of cases involving HBA. Within the Business Plan the stated purpose of the inspection was to assess the quality of casework in cases involving HBA, gather evidence of victim experience by engaging with the third sector and include examination of cases of FGM, FM and HBA.

C. Published Data

CPS published data¹ as at Q2 2025/26 indicates that on a rolling year to date (RYTD) basis there have been 102 prosecutions for HBA. 46 of those cases have ended in conviction (45.1%), and 56 (54.9%) have a non-conviction outcome recorded. 39 of those convictions were achieved via a guilty plea (38.2%), with seven convictions secured after trial (6.9%). Of the cases which ended without conviction, 52 cases (51%) were dropped by the CPS, two cases (2%) were dismissed/acquitted during or after trial, and two cases (2%) were finalised administratively. Within those cases which concluded on a non-conviction basis, 30 cases (53.6%), had 'victim or witness reasons' cited as the reason for the outcome, and in 20 cases (35.7%) the case failed for 'evidential' reasons.

CPS data indicates there have been 38 FM prosecutions nationally on a RYTD basis. Of these, 21 (55.3%) ended in conviction, and 17 (44.7%) were dropped by the CPS. 17 of those convictions were achieved via a guilty plea (44.7%), with four convictions secured after trial (10.5%). Of the cases which ended without conviction, 16 cases (42.1%) were dropped by the CPS and one case (2.6%) was finalised administratively. Of note, nine cases (52.9%) ended for 'victim reasons', six cases (35.3%) ended for 'evidential' reasons, and one case (5.9%) on public interest grounds.

D. Victims' Voice

The impact on victims of HBA and FM can be significant. Victims in these types of cases are often some of the most vulnerable and many do not have confidence in the criminal justice system. They may feel loyalty to their family or community which makes them less likely to support a prosecution. Victims can be under threat during and for a significant period after a prosecution. There can be specific barriers for victims with insecure immigration status.

We recognise that the CPS has recently engaged with third sector organisations representing victims in developing its updated HBA and FM guidance. These include Karma Nirvana, Southall Black Sisters, IKWRO and Savera UK.

As part of this landscape review we will engage with representatives of the third sector to establish the extent to which they were consulted and engaged with by the CPS, particularly in relation to the new CPS guidance on HBA and FM. We will seek to establish

¹ [CPS quarterly data summaries | The Crown Prosecution Service](#)

the extent to which the new published guidance, in their view, addresses issues they may have raised in consultation with the CPS.

It is anticipated that we will engage in more detail with those third sector organisations on any future inspection activity intended to assess the impact of the new guidance.

E. Objective

To provide a comprehensive, strategic overview detailing how the Crown Prosecution Service has developed its approach to ‘honour’-based abuse, and the extent to which recent initiatives are designed to support a high-quality service to victims.

To provide a sound evidential basis for HM CPSI to conduct a future inspection once recent CPS policy and guidance changes have embedded.

F. Review criteria

We will review the following:

1. Background and context of ‘honour’-based abuse.
 - a. What is ‘honour’-based abuse?
 - b. What data is available
 - i. to show the extent of prevalence in England and Wales
 - ii. to show the number of prosecutions undertaken by CPS, whether they are successful or not and why?
 - iii. What trends does the data reveal?
 - c. How has CPS policy and guidance evolved over recent years to meet the demands involved in prosecuting ‘honour’-based abuse?
2. Understanding and engagement.

How does the CPS ensure it understands the cultural complexities of ‘honour’-based abuse through engagement with communities and third-sector organisations?
3. Organisational learning.

How does the CPS ensure learning from engagement, scrutiny panels and case discussions is shared and used to improve understanding and practice across the organisation?

4. Assurance and oversight.

How does the CPS assure itself that staff dealing with ‘honour’-based abuse are appropriately equipped, supported and supervised?

How effectively does the CPS monitor the accuracy of HBA and FM flagging and ensure the integrity of its data?

5. Victim focus.

How does the CPS ensure that its evolving approach to ‘honour’-based abuse meets the need of victims?

G. Methodology

This review will gather evidence from work undertaken by CPS at a national level including a review of relevant documents and some limited on-site attendance to conduct interviews with relevant staff.

Document request

We will examine documents relating to the following:

National

- i. CPS Headquarters relevant national legal and operational guidance (where not available on CPS intranet)
- ii. Agenda/minutes from CPS led national HBA multi-agency conference
- iii. HBA, FM, FGM and Harmful Practices action plan
- iv. Agenda/minutes from the national HBA Scrutiny Panel
- v. Agenda/minutes from quarterly meetings with HBA leads in CPS Areas

On-Site Phase

National interviews:

In CPS headquarters the following will be approached for an interview:

- CPS HBA lead
- Director of Policy
- CPS Policy leads for HBA

CPS Area surveys:

A survey will be undertaken of the CPS Area HBA leads.

Victim voice:

Representatives of the third sector will be approached for interview.

H. Resources

The lead inspector will conduct the document read and flagging check. One other legal inspector will be required to assist with on-site interviews.

I. Timetable

The scope of the review will be sent for comment to the CPS in May 2026. The inspection will then be commissioned immediately thereafter, commencing with the document examination and on-site work being conducted during May-June 2026. Publication of the report is planned for late summer 2026.

J. Equality Impact Assessment

A preliminary evaluation of the need for an equality impact assessment (EIA) has been undertaken. The potential effects of the review on disadvantaged groups or individuals with protected characteristics have been considered. Based on the nature of the review and the methodology to be used, there is no indication that any protected groups are likely to be impacted by the outcome. As no impacts were identified during the screening process, a full EIA is not anticipated to be required. This position will be kept under review throughout the course of the review.

Justine Allan

May 2026