

Insight Hour with Karma Nirvana summary:

How can employers respond to Honour Based Abuse?

This Insight Hour was recorded, you can watch it [here](#).

[Karma Nirvana](#) were established in 1993 as the first specialist charity for victims and survivors of Honour Based Abuse (HBA) Karma Nirvana operate the [National Honour Based Abuse helpline](#) (0800 5999 247). They offer support in multiple languages, and campaign for increased awareness and targeted action against HBA in the UK.

What is HBA?

There is currently no statutory definition of HBA, and Karma Nirvana are [campaigning](#) to change this. They propose the following definition:

"An incident or pattern of violence, threats of violence, intimidation, coercion, control or abuse (including but not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, economic, spiritual, faith-related or emotional abuse) motivated by the perpetrator's perception that an individual has shamed, or may shame, the perpetrator, the family, or community or has otherwise broken, or may break, the perceived norms of the community's accepted behaviours, including by speaking out about the abuse and where the perception of shame may also prevent a victim from accessing support or help."

While victim-survivors' experiences of HBA are diverse, the practice broadly centres around upholding honour, which requires individuals to adhere to a set of standards and behaviours deemed morally acceptable. It is in many ways a hidden societal issue, and general public awareness of HBA is low.

It can be very challenging for victim-survivors to access support, particularly from the police, as HBA cases often implicate their wider family and multiple perpetrators. Some are not aware that what they are experiencing is HBA, that the behaviours they are being subjected to are abusive and should not be tolerated. The perception of their own honour may be a barrier for the victim-survivor to ask for help, and many also face an insecure immigration status.

What is the prevalence of HBA?

There were 9,249 contacts with Karma Nirvana's HBA Helpline in 2023-2024, totalling 2,962 separate cases. The vast majority (90%) were women, and cases frequently involved multiple perpetrators. There were 60 known cases in workplaces, and some victim-survivors were referred to the helpline by colleagues. Karma Nirvana supported the production of Channel 4's [The Push: Murder on the Cliff](#), to highlight that HBA also affects working professionals. The documentary follows the murder of

Fawziyah Javed, a young lawyer from Leeds who was pushed off the top of Arthur's Seat by her husband.

Spotting the signs of HBA in the workplace

While every case of HBA is unique, the following can be signs that someone may be at risk.

- Unexplained, repetitive absences that don't match their regular pattern of leave – such as applying for extended leave overseas
- Subtle changes in behaviour, such as coming into the office more to avoid being at home where the risk of HBA is higher
- Not joining in social work events as their perpetrator(s) may be preventing them from participating
- Unexplained injuries
- Withdrawing from eating
- Sudden changes in work performance and/or productivity

Common triggers of HBA

Based on their helpline data, Karma Nirvana have identified that simply being female is a potential trigger of HBA. Other triggers include family disputes, refusing marriage or divorce, being LGBT+, pregnancy or termination, or running away from home.

How can employers help employees impacted by HBA?

Employers should avoid all attempts at mediating between victim-survivors and their perpetrators, including in cases where multiple family members/perpetrators work for the same organisation. Victim-survivors suggest that employers should keep in regular contact with affected employees, even during extended leave. With the consent of the victim-survivors, employers may also choose to share some information with colleagues to avoid the victim-survivor having to repeat their story and re-live their trauma. This can also be used to spark organisation-wide conversations about HBA and raise awareness among employees.

Employers can also provide both mental health support and practical support. This may include liaising with the police to devise safety plans covering the victim-survivors environment at work and at home and securing work premises by informing security staff of risks from perpetrators. Some employers may also be able to offer flexible work hours or for the affected employee to move location.