Title: Understanding family abuse: An intersectional approach to prevention and addressing family abuse perpetrators

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Abstract

This article provides an original contribution to understanding the motives for and perpetration patterns of family abuse that affects a range of minoritised communities, such as those minoritised on the basis of race, sexuality or transgender identity, and to contribute to debates around prevention. Negative and discriminatory societal attitudes, norms and behaviours towards these groups influence and justify family abuse. Based on empirical research, our study enhances the existing knowledge base to create practice and policy-focused recommendations for improving preventive and intervention efforts. We approached this from an ecological perspective, using a mixed-methods approach to interrogate quantitative and qualitative data to identify motivating factors underpinning perpetrators' behaviours. Our analysis, drawing on a phenomenological approach, shows an ecological framework with three interacting levels at which motivating factors occur: the individual, the community and society. Along with understanding who perpetrators might be, the types of family abuse and its impacts for victim/survivors, these three motivating factors provide a template for developing interventions with perpetrators of family abuse. The research also suggests that before interventions for perpetrators of family abuse can be properly developed, the field of domestic abuse needs to reconsider how family abuse is positioned as part of domestic abuse.

Key words/short phrases:

Family abuse, perpetration, sexual and racial minoritised communities, interventions, prevention.

Word count: 7412

Understanding family abuse: An intersectional approach to prevention and addressing family abuse perpetrators

Introduction

This article provides an original contribution to understanding the motives for and perpetration patterns of family abuse that affects a range of minoritised communities, such as those minoritised on the basis of race, sexuality or transgender identity, and to contribute to debates around prevention. Family abuse against people from racially and/or sexually minoritised (LGBTQ+)[1] communities does not occur within a vacuum: negative and discriminatory societal attitudes, norms and behaviours towards these groups ultimately influence and, to some degree, justify and condone family abuse. This can also lead to the issue being invisible, neglected or misrepresented in the public domain. Compounding these risk factors are the intersecting identities racially minoritised and/or LGBTQ+ people also have relating to gender, ethnicity, disability, culture, mental health issues, citizenship, age, economic status, geographical isolation and other identity-based and situational factors that result in a range of specific barriers to safety. Awareness of these factors and understanding of the effects of these intersections is critical when undertaking risk assessments, managing safety and considering interventions for perpetrators of family abuse. In practice, this means understanding the compounding effects that multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage have on survivors whilst also understanding the individual, community and societal push-pull factors that shape the behaviours of perpetrators. Importantly, no matter which group or community they belong to, each survivor's experience of violence and abuse is unique, requiring risk to be carefully assessed on an individual basis.

Defining family abuse

Understanding and preventing family abuse is a complex issue, however, we start with the United Kingdom 2021 Domestic Abuse Act. This provides a statutory definition of domestic abuse, which includes family abuse of family members as well as intimate partner abuse where the victim/survivors are over the age of 16 years. The Act's definition of domestic abuse rests on two aspects: the type of abuse which includes, physical, sexual, economic abuse and coercive controlling behaviours; and the 'personal connection' between the perpetrators and victim/survivors. In the UK, understandings of domestic abuse have traditionally been associated with intimate partner abuse (op cit Hague and Malos, 1993) and the 2021 Act, whilst comprehensive in scope, includes family abuse as a form of domestic abuse. This means, in practice, that intimate partner abuse is privileged whilst the specificities of family abuse are rendered less visible and/or limited to a specific range of behaviours and families that abuse. This has been noted in the case of some racially minoritised and/or faith communities being problematised as a high risk for perpetrating particular kinds of family abuse: 'honour' abuse, 'honour' killings and forced marriage (Gangoli, Donovan, Gill, Butterby, Dhir, Regan, 2023). Consequently, families from majority white communities where family abuse is perpetrated against family members who are non-conforming to norms of sexuality and/or gender identity are rarely seen or heard in discussions about family abuse (Hester and Donovan, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2019). In this article we attempt to correct this.

[1] We use this umbrella term when we speak about communities, but we use LGBQ and/or T+ when referring to individuals. This is to emphasise that identities of sexuality and identities of gender can result in different discriminatory experiences and/or issues for individuals being victimised by family abuse; that trans and non-binary people might identify as heterosexual rather than as lesbian, gay or bisexual; and as a way of reminding us not to homogenise members of these groups.

Evidence from around the globe strongly indicates that family abuse is predominately perpetrated by men against women and young people (WHO, LSHTM, SAMRC, 2013). However, what we know about family abuse has been shaped, informed and influenced by Western discourse, changing societal values, the subjective differences of individual interpretation, and inconsistency in terms and definitions used in research and data collection (Gangoli 2007). Western concepts of family abuse have been informed by a feminist analysis of intimate partner abuse which views male violence against women as a perpetuating force in women's oppression (see for example: García-Moreno et al. 2015). Such concepts fail to recognise the interconnections between individuals, extended families and wider communities and that family abuse can result from "a range of family and community factors, rather than one individual's problematic behaviour within an intimate partnership" (Olsen and Lovett, 2016: 1). These are the interconnections that we discuss later.

In the UK, family abuse occurs across all ages and socioeconomic and demographic groups. Much of what we know is in the context of racially minoritised communities and the victimisation of women and girls, for example, in the context of forced marriage and crimes in the name of honour () but we know less about male victims from racially minoritised communities who may suffer these forms of abuse (Idriss, 2019),including understanding how and why women may perpetrate these forms of abuse (Rew, Gangoli and Gill, 2013, Gill and Walker, 2020). More recently, research has examined family abuse that targets family members' sexual and gender identities (Taylor and Neppll, 2023; Galop and Yougov, 2022).

As Bassel and Emejulu (2010: 518) explain, intersectionality 'refers to the study of the simultaneous and interacting effects of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and national origin as categories of difference'. While the term was first presented in legal theory by Crenshaw (1989), there is general agreement that Black feminist contributions of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s – such as work by Davis (1983), Lorde (2007), Collins (1986) and Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) – played a major role in subsequent decades, influencing the use of intersectionality as an analytical tool to explore different forms of gendered, structural inequalities (Gangoli, Donovan, Gill, Butterby, Dhir, Regan, 2023; Gousis and Gill, 2022). Emerging literature is exploring the intersections between gender, sexuality and racialisation in cases of family abuse—for example, how ideas of "honour" and "shame" affect the treatment of racially minoritised young people (Khan et al. 2017; Gangoli, Donovan, Gill, Butterby, Dhir, Regan, 2023). This literature is also devising conceptual frameworks of 'honour' that are based on work in racially minoritised communities and applied in the context of victimised white, transgender family members (Rogers, 2017; Donovan and Barnes, 2019). In the context of gender, some research has focused on the role of women in perpetrating family abuse (Bates, 2018; Rew, Gangoli and Gill, 2013). For instance, Bates (2018) argues that in many cases of forced marriage and 'honour'-based abuse (HBA), female perpetrators who are the mothers of the abuse victims act as secondary perpetrators in collusion with, or due to fear of, primary (male) perpetrators. In some other types of familial abuse, such as dowry-related abuse, mothers-in-laws of abuse victims are often primary perpetrators (Gangoli and Rew, 2011).

While statistics provide some indication of the level of family abuse in racially minoritised communities and against LGBTQ+ people who are part of those communities, it is difficult to determine the full extent of this abuse due to a lack of conceptual understanding, underreporting and unreliable recording. However, Donovan and Hester (2014), in their survey found 42% of LGBTQ+ participants reported experiencing homo/bi/transphobia from family members with 16–19-year-olds significantly more likely to report than other age groups. Another survey (Ussher et al. 2016) of 6,514 young LGBTQ+ people found 29% of respondents reported family abuse and 36% of these stated that their gender identity or sexuality was implicated in their victimisation. Finally, Galop commissioned YouGov (2022) to undertake a survey of family abuse reported by LGBT+ people. In their research

report, the results show that of 5,078 participants, 23% reported family abuse. None of this research clarifies the ages of victims when family abuse took place. In practice, Galop, a national specialist LGBT+ organisation providing domestic abuse services in England, has always adopted the definition of domestic abuse that includes family abuse in shaping their work. Their review of their domestic abuse services in 2018 showed that family abuse is a significant proportion of their work: 23% of their clients reported family abuse (Magić and Kelley, 2019).

The majority of complex, intersecting forms of family abuse are not reported. Reasons for non-disclosure are numerous and complex including: shame; fear of reprisals from the perpetrator and others in the community; fear of the ramifications for victims of involving the criminal justice system and other government services; a perception that abuse is normalised, as something that has to be endured; if reported, the difficulty of keeping something private in close-knit communities; poverty and isolation; and a lack of culturally appropriate services. We are aware that in some cases of racially minoritised cases of family abuse, those victimised by family abuse, for example in the case of Female Genital Mulilation, do not know where to go to seek help since most domestic abuse services speak to intimate partner abuse rather than family abuse (Mulvihill, Gangoli, Gill and Hester, 2018).

In cases of intimate partner abuse, mandatory or voluntary perpetrator programmes are often implemented alongside criminal justice responses, but there is little evidence of the use of bespoke or targeted perpetrator programmes for family abuse (Westmarland et al. 2022). The specific roles of faith-based and community organisations in acting informally to address some specific forms of abuse have been highlighted (Mulvihill, Gangoli, Gill and Hester, 2018) but these need more research, especially because much of this work to date focuses on intimate partner domestic abuse (Catholic Diocese of Arundel & Brighton, nd.; Methodist Church, 2010; Aghtaie et. al. 2020) rather than family abuse.

What is also emerging in the current public discourse is the need to ensure that services, prevention programs and policy frameworks that address family abuse are designed and delivered in ways that are inclusive of community diversity. A number of racially minoritised and LGBTQ+ communities (and individuals who intersect these communities) argue that their rights and needs in relation to criminal justice and specialist support services are not being sufficiently met or, worse, are being denied completely (Magić and Kelley, 2019). Thus, while the progress made so far in bringing the issue of family abuse from the margins to the centre is significant, much more work is required to ensure that the different manifestations of this abuse within different communities are understood and addressed. This requires an intersectional approach across the continuum, from tertiary intervention through to primary prevention efforts.

Thinking theoretically about family abuse perpetration

In this study, the focus was on exploring the ways in which perpetration of family abuse might be understood at individual, community and societal levels. Drawing on phenomenological approaches, it is clear that individuals' perceptions, attitudes and social practices are produced through and in response to historical, cultural and societal norms that are believed to be enacted as natural or taken for granted 'truths' (Butler, 2004; Ahmed, 2007). Structural inequalities informed by patriarchal and/or colonial and/or homophobic and/or eugenic and/or capitalist constructions of social, economic, cultural and embodied hierarchy can be implicitly taken for granted as 'the way things are', 'God's will', 'mother nature', 'tradition' and/or all of these together. The result – though not always uniform or fixed or predictable – can be a set of family and community practices that both reinforce and rationalise existing, habituated ways of thinking, and 'doing' family, intimacy, marriage, parenting – and therefore gender and sexuality (Al-Saji, 2017). The habituated ways of doing gender and sexuality also

appear to have been pre-rehearsed by those who came before, rendering them even more, self-fulfilling as right and natural (Butler, 2004).

At the same time, family members perceived or believed to be non-conforming to those norms are problematised. Norms of gender and sexuality are perceived as being embodied in family members' presentation of self, their attitudes, and their family practices. This means that when family members do not conform, their bodies are understood to be the site of both 'the problem' and the solution, through its being disciplined, punished, or reconfigured in its presentation as correct and conforming.

Being asked for rationales for family abuse can be confusing for those perpetrating it, since their attitudes and perceptions of the world rest on their social, cultural, religious, historical inheritance that such norms of gender and sexuality are self-evidently and obviously 'natural', right and need to be defended, protected and, in some ways, 'fought for'. Our article draws on intersectionality theories to understand and document how different forms of family violence and abuse are connected on societal, community and individual levels. This approach highlights the importance of naming marginalised groups and making them visible in policy, practice and social justice responses without simultaneously stigmatising them (Strid and Verloo, 2019).Intersectionality also shows how sexuality, gender and race are interconnecting and thus inseparable systems of privilege and oppression that create particular effects for the respondents in this study.

By offering an understanding of the ways in which attitudes, perceptions and practices regulate, punish and demand conformity to norms of gender and sexuality – and thus to norms of family, marriage, intimacy – we offer potential themes to be included in interventions for family abuse perpetrators.

Methods

Our research sought to enhance the existing knowledge base to create practice- and policy-focused recommendations for improving preventive and intervention measures in relation to family abuse particularly in minoritised communities. To achieve this aim, we undertook the following activities:

1) Interviewing existing experts (n=30) in the domestic abuse field about their perceptions of family abuse perpetrators and their motives and what might be done to intervene and prevent family abuse

Thirty interviews were conducted with police officers, representatives and/or leaders from community/faith organisations, and domestic abuse practitioners to explore interviewees' institutional/professional understanding and experiences of family abuse and their perspectives on interventions for family abuse perpetrators. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 1.5 hours and were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription company. Interviews explored practitioners' perspectives (based on their expertise and experience in the field) on the nature of family abuse, victims/survivors' referral routes into their organisations, the help-seeking behaviours of those victimised by family abuse, their perceptions/experiences of what happens to perpetrators of family abuse, and their recommendations for change, interventions and prevention. Interviews took place remotely via Zoom or Teams, depending on interviewee preference. Interviewees were also asked how they would like their job title and area of work to be referred to publications from this project in order to protect their anonymity.

2) Drawing on case studies (n=19) of family abuse perpetration and analysing them using key questions about motivations, patterns of behaviours, and interventions framing the analysis

These included 19 case studies to consider patterns in perpetration of family abuse and how and when perpetration is reported (e.g., based on seriousness) and to determine contextual details regarding family stability, perpetrator rationale/defence, family witness statements and levels of support for the perpetrator(s), and agency responses. Case studies came from two sources: third-sector agencies, and the secondary analysis of an existing dataset from the ESRC-funded Qualidata archive (dataset SN853338).

3) co-producing a toolkit with relevant practitioners (n= 35) (e.g. in specialist by and for domestic abuse organisations, police, faith groups, mainstream domestic abuse organisations) to address perpetrators of family abuse.

We organised a practitioner workshop, where the draft toolkit was presented and opportunities were given to participants to consider three different aspects of the toolkit: prevention; whether dedicated services for family abuse are needed and who might provide them; and whether family abuse needs to be separated out from domestic abuse in order to develop practitioner best practice and expertise in addressing family abuse perpetrators. In addition, a jamboard was used to collect anonymous feedback from participants on the draft findings and recommendations embedded in the toolkit.

Recruitment and ethics

To recruit participants, we drew on existing knowledge about working on gender-based abuse (Skinner et al., 2004) and worked in collaboration with specialist non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and major stakeholders to access participants. We also identified a small number of participants through recommendation: such "snowball sampling" is commonly used where potential participants are hard to reach. Those who agreed to participate then signed a consent form that stipulated their right to withdraw from the research within seven days (which none exercised). The research project was granted ethical approval by the University of Durham, where the PI was based. No personal data were obtained from practitioners other than their role title and the number of years they had worked in the field of domestic and/or family abuse.

Our qualitative data analysis was guided by the process of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Quantitative data were analysed to determine patterns (demographics, nature of abuse, interventions). Qualitative findings were triangulated with the literature to finesse the arguments and discussions. The theoretical model that emerged from the analysis was the ecological model that looks at the individual, the individual's environment, and the interactions of the individuals with the environment and vice versa. Bronfenbrenner's seminal work on the ecology of human development (1979; 2005) describing the multiple influences on an individual's behaviour has been an important cornerstone of the popularity of the model. Here, following Haggeman-White et al. (2010) we look at some interlinked aspects using the ecological model, particularly societal, community and individual factors that explain perpetration of family abuse and therefore provide opportunities for intervention with family abuse perpetrators.

The findings of this paper draw on all the data collected across the three stages listed above.

Findings

Who does what to whom?

Family abuse is not restricted to any ethnic community or faith including white and/or Christian communities. Representatives from Catholic, Methodist, Church of England, Muslim and Hindu communities testified that family abuse took place in their faith communities. Most perpetrators are male, and from the immediate or wider family or community and/or faith groups. Female family members are also perpetrators in some contexts. Participants reported that men are most likely to exert physical violence, threats of violence or threats to kill in addition to coercive control and that women are most likely to exert coercive control, manipulation and/or emotional abuse. Multiple perpetrators are common and can be of any gender and have varied roles in their family/community/faith. Perpetrators can include any family members, including adult children; parents; cousins; sibling(s); male cousins; grandparents, parents and other relatives-in-law; uncles; aunts; extended family and community members not related in law but still referred to as 'aunty' and 'uncle', 'mother' and 'father', 'sister' and 'brother'.

In order to work with perpetrators of family abuse, research participants emphasise the importance of understanding the motivations for the abusive behaviours. This report identifies three sets of motivating triggers: societal, community and individual. While these are explained separately here to elucidate their distinctions, they often overlap in practice.

Societal level factors: Belief systems that inform motivations to perpetrate family abuse

We call these societal level beliefs even though they might not be dominant beliefs. In some cases, the enactment of these beliefs might include behaviours that constitute criminal acts. However, they are beliefs that exist prior to and, at the same time, in the production of family life where family abuse might take place. They are background truths (or unacknowledged norms?) that are not realised as such, until a family member apparently challenges their claim to be true by enacting non-conforming practices of gender and/or sexuality. When this occurs and families act to regulate and/or punish non-conformity, the strength and importance of adherence to these beliefs and attitudes becomes central to family life. Some of these belief systems are supported, underpinned and reinforced by religious/faith beliefs and/or loyalty to a family's or community's cultural traditions. Evidence of the following societal level beliefs were found to be present in family and community networks, however they have the potential to be informed by and/or reinforced through wider influences, such as dominant societal narratives, or legal frameworks:

1. The family's interests take priority over, and are more important than, any individual family member's interests.
2. The family has ownership of family members as resources that can be used to project the family's status, to provide evidence of their conformity to traditional/cultural/community/faith-based behaviour norms, and to barter with other families (e.g. with promised marriages of young children) for status and/or spousal visas.
3. Family members should be obedient to parents/family/community/faith elders.
4. There should be conformity to norms of gender and/or sexuality prior to and during intimate relationships and marriage (including gender roles, where a married couple lives, who makes decisions about a marriage, when to have children.).
5. Marriage is permanent.

A powerful example of this can be seen in the ways that trans people's lives, and especially young trans people's lives have been discussed in British society, particularly at the time of this study,

about so called 'conversion therapy'. A 2021 Government report recommended this being banned for use with LGBT people, however, subsequently, trans conversion therapy was excluded from the ban (see Donovan, Butterby and Barnes, 2023 for discussion of this) amidst public discussions about the rights of parents to be the arbiter of what is in the best interests of their trans children. Such societal discussion can be seen to provide a societal lever for family abuse to take place against trans family members:

> *[the] general narrative around LGBT people in the UK is so negative at the moment, especially around trans and non-binary folk. And of course that informs conversation, of course it will give [abusive] parents and siblings wings to do, to make them think … if they don't necessarily agree or necessarily have [an] affirmative stance towards LGBT identities it will give them that additional validation that what they are doing, what they are thinking or what they are planning to do is actually correct.* (ID049, independent consultant)

More broadly there is also the British societal stance on corporal punishment of children. The Children Act 2004 (Section 58) contains an inherent contradiction by stating on the one hand that it is unlawful for parents to smack their children, and on the other hand saying they can do so if it is 'reasonable punishment'. Such ambiguity provides the authority to those who would want it, to use physical violence to regulate and/or punish their children who are not conforming to norms of gender and/or sexuality:

> *Because a lot of people will probably say you know 'I was raised where I've been harmed and abused, you know, but I don't see it as abuse'. So there's again, you know, these messages that people hold about a certain level of violence and abuse is acceptable, or some people may even have views that it's OK to be violent and abusive towards children 'cause that's the way that they're disciplined as long as it doesn't lead to serious injury and it never harms anybody.* (ID005, head of services, charity)

Community-level factors: Perpetrators' entitlement to abuse family members to elicit conformity to family beliefs

Reinforcement of beliefs through habituated perceptions, attitudes and practices confirm those beliefs as normal, natural and non-contestable. Such reinforcement, from neighbours, friendship networks, extended families and/or faith communities both embed and embody those beliefs as real, enduring and self-evidently the way family and intimate lives should be lived and enacted through norms and practices of gender and sexuality.

In the accounts of practitioners, gender and sexuality are not constructed as neutral academic terms but describe and enact dominant forms of being in the world according to beliefs, perceptions and attitudes about what it is to be a man and what it is to be a woman; that there are only two, binaried genders that have legitimacy and which emerge naturally as a result of there being two sexes; and that these sexes exist to procreate in heterosexual marriage and thus continue the family line and/or provide resources, including status, to the family through marriage. As a result, whilst reference is made to norms of gender and sexuality for brevity's sake, the actual norms rely on a naturalistic, patriarchal, heteronormative pairing of men with women. These norms are enacted through dominant and mutually exclusive norms of heterosexual masculinity that position men as entitled rule makers and enforcers in their (extended) families and (faith) communities; and heterosexual femininity that position women as subordinate to men and responsible for ensuring rules are enacted. Where the institutions of heterosexuality and marriage are threatened by family members who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or

by family members who are gender non-conforming and/or who are transgender, family abuse can be perceived as justifiable in order to protect the institutions and the family's 'honour', standing and/or status from having deviant, sinful or possessed children.

Perpetrators of family abuse have belief systems that reinforce and are reinforced by a sense of entitlement—moral, faith-based, generational, cultural—to behave in the way that they do. Such strongly held beliefs lead families and communities (including faith-based communities) to develop and adhere to expectations about behaviour in ways that elicit conformity from all family members to norms of gender, sexuality, intimate relationships, marriage, divorce, family and community hierarchy. Entitlements are understood to be inherent in:

1. parents/extended family, in-laws and community/faith elders being entitled to make decisions about family member(s)' intimate lives, marriage partner and married life.
2. parents/in-laws' expectations of family member(s)' obedience in matters of social norms / gender roles / sexuality / intimate relationships / marriage (including where and with whom newly married family members live and whether they are allowed to divorce/leave an abusive partner).
3. parents/in-laws expecting support from other children/family members in attempting to or actually controlling family member(s) and/or punishing them if they do not conform.
4. faith/community leaders and wider community leaders/elders putting individual families under surveillance and those families accepting such surveillance as 'correct'
5. families having a 'natural' right to protect family member(s) from sin/non-conformity/possession and controlling/coercing/ punishing them in order to secure conformity.

Adherence to community level beliefs about a family's right and responsibility to discipline family members who are perceived to be non-conforming, can be seen when those communities do not engage with the authorities about this. For instance, they remain silent in the face of requests from the police for information or evidence about family abuse:

> *Where you have a whole community of people that are unwilling to speak to the police to give any evidence, who will also support the—the family in, you know, perpetrating those crimes and then making it impossible to investigate and to find out what really happened.* (ID004, service lead, charity)

Whilst men in their role as father and/or uncle are often primary perpetrators of family abuse, they are frequently enabled by other (extended) family and/or community members (men and women) who either are willingly or are coerced into enacting family abuse, to bring a perceived-to-be errant family member back into line:

> *They can sometimes be primary perpetrators, they can sometimes be kind of complicit in there, it can sometimes be sisters as well as brothers … because often they are, they are kind of, they're if you like safeguarding, you know, the honour of the family and all those sorts of things or, or just, they, they have that, that kind of role and they may feel that they're … so it might look different, but they are still perpetrators.* (ID106, manager, 'by and for' LGBT+ organisation)

The role of community and/or faith leaders is also pointed to as sometimes being pivotal in creating expectations in families that they should be enforcing certain religious/community beliefs (see also Meetoo and Mirza, 2007). These may include those beliefs of faith leaders but also just the very conservative teachings they preach, that privilege family honour, standing and/or status over any

individual family member's non-conformity (whether intended or enacted) in relation to the family's and /or (faith) community's norms of gender and sexuality. Powerful community and/or faith leaders can create or strengthen a belief that disciplining errant family members is a family's duty, so that the errant family member might be 'saved' from their own sinful and/or 'deviant' behaviour (see also Barnes and Aune, 2021):

> *'generally the church itself, I think is very backward about acting in respect of violence in the families, or domestic abuse, and that's part, that's historic, […] I still hear it now about people who are looking at...who come and say they've been a victim mainly, is that they don't get any help from the church, because the church still wants to try and keep them together. I think sadly the church is rather backward and historic in its attitude to family-based violence. First of all, a lot of...I would say actually that some priest and religions don't believe it happens, and if it does happen, they will say that it is the fault of the victim'* (ID50, Board Member, Catholic /faith organisation)

Individual-level motivating factors for family abuse

Societal and Community level motivating factors can provide a context in which family abuse might be normalised as 'necessary' for families to protect their honour, status and/or standing as well as to protect or save a family member from themselves. Nevertheless, these factors can only be conducive to family abuse if individual family abuse perpetrators are motivated to enact family abuse themselves, and will inevitably have gendered implications, for example: mothers may have different motivations from fathers whilst perpetrating family abuse, as they may be more implicated into maintaining family honour that fathers are (Kandiyoti, 1989; Alpin, 2019). Practitioners identified four core individual-level motives for family abuse. Individual perpetrators might be motivated by one or more of them:

1. to secure conformity to norms of gender and sexuality, intimate relationships and marriage
2. to secure conformity to interpretations of faith/religious texts in relation to norms of gender, sexuality, intimate relationships and marriage
3. to 'save' family member(s) from 'sin', shame and isolation from wider family/community/ faith
4. to protect the family from shame/dishonour/loss of status in their own (faith) community and their countries of origin because of the behaviours of the victimised family member(s).

In the following excerpt from a case study, it can be seen how abusive parents-in-law in collusion with an abusive husband, seek to rationalise their abuse by blaming the victim/survivor for their non-conformity to expected norms of family life and the heteronormative gendered roles of wife and daughter-in-law:

> *The perpetrator's parents would blame the victim for everything. They didn't think she was a good [country name] daughter-in-law and made the victim ask for forgiveness during their family meetings. Primary perpetrator's family members threatened the victim by saying she will be alone if she did not obey her husband and her own community will disown her as they would have no respect for her if he abandoned her.* (Case Study 5)

Threats that the victim/survivor will lose any respect if her marriage breaks down and the husband is perceived to abandon her, can work to keep victim/survivors in an abusive family and marriage, by highlighting the potential for shame and dishonour to the victim/survivor.

Such beliefs and sense of entitlement will lead many perpetrators to dismiss claims of family abuse, minimise the impacts of this abuse, and normalise their behaviours as traditional, 'God-fearing' and/or cultural:

> *I can talk about the Afro Caribbean perspective. [W]hat's funny is that there's this idea that … Jamaicans are so chill, but we are quite conservative, very conservative. A lot of us coming from a faith background and again we see it with domestic abuse for research we're doing. So in terms of LGBTQ+ communities it's exceptionally hard it is so hard, it is getting better, I think. What surprises me today is you will still hear derogatory offensive terms being used around people and their sexuality.* (ID37, member, faith-based organisation)

Several participants were unconvinced that such beliefs, so fiercely held, might be changed and/or successfully challenged—especially given the short-term nature of any perpetration intervention and the pervasiveness of the beliefs and entitlements which the perpetrator will face in between and/or at the end of the interventions. We return to this in the section on interventions.

Not all of these societal, community and individual beliefs will operate consistently or permanently across all family members—there are push–pull factors that include these beliefs and where sources of support come from for those beliefs (extended family, community, faith). There are also alternative beliefs espoused elsewhere in society (the law; help providers; societal expectations in education, employment; broader discourses about gender, sexuality, intimate relationships, marriage and divorce). In the following excerpt it can be seen that for some perpetrators, their own rules and norms take precedence over any rules or laws in the country in which they live:

> *'I mean the amount of times that people have said to me, perpetrators as such, being caught, "your law doesn't apply to me. I answer to a different law".'* (ID01, Solicitor, specialist in international family law)

Figure 1 shows the factors, with double-headed arrows indicating that they can push or pull family members away from or towards family abuse. Continuing the example mentioned earlier, the use of conversion therapy where used by families against family members to change their sexuality from gay to heterosexual might be facilitated or pushed by community factors such as families' faith communities. A societal factor such as the law criminalising the use of conversion therapy to correct a family member's sexuality might be the pull factor needed convincing the family they should not use conversion therapy. That the government has decided not to criminalise conversion therapy for transgender identity then both community and societal factors might work as push factors to convince a family they and/should use conversion therapy to cure their family member of their non-conforming gender identity.

Figure 1 here

In any family the push/pull factors might be different and specific to them and depend on their own beliefs/attitudes as well as the degree to which community factors have sway in those families and then the degree to which societal factors might act to regulate or facilitate individual family behaviours to enact family abuse.

Interventions

Many participants were very clear that any perpetrator intervention for family abuse perpetrators would need to take account of the fact that their beliefs, attitudes and practices are being supported and colluded in by their wider family and community. This is making it difficult for any change in attitudes to be sustained:

> *Readjusting [the perpetrator programme] as a model I think would be really—it would be really beneficial. But again, you know, you've got these perpetrators that have got real, deep-rooted views. How do you even start to unpick them? You know, you—you'll do a bit of work. Say if you do an hour session only for that perpetrator to go back into. this really heavy patriarchal structure where the uncles, the male cousins, the sons, they all kind of reinforce that everything's okay. So, your one hour in a classroom is definitely then gonna be very watered down when they go back into that structure.* (ID065, HBA and FM subject matter expert, police)

Identifying how family is understood by the victimised family member

Participants emphasised the importance of identifying and understanding how family is understood by the victimised family member as an important precursor to understanding the pattern of family abuse being enacted and thus the type of intervention needed to address it. This includes understanding the push/pull factors in each family: how important family is, who counts as family, who has influence over family decisions/behaviours, and who is involved with supporting, colluding with and enacting family abuse. It also involves identifying those who are perpetrators, allies and other victimised family members—and keeping in mind that the identities of these individuals might change or overlap depending on the circumstances and over time.

It is important that practitioners working with family abuse understand the family holistically, including how perpetrators define their family and their relationships to their wider (faith) community and/or racialised community. This is key to understanding the push/pull factors (*see Figure 1*) that need to be addressed when working with family abuse perpetrators, and the relative strength of the different push-pull factors. For example, the law might act as a push factor away from enacting a particular form of family abuse but a strong faith leader who expects families to protect family members from sin might act as a pull factor to family abuse that is more compelling:

> *As I understand it from [when] we talked to our priests … perpetrators, who obviously don't think often that they are doing something wrong, they think it's necessary correction, and they go to the priest expecting to be [validated] in what they're doing, is that the right word? I think it is, you know it's okay what they are doing, you know they are doing it for the victim's good.* (ID50, board member, Catholic/faith organisation)

In family abuse, perpetrators often do not act alone. Other family members, as well as other members of their community and/or faith group, might also facilitate and/or directly perpetrate family abuse themselves. It is also important that practitioners assess other family members who have colluded with, facilitated and/or enacted family abuse, in order to determine whether any of those who abuse are or have been in the past themselves victims of family abuse and are being coerced into being abusive.

Discussion: Addressing the gaps that exist in practice, policy, and procedures

There are several reasons why our study found no evidence of family abuse perpetrator interventions. The following three emerged as the most important.

First, shared beliefs, perceptions and attitudes that families are entitled to obedience and conformity to norms of gender and sexuality of its family members. These are gendered expectations, and may lead to non-recognition, normalisation and/or acceptance of family abuse by victimised family members, by families and communities, and by practitioners across a range of provision, including education, youth work, social services, housing, police, health services and the domestic abuse sector:

> *Within their own communities, this is normalised behaviour, this is acceptable behaviour.' (ID91, local council coordinator)*

Such beliefs and attitudes lead to family abuse being normalised and minimised by families, communities and those services that represent society: the police, social services, schools, health providers. Without an approach that problematises those beliefs and attitudes and/or that breaks the relationship those beliefs/attitudes which become a rationale for and enactment of abusive behaviours family abuse will continue with impunity.

Second, perpetrators of family abuse currently only face criminal justice system responses, yet these are relatively rare because of the difficulties in gathering evidence. Family members are reluctant to report family abuse perpetrators, and this can be exacerbated by the general lack of trust and confidence that many members of racialised communities and LGBQ and/or T+ people feel in the criminal justice system.

> *People do not want to report their families, it's going to make matters worse, and it doesn't necessarily reduce the risk.* (ID106, manager, 'by and for' LGBT+ organisation)

Third, participants pointed to a lack of skills and knowledge in their own sectors – which mirrors the perceived lack of national or local guidance - on how to respond to family abuse for both victims/survivors and perpetrators. Austerity has also had an impact, leaving poorly resourced statutory and third sectors unable to engage in community development and building capacity in services, training and best practice development. These deficits can result in risk and need being underestimated and inappropriate responses which might inadvertently increase the risk for those being victimised:

> *So, I've worked with many cases where they've had an honour-based risk assessment and they've identified multiple perpetrators, but in terms of actions, it's almost tokenistic. We've done this risk assessment but there is no follow up or actions. So, they've gone on to report multiple incidents, but do you know, that document is stored somewhere, like I said—why does the situation have to escalate until there is a serious event, for people to be held accountable?* (ID60, practitioner, specialist service working with perpetrators of Domestic Violence and Abuse).

Gaps of knowledge were identified both about the dynamics of family abuse perpetrators and also the particularities of diverse faith and/or racialised communities and/or of LGBTQ+ lives. As noted above, discussions of motivations may appear to be individual for perpetrators but have deeper community and social/structural support. How these motives are translated into abusive behaviours will be shaped by the push/pull individual, community and societal factors, and may differ across gender, age, sexuality and ethnicities. Some practitioners were particularly concerned that approaches to family abuse where LGBTQ+ family members are victimised, are less informed by what is known about family abuse and the importance of considering risk and harm to, and needs of, the family member. Instead, there is a fear that they are more focused on keeping the family together through what is seen as a difficult time for parents and their LGBTQ+ family members. For example:

> '*How do you address sexuality in communities who believe only heterosexuality should, and does, exist? I don't know if the hierarchy can be effectively challenged here, so perhaps arming potential victims with the knowledge and resources to seek help and support early is the better strategy?*' (ID81, Medical Doctor and Charity Worker)

Concluding Thoughts: What can be done?

Table 1 here

In Table 1 we have outlined what needs to be done to start a process by which interventions addressing family abuse perpetrators can be developed and address the three reasons outlined above about why there is so little work done on family abuse perpetrator interventions. Many of the recommendations point to the need to build capacity in the domestic abuse sector in order to build expertise and a knowledge base about what kinds of interventions might be needed for the range of family abuse that exists.

The recommendations are intended to address the lack of visibility that exists about family abuse in the domestic abuse sector, and in communities and families, about what family abuse is, how it can be recognised and named and where those victimised should go for help. This requires a different approach to capacity building that does not only rely on one-to-one case work – which is also necessary – but also works in communities to ensure that the push factors away from family abuse are more evidently beneficial to all than the pull factors towards family abuse. A programme of training is required to build skills, knowledge and confidence of practitioners to work and build trust with families where family abuse might take place. Employment strategies should recognise the importance of recruiting from within communities and families where family abuse might take place. Community and faith leaders who champion the push factors away from family abuse will be crucial for some individual families and perpetrators, whose perceptions and attitudes prioritise their family's honour, status and/or standing over their individual family member's health and wellbeing. Prevention underpins all of this work so that children and young people (and other potential victims/survivors) are better equipped to recognise family abuse and feel able to report it with reassurance that they will be listened and responded to appropriately.

Finally, family abuse perpetrator interventions should include awareness of and engagement with the societal, community and individual motivating factors outlined in this article that can lead to family abuse. Understanding the push/pull of these factors can also enable a better and more tailored approach to family abuse, which, given the diversity of family contexts in which this can take place, will be important to ensure that appropriate interventions are designed, implemented and evaluated to measure success.

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Key messages

- There has been very little research on the motives for and perpetration patterns of family abuse that affects a range of minoritised communities, such as those minoritised on the basis of race, sexuality or transgender identity, and to contribute to debates around prevention
- Before interventions for perpetrators of family abuse can be properly developed, the field of domestic abuse needs to reconsider how family abuse is positioned as part of domestic abuse.
- There are three interacting levels at which motivating factors for family abuse occur: the individual, the community and society. Along with understanding who perpetrators might be, the types of family abuse and its impacts for victim/survivors, these three motivating factors provide a template for developing interventions with perpetrators of family abuse.

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Conflict of interests

None to declare

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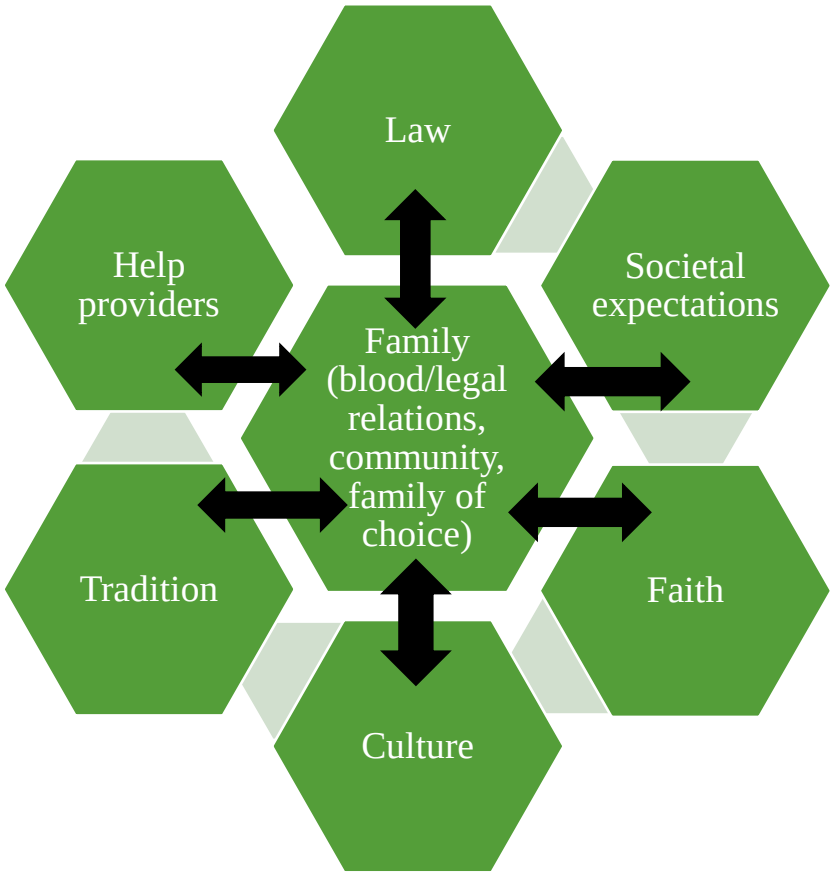
Figure

Figure 1 *Push-Pull Factors That Influence Decisions to Perpetrate Family Abuse*



Alt text: This figure shows the factors, with double-headed arrows indicating that they can push or pull family members away from or towards family abuse. These include culture, tradition, faith, social, expectations, law and health providers.

Table

Table 1

What needs to be done?	Which sector?	By who?
Make better use of existing law	Criminal Justice System	CJS practitioners: police, Crown Prosecution Service
Training about family abuse	Statutory and the domestic abuse sectors	Capacity building needed to design and deliver training
Employment: to increase representation from minoritised groups	Statutory and the domestic abuse sectors	Each organisation in each sector
Representation more generally: to raise profile of family abuse and minoritised groups impacted	Statutory and the domestic abuse sectors	Each organisation in each sector
Improved partnership working: to share information and expertise	Statutory and domestic abuse sectors, especially 'by and for' services for racially minoritised communities and LGBQ and/or T+ people	Local Authority Coordinators facilitating Family Abuse Forums
Prevention aimed at: • **Children and young people**	Primary, secondary, further, and higher education sectors	Capacity building needed to design and deliver prevention materials.
• **Communities**	Across each local authority area to provide opportunities for community engagement, early intervention, information about the law	Capacity building needed – especially within 'by and for' services to engage with communities

Alt text: In Table 1 we have outlined what needs to be done to start a process by which interventions addressing family abuse perpetrators can be developed and address the three reasons outlined above about why there is so little work done on family abuse perpetrator interventions