



House of Commons
Home Affairs Committee

**Domestic Violence, Forced
Marriage and “Honour”-
Based Violence: Further
Government Response to
the Committee’s Sixth
Report of Session 2007–08**

Third Special Report of Session 2007–08

*Ordered by The House of Commons
to be printed 30 October 2008*

The Home Affairs Committee

The Home Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Home Office and its associated public bodies.

Current membership

Rt Hon Keith Vaz MP (*Labour, Leicester East*) (Chairman)
Tom Brake MP (*Liberal Democrat, Charshalton and Wallington*)
Ms Karen Buck MP (*Labour, Regent's Park and Kensington North*)
Mr James Clappison MP (*Conservative, Hertsmere*)
Mrs Ann Cryer MP (*Labour, Keighley*)
David TC Davies MP (*Conservative, Monmouth*)
Mrs Janet Dean MP (*Labour, Burton*)
Patrick Mercer MP (*Conservative, Newark*)
Margaret Moran MP (*Labour, Luton South*)
Gwyn Prosser MP (*Labour, Dover*)
Bob Russell MP (*Liberal Democrat, Colchester*)
Martin Salter MP (*Labour, Reading West*)
Mr Gary Streeter MP (*Conservative, South West Devon*)
Mr David Winnick MP (*Labour, Walsall North*)

The following Members were also Members of the Committee during the inquiry:

Rt Hon John Denham MP (*Labour, Southampton Itchen*)
Mr Jeremy Browne MP (*Liberal Democrat, Taunton*)
Mr Richard Benyon MP (*Conservative, Newbury*)

Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at www.parliament.uk/homeaffairscom. A list of Reports of the Committee since Session 2005–06 is at the back of this volume.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Elizabeth Flood (Clerk), Jenny McCullough (Second Clerk), Elisabeth Bates (Committee Specialist), Sarah Harrison (Committee Specialist), Mr Tony Catinella (Senior Committee Assistant), Mr Ameet Chudasama (Committee Assistant), Sheryl Dinsdale (Committee Assistant) and Ms Jessica Bridges-Palmer (Select Committee Media Officer).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Home Affairs Committee, House of Commons, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 3276; the Committee's email address is homeaffcom@parliament.uk.

Third Special Report

On 13 June 2008 the Home Affairs Committee published its Sixth Report of Session 2007–08, *Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and “Honour”-Based Violence*, HC 263-I & II. The Government’s response to the Report was published as a Command Paper (Cm 7450) in July 2008. The Committee has received a further response from the Government on 30 September 2008. This is published as an Appendix to this Special Report.

Appendix: Further Government Response

Recommendations

1. A lack of standardised data, and what is judged to be significant under-reporting, make it difficult to make an accurate assessment of the numbers of individuals experiencing domestic violence. Only a tiny proportion of victims ever come into contact with statutory authorities, particularly criminal justice agencies, making measurement of the scale of abuse even more complex. However, available statistics suggest that one in four women and one in six men will experience domestic violence at some point in their lives. The vast majority of serious and recurring violence is perpetuated by men towards women. (Paragraph 30)

2. Understanding of the scale of “honour”-based violence and forced marriage is even patchier. The Government’s Forced Marriage Unit handles around 300 cases of forced marriage each year, but this is likely to represent only the tip of the iceberg. (Paragraph 31)

3. Too little is still understood about the true scale of domestic violence, “honour”-based violence and, particularly, forced marriage. Because of the different ways in which data is gathered and recorded by different agencies, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of the Government’s response to domestic violence. Differences in data recording also makes it virtually impossible to track offenders across agencies, and between relationships. We recommend that the Government implements a single performance management framework on the collection and reporting of domestic violence data, to apply across all relevant Government agencies, not only criminal justice agencies. This framework should ensure that data are comparable across all agencies, and be used to measure the effectiveness of the Government’s response to domestic violence. (Paragraph 32)

July Response

The Government acknowledges that there are challenges with understanding the numbers of individuals experiencing domestic violence including “honour”-based violence and forced marriage.

We are looking at ways of gathering more accurate information from a variety of sources, however we need to be cautious about over-inflating numbers as this could be counter-productive.

We are looking at all our data sources and the CJS are the most reliable. However we are constantly looking at how to gather and collate a variety of data sources which will give us a more accurate figure and identify the needs in order to intervene.

Update

We will be setting up a cross-government working group in 2009 to look in detail at the challenges presented by current systems and to explore the options for addressing these.

Recommendation

4. We had sight of emerging data on prosecutions of “honour”-based violence and forced marriage cases, which is currently being collected via a pilot study in four Crown Prosecution Service areas. We think that this data, particularly that relating to the age of defendants, will make an important contribution to understanding the nature and scale of these particular forms of violence. We look forward to the full results of the pilot in the summer of 2008. (Paragraph 35)

July Response

Since compiling the emerging findings from our pilot study on forced marriage and ‘so-called’ honour crimes, we have been working towards finalising the findings. Additional information on prosecutors’ experiences in identifying, managing, and prosecuting these cases has also been collected through questionnaires and a focus group discussion held in June. The final report is due to be published in the autumn.

Update

The final report on the so-called ‘honour’ crime and forced marriage pilot is currently on track for publication in autumn 2008.

Recommendations

5. The evidence we heard from survivors about the ignorance they faced from many quarters, coupled with widespread under-reporting, persuades us of the need for at least one major public information campaign. We consider that in the UK a number of different campaigns would be valuable, targeting different audiences, including the following:

(a) A general public awareness campaign to target victims, including male victims, and friends and family. This should emphasise the nature of abuse, educate friends and family on warning signs, and publicise support.

(b) A campaign specifically on forced marriage and other forms of “honour”-based violence. The Government should make full use of feedback from survivors, starting with that gathered through our eConsultation, to design key messages and media. (Paragraph 67)

6. The Government should consider implementing an overall communications strategy for domestic violence, including “honour”-based violence and forced marriage. This could perhaps be developed along the lines of the THINK! Road Safety campaign, which is well recognised and has wide coverage. (Paragraph 68)

July response

The Government recognises that there is a need to raise awareness of domestic violence, including “honour”-based violence and forced marriage. We have already run a number of successful campaigns to tackle rape, sexual assault and domestic violence which were

aimed at different audiences. We are currently looking at the role for communications in tackling violence against women and particularly with a view to prevention of violence, which would involve changing attitudes and behaviour among key audiences.

Update

We will be building a communications support package for this area of work.

Recommendation

7. We welcome the research being carried out by Respect and the NPSCC with the Big Lottery Fund. We recommend that the Government consider amending its definition of domestic violence to include under-18s. (Paragraph 77)

July Response

The Government acknowledges those issues raised about widening the definition of domestic violence to include under 18s and continues to keep the definition under review.

Update

Consideration of the definition will be covered in our Delivery Plan for 2009/10.

Recommendations

8. We acknowledge that there are areas of good practice in education in schools on domestic violence and forced marriage, and we welcome the initiative by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to design ‘school-friendly’ materials in conjunction with the Forced Marriage Unit. We recommend that the DCSF and FMU work together proactively to distribute these materials to all schools, rather than waiting for materials to be requested. (Paragraph 93)

9. However, we were alarmed by the evident resistance of some schools and local authorities to displaying information, particularly on forced marriage. Whilst schools should retain discretion about the most appropriate way to display materials, it is clear from survivors’ accounts that schools can provide a lifeline to vulnerable pupils by providing information on support services. We strongly recommend that the Department for Children, Schools and Families take steps to ensure that all schools are promoting materials on forced marriage, whilst allowing them to retain discretion on the details. We intend to follow up this issue. (Paragraph 94)

July response

Schools have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of their pupils and we have encouraged them, through guidance, to make available information about helplines and access to support for victims or people in fear of forced marriage.

In April 2008 Ministers at the DCSF wrote to local authorities and schools to remind them of their responsibilities in relation to the issue of forced marriage and the materials and guidance already available and to explain the further action being taken.

DCSF has worked with the Forced Marriage Unit to develop materials specifically for schools and for young people to raise awareness of forced marriage and of sources of support. We have been helped by schools, young people and support groups, including Karma Nirvana, in the development of these materials, and they are already available on the Every Child Matters website:

<http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/socialcare/safeguarding/forcedmarriage/>.

We will be sending printed copies to all secondary schools in July, as well as to all local authorities and LSCBs, and DIUS will be sending them to all colleges. We are strongly encouraging schools to use these materials, and will be using a wide range of methods to promote their use. For example, we will use conferences, and workshops (such as the HBV roadshow), and have already asked regional staff (for example Safeguarding Advisers) to promote them. We are also engaging with professional associations.

Update

We can confirm that materials designed specifically for schools and young people were officially launched by Kevin Brennan at the HBV Roadshow in London in July. These consist of two posters, one aimed at young people and the other aimed at practitioners working with them, leaflets and information cards. Hard copies were sent to all secondary schools, local authorities, Local Safeguarding Children Boards and pupil referral units before the summer break. DIUS have also sent copies to all FE colleges.

Recommendation

10. Recent concern raised by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children over the inadequacy of sex and relationships education in schools serves to highlight further the need for better statutory education on these subjects. We recommend that the Department for Children, Schools and Families specifically consider education about relationships, domestic and “honour”-based violence and forced marriage as part of its current review of sex and relationships education in schools. We strongly urge the Department to recommend that education on these issues is explicitly made a part of the statutory school sex and relationships curriculum, rather than being left to the discretion of individual schools. (Paragraph 95)

July response

The curriculum already provides scope for the exploration of issues relating to domestic violence and forced marriage principally, although not exclusively, within Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE), which includes sex and relationship education (SRE).

It is important that we focus efforts on raising the overall standard of teaching in PSHE and SRE, where issues to do with healthy relationships, managing conflict and aggression

