

Action Plan and Summary

Honour-based Violence (HBV) and Honour-based Killings in Iraqi Kurdistan and in the Kurdish Diaspora in the UK

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Action Plan on 'Honour-based Violence and Summary

- This 'Action Plan and Summary' report presents:
 - An **Action Plan** on honour-based violence and honour killings for the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government and agencies in Iraqi Kurdistan Region.
 - A set of **Recommendations** for the UK policy-makers and agencies (and for the UK Government).
- Due to the importance of combating 'honour'-based violence, both of these are presented in full, rather than being abbreviated, as in an executive summary. They are followed by a brief summary of the research and its findings to give context to the Action Plan and Recommendations.

Introduction

- In 2008, the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) took the unprecedented step of commissioning an international research project on 'honour'-based violence (HBV)¹ in Kurdistan and within the Kurdish Diaspora. The KRG is to be congratulated on taking this step to start to address the issue, as one part of a wider Government strategy, including the setting up of the High Commission to Monitor Violence against Women. These initiatives were designed to contribute to the committed democratization and modernization process currently underway in Iraqi Kurdistan, including the integration of gender issues into social and public policy.
- The study commissioned by the KRG was a pioneering and unique piece of research, breaking new ground for social researchers in Kurdistan Region. It was carried out by a consortium of senior researchers from the Centre for Gender and Violence Research, School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol, UK, and Roehampton University, UK,

¹ We have used 'honour' in quotation marks at the beginning of this Action Plan and Summary, to signify the contested nature of a concept of honour which leads to violence and abuse. We have not used quotation marks, thereafter.

working in partnership with the Kurdish women's organization, Kurdish Women's Rights Watch (KWRW).

- The research was a practice and policy analysis, which aimed to enable social development and change in response to this pervasive form of violence.
- The aim was to follow best practice in trans-national research on gender issues, consciously attempting to avoid ethnocentrism and the imposition of Western ideas, and to understand and respect cultural issues and traditional practices, while working towards modernization.
- The team took the view throughout that HBV is a wide-spread phenomenon and that Kurdish society and communities must not be singled out or stigmatized in this respect. Nevertheless, it is important that the issue is addressed in Kurdish communities, as well as in others, to lead to social development and to address harmful social practice where they exist.

1. What is honour-based violence?

- Honour-based violence (HBV) is a form of intimate violence committed, most commonly, against (often young) women by husbands, fathers, brothers and male relatives. Some men also experience honour-based violence. It has existed throughout history and in a broad variety of societies across the world from white European to African cultures, to South and East Asia to Latin America.
- Thus, the application of an honour code to women's conducts especially in terms of behaviour and sexuality is neither unique to Kurdish society, nor specific to Islamic cultures. However, there are commonalities between communities and societies that practice honour violence and killing concerning beliefs that women's behaviour should be broadly under the control of male family and community members, and a repository of their honour.

- Honour-based violence covers a wide range of actions including physical violence, assaults and killings in the name of honour, curtailment (sometimes very extreme) of liberty, basic rights or education, suicide and coerced suicide, enforced self-immolation, starvation, poisoning, and forced marriage of women on the grounds of honour, including to men who have raped them. It is also often thought to include 'honour revenge', abandonment, removal of children, aspects of female genital mutilation, forced virginity, forced hymen repair, forced abortion, and imprisonment of partners / male friends who are regarded as unsuitable or unacceptable.
- The most extreme form of HBV – killing in the name of honour – is tragically widespread, and its continuing occurrence has been reported in Bangladesh, Brazil, Britain, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Pakistan, Morocco, Sweden, Turkey, Uganda and the United States.
- It should be noted that the research was commissioned by the Kurdistan Regional Government to respond to concerns in Kurdistan about honour-based violence, particularly following the stoning to death of the teenage Yazidi girl, Du'a Khalil, in 2007. During the stoning, official agencies were filmed failing to intervene and the case sparked a large reaction, nationally and internationally.
- Over the last decade, national and international attention, new policy development and activist campaigns have begun to challenge honour-based violence in a variety of countries. This research is at the forefront of this new and challenging policy direction and represents a significant part of the pioneering contribution of Iraqi Kurdistan to the global effort to decrease violence in the name of honour.

2. Aims and methods of the study

- The study was conducted between September 2008 and November 2010. The research aims overall were to investigate, in both IRK and the UK:
 - The nature and extent of HBV in Kurdish communities;
 - Policy, practice and activist responses;
 - The experiences of victims and family members;
 - Media coverage and attitudes.

- The study was designed to provide:
 - Robust evidence to support policy development.
 - An Action Plan for the Kurdistan Regional Government and agencies in Iraqi Kurdistan.
 - Recommendations for policy-makers and agencies in the UK.
 - Contributions to the work of women's organizations and NGOs working on the issue in both Kurdistan and the UK, and to the development of good practice more broadly.

The methods used are detailed in the Appendix.

Action Plan for Iraqi Kurdistan Region and the Kurdistan Regional Government

Note: this Action Plan can also be used as a stand-alone document

7.1. Introduction

This Action Plan has been developed from the research evidence of the international Honour-Based Violence Study conducted in Iraqi Kurdistan and the UK from 2008 to 2010. It aims to provide policy and practice assistance to the Kurdistan Regional Government, and both to agencies, NGOs, professionals and activists working on the issue, and also to victims, survivors and the families of those affected.

The study found that the Kurdistan Regional Government and the various agencies in Iraqi Kurdistan Region are to be congratulated on what they have achieved so far to combat honour-based violence in the Region. For example, the government and the Kurdish law-makers have made several notable legal amendments to reduce violence against women and crimes in the name of honour, amending several articles in the IPC between 2000-2002, in attempts to remove undue leniency in the treatment of offenders. These actions have set a positive precedent, although the research evidence demonstrated that they have not always been reliably implemented.

Overall, however, there is a political will to address issues of honour-based violence in Iraqi Kurdistan, as part both of the modernization and democratization project locally, and of the wider global effort on the issue.

The Action Plan will assist in strengthening this political will and in putting into place multi-stranded, co-ordinated action which will place Iraqi Kurdistan at the forefront in the global region in challenging honour crimes.

Action plans are designed to be achievable within realistic time limits. However, cultural change is lengthy and complex. This Action Plan is therefore designed as a beginning and a pointer towards future development.

7.2. The Action Plan: Overall issues

- **7.2.1.** This Action Plan is centred on the:

- **Prevention** of honour-based violence
- **Provision** of relevant services, and
- **Protection** of families/ victims.

These categories have been successfully used in some other countries including the UK.

- **7.2.2.** The primary recommendation of the research, is that there is a need for:

- A multi-pronged approach to tackling honour-based violence.

Co-ordinated work on multiple levels would be expected to include, in general, more effective protection systems and mechanisms, an improvement in how cases are dealt with and investigated in the criminal justice system and the courts, improved training for agencies and professionals, and programmes for education reform and of awareness-raising in communities.

- **7.2.3.** The first requirement is for the further building and strengthening of:

- Political commitment by the Kurdistan Regional Government, by relevant agencies and by communities to working against honour-based violence.

Such political commitment needs to be embedded in the work of the relevant ministries and agencies and to be adequately resourced, if social development and change on honour violence are to be achieved.

- **7.2.4.** This will require the leadership in Iraqi Kurdistan to move forward, using this commissioned research and to further act on its stated commitment to address gender, honour and violence issues, in order to build on the good work already conducted, on which the Kurdistan Regional Government is to be congratulated.

- **7.2.5.** An important underlying issue is the need for a wide-ranging addressing of gender equality, and the development of a gender equality scheme, as a strong government modernizing commitment. On a general government level, this includes the promotion of women to senior posts (based on their qualification and skills and not only on their allegiance to political parties),

the re-establishment of the Ministry of Women, and the integration of gender equality issues within the work of relevant departments and agencies.

It also means reforming laws relating to women, both in the Iraqi Penal Code and the Iraqi Personal Status Code to remove provisions which may disadvantage women, to promote gender equality and to combat honour crimes.

7.3. The Action Plan: The Kurdistan Regional Government

- **7.3.1. Re-endorsement of legal remedies.** The helpful legal reforms noted above (including, for example, the amendments of Articles 128, 130, 132, 377 of the IPC, which were adopted at different times under different administrations) now need to be reviewed and re-endorsed in the unified Kurdistan National Assembly.
- **7.3.2. Enforcing legal implementation.** An essential step to improve the policing and treatment of honour-based violence is to enforce and standardize the (currently inconsistent) implementation of these and other relevant pieces of legislation on violence against women (including the proposed law on domestic violence).

In order to be effective, laws, of course, need to have ‘teeth’, to be properly enforced and to be operated with commitment and will. Until now, this has not always been the case for honour crimes, and this Action Plan provides an opportunity to address this difficulty.

- **7.3.3. Monitoring and advocacy.** To achieve more consistent legal implementation in the courts in this way, monitoring mechanisms need to be urgently established. Independent advocacy for victims and independent monitoring of improvements would be of assistance in this process.
- **7.3.4. Specialized training and support of the criminal justice and legal professionals involved.** Further measures need to be put into place to improve the functioning and implementation of these laws. Importantly, this needs to entail training for the criminal justice system, lawyers and the judiciary to enable them to deal with crimes on the grounds of honour more consistently and effectively than at present. (See also sections 7.3.10 and 7.3.13.)
- **7.3.5. Improved systems of investigation.** The police and prosecutors need improved systems of investigation and evidence collection. This would entail training, the development of

more expertise and improvements in attitudes of officers to women's issues and to gender and honour violence, and a modernizing the methods used for investigation (e.g. the introduction of modern techniques such as DNA analysis etc.).

- **7.3.6. Arms regulation.** The widespread presence of firearms, prevailing in many homes, makes a key tool of violence readily available to use against women. The regulation of the use and circulation of firearms needs to be considered. For example, some forms of registration and safe centralized deposit of guns is necessary to expel the gun from domestic space.

- **7.3.7. Witness protection programmes.** It is essential that witnesses are better protected, if prosecution of honour crime is to be improved, with the introduction of sympathetic witness protection programmes and wider protections and welfare measures for victims and their families.

- **7.3.8. New legislation and a national strategy** (see Section 6.4.1. below). Further, the development of new legislation and a national strategy on honour-based violence in the future would assist in the building of a coordinated response across Iraqi Kurdistan.

- **7.3.9. Customary law versus formal law.** The issue of customary law versus formal law is an important one in the context of honour crime. There is a pressing need for clear commitments that customary and traditional mechanisms and parallel legal systems are subordinate and secondary to the official legislature and formal law of Iraqi Kurdistan Region.

- **7.3.10. Training and awareness-raising for those involved in customary law and justice.** Those who deal with informal customary law, cultural systems and tribal justice need to be trained on women's rights, honour-based violence and gender equality. The idea of such training would be to:

- Enable the gradual erosion over time of harmful cultural views and behaviour (e.g. in terms of upholding family honour) which damage and disadvantage women and other family members.
- Ensure that women victims are provided with appropriate and sustainable remedies, while according respect to traditional non-harmful cultural practices.

- Have in place systematic and rigorous recording and monitoring procedures and processes to ensure that ‘informal justice’ conforms with human rights principles and formal law.
- **7.3.11. Kurdistan Women’s Council.** The current government is encouraged to concretize the establishment of a Women’s National Council with a monitoring capacity which would be able to develop a gender equality scheme and work on HBV as one of its tasks.
- **7.3.12. Specialist courts.** Building on the positive experience of the court in Sulaimaniya, the government is encouraged to consider working towards the wider establishment of specialist ‘Violence Against Women Courts’ (as in many other countries including the UK and Canada), with specialized training of judges and prosecutors and the monitoring of these courts as a longer term goal.
- **7.3.13. Training and professional education more widely.** In order to combat honour-based violence, wider training of relevant professionals is essential. Such training needs to:
 - Take place at all levels of government and the education, health, criminal justice judicial systems
 - Be culturally sensitive and to be conducted with care and sensitivity
 - Be secular in approach
 - Include contextual understandings that honour-based violence is usually a form of gender-based violence and is deeply damaging to women and girls
 - Avoid blaming women and children for honour crime or condoning their ‘punishment’ on ground of honour
 - Lead to better understandings of HBV within the judicial system, the police and the wider society.
- **7.3.14. Women’s support services, shelters and NGOs.** Victims and survivors of HBV and their families need support and services and to know that the government takes their needs seriously. As well as general welfare and health facilities, this will include facilitating women’s support services, shelters and NGOs so that such services are reliably available for

victims. This would need to include providing better security and support for shelters. (See also 11.5.)

- **7.3.15. Programme of public awareness and education.** To achieve new understandings and to challenge traditional views of honour violence requires a sensitive programme of public awareness and education. Such a programme could be rolled out across communities, towns and rural areas. It would need to:

- Be culturally sensitive at all levels
- Be based on a community sensitization model in which the local population is involved. (Precedents exist for this model around the world)
- Include men in all stages
- Be conducted with care, knowledge and sensitivity
- Be aware of safety issues in some situations

Such an awareness-raising programme would be expected to take place in villages and to use popular culture in the form of songs and drama (learning from similar programmes developed in other countries).

- **7.3.16. Reforming the education system.** Reforming the education curriculum is essential. Such reform should start from the schooling of children onwards and contribute to a co-ordinated effort taking on issues of HBV and gender-based violence. Such reforms would be expected to include the development of gender equality education, sex education and citizenship education, but in a culturally and socially sensitive context. Again, precedents exist in some other countries on which to draw.

- **7.3.17. Multi-stranded strategies.** More widely, the government should encourage multi-agency strategies on HBV and an improved system of cooperation and forum- building between women's community projects and the government, the police, and other agencies to enable more effective joint working.

- **7.3.18. Faith leaders.** While this Action Plan is designed as a multi-faceted strategy at government and agency level, it is essential that religious, faith and cultural leaders are also involved in building an integrated response. Their response should be coordinated by the

Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs, which needs to provide training to clerics and the religious community in consultation with experts and women's rights groups. The idea of such training would be to:

- Address the misinterpretation and misuse of Islam/Qur'an in relation to HBV
- Raise public awareness about gender equality and social justice inside the religious community
- Enable the gradual erosion over time of harmful religious views and behaviour, which damage and disadvantage women

7.4. The Action Plan: The Kurdistan National Assembly

- **7.4.1. Improving the legal context.** New legislation will be needed as modernization proceeds in Iraqi Kurdistan region to enable gender equality and to address more fully gender-based violence, honour-based violence and female genital mutilation, as also noted above. The project laws of VAW and FGM need to be brought to discussion and ratified as a matter of urgency. Also, controversial Articles in the Iraqi Penal Status Law and the IPC need to be amended, including Article 409 related to “adultery” (*zina*) Article 41 related to ‘disciplining’ (*ta'dib*) wife or children, and Article 393 in relation to rape.

- **7.4.2. Regulation of mobile phones / cyber-abuse.** A particular issue of concern, highlighted by this research, is the widespread abuse and violence conducted using mobile phones and cyber-space and aiming to damage the reputation and, therefore, honour of women. Women are also being targeted by anonymous actors, who use images of women, real or fabricated, to undermine individual reputation and publically question the victim's honour. This new problem will need to be addressed in terms of legislation and policy control.

- **7.4.3. Regulation of arms.** There is a need for the Kurdistan National Assembly to ratify Law number 16 in relation to arms' regulation in Iraqi Kurdistan, which was introduced and discussed in the parliament in October 1993. This law need to be reviewed and ratified.

- **7.4.4. Regulation of the courts.** As noted above, the prosecution of honour-based violence needs to be regulated and monitored for effectiveness. The Kurdistan National Assembly (KNA) will need to put in place mechanisms to achieve these outcomes.
- **7.4.5. Communication mechanisms with courts.** All new and amended laws and articles of laws ratified by the KNA should reach the courts. In addition to their publication in the Waqa'y'i Kurdistan journal, there is a need for the KNA to communicate them to professionals and the public alike, throughout the Kurdistan Region.

7.5. The Action Plan: Women's support projects, NGOs and human rights groups

- **7.5.1. Resourced services.** The women's NGOs and human rights organizations in Iraqi Kurdistan provide an essential and humane service supporting victims, but are critically overstretched and under-resourced. This sector needs to be strengthened with additional resourcing to enable it to respond more adequately. Such resourcing would lead to more embedded sustainable provision and to increased services.
- **7.5.2. Specialist training, and the further development of expertise and professionalization.** Specialist training, expertise and professionalization of these services is required and would be facilitated by increased resourcing and support.
- **7.5.3. Solidarity and support mechanism.** Women's organizations and activists' work will be more effective if liaison mechanisms and support programs are available and put into practice.
- **7.5.4. Awareness-raising programmes.** Women's and human rights projects will be able to assist in putting in place awareness-raising programmes and new programmes of support put in place as a result of the action plan. These would need to:
 - Be proactive in involving and supporting victims and families, rather than adopting a more passive role.
 - Reach out, in particular, to marginalized, isolated and rural women and families.

- Target both women and men victims and also male perpetrators in terms of services and projects to address HBV.

7.6. The Action Plan: The media and social attitudes

- **7.6.1. The media in awareness-raising.** The research found evidence that the media play a crucial role in raising public awareness about HBV and in changing people's attitude.

Also, media outlets may play a role in perpetrating traditional attitudes about women and family honour. This Action Plan recommends that the media take a more careful and consistent role in raising public awareness more actively about HBV and its consequences for Kurdish society.

- **7.6.2. Media ethics.** Media outlets should observe international media ethics and avoid stigmatizing women and playing around 'honour'/'dishonour' equation.

- **7.6.3. Gender strategy:** There is a need for setting up a gender strategy inside media groups, integrating more women into media circles, as well as a special need for trained and specialist reporters on gender violence issues and HBV, in terms of reporting atrocities, following cases, attending court and so on.

- **7.6.4. Avoiding sensational reporting.** In general, media reporting needs to avoid sensational or patriarchal approaches, and rather to promote gender equality and social justice in cases of honour based violence.

- **7.6.5. A progressive role.** There is a progressive role that can be played by the media in Iraqi Kurdistan Region in terms of facilitating changing attitudes and social development. This requires a broad understanding of gender and honour-based violence, dialogue and a non-prejudicial approach to related government institutions and NGO's dealing with HBV, as well as careful analysis and rational debate.

Recommendations for Action in the UK

1. General recommendations and the gaps

The overall recommendations identified in the UK section of this research highlight:

- **The continued need for pro-active policies on HBV** in the UK (including ones that require the arrest of perpetrators of violence regardless of the wishes of victims), improved investigations and risk assessment, and the spreading of existing good practice more consistently through the criminal justice system.
- **The provision and resourcing of specialist support agencies**, especially those based within relevant communities, including safe havens (refuges), outreach projects and the referral of victims to these services.
- **The need for a holistic coordinated approach** which recognizes the complexity of the issue and the need for a broad social, community and justice response.

In summary, to achieve these outcomes, the following issues need to be addressed:

- The lack of focussed services, of safe shelter/refuge for victims, and of resourcing for HBV support provision and services for black and minority ethnic (BME) women more generally.
- The lack of awareness about the issue among both agencies and the public.
- The lack of knowledge about HBV across many of the lower ranks of the police force.
- The gap between policy and practice in the criminal justice system as a whole, despite recent leaps forward, within specialist units in the police, the Government, FCO and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO).
- The lack of efficient information systems and failures to record sufficient data accurately and in the right places.

- The need for better working relationships between the police and specialist violence against women services in Kurdish and other BME communities.
- The need to improve police officer training to counteract postcode lottery effects.
- In relation to these issues, for example, in London, it is clear that, despite both a major shift in policy since the murder of Heshu Yones and the sterling work done by the HBV working group, senior police commanders, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and ACPO, the police response to HBV remains variable.

2. Wider issues that need to be addressed

To tackle these areas of concern, it will first be necessary to address:

- **Attitudes** of the police and other criminal justice system professionals about HBV in BME communities. All professionals bring their own values and beliefs to their work. However, in working with other agencies, these beliefs may be challenged and, thus, undergo modification.
- **Continuing inconsistencies** in the police response to HBV. NGOs are concerned that although the MPS and ACPO have taken important strides in improving responses to HBV, this is not the case nationwide and, thus, many developments and improvements have been limited to the London area.
- **The need for better exchange and sharing of information.** This is important in terms of both the management of HBV cases within the police force, and in relation to multi-agency responses. Although developing systems and processes for sharing information requires time and effort, without such systems, co-ordinated responses are difficult to sustain.
- **The need for better inter-professional training.** Inter-agency training provision on HBV is sparse and generally uncoordinated, despite recent national and local efforts e.g. local road-shows around the country on HBV. Multi-agency training offers opportunities to promote cross-disciplinary dialogue and, thus, to develop trust and cooperation between a variety of actors working to combat HBV and other forms of VAW.

3. No need for any new legislation, but rather for an integrated approach

- Our findings were that there is no need for further legislation in the UK. The country now has a satisfactory range of legal remedies to address HBV.
- The critical issue remains the challenge of drawing together diverse legal and social approaches in order to better flag, detect and prosecute HBV and to support victims. This means looking beyond criminal justice solutions in order to more fully engage with wider social justice and welfare approaches, in a coordinated approach. There is an urgent need for legal and criminal justice efforts to move beyond policy-making (although this is an essential beginning), and to look towards developing integrated approaches.
- Implementing such changes would require that all those working in public support systems understand the larger complex picture. Criminal justice, health, education, and social-care agencies must operate together, both in terms of supporting victims and attempting to prevent future crimes.
- More resources need to be directed towards supporting preventative measures and securing the financial status of specialist services, many of which are currently under threat in the UK as a result of a lack of funding.

4. Specific recommendations for the police and the criminal justice services

The findings of this study demonstrate that the UK already has strong legislation, strategies and policies for tackling honour killings and HBV, but the key obstacles centre on the lack of effective implementation and enforcement. The principal recommendations for the police and criminal justice system include:

- **Implementing the ACPO Strategy, CPS initiatives and other good practice.** Overall, the first priority is to implement, improve, embed and monitor the Strategy, training, risk assessments and good practice guidelines.
- **Improved police training for front-line officers dealing with HBV**, across the country, which focuses both on how to investigate such cases and also on improving officers' understanding of honour crime.

- **Better recording of HBV and information collection**, including via information systems using new technologies. The information currently flagged by the CPS and the police, despite improvements, is often insufficient to represent the complex nature of HBV and police responses it.
- **A more reliable and consistent classification of HBV** by all agencies which would improve the efficiency of current police responses.
- **Further improved risk assessment** through the ACPO policy and the DASH model.
- **The provision of improved and culturally sensitive witness protection programmes**, in cases of honour killings and HBV.
- **Better systems for establishing dialogue** between senior police officers, junior officers on the front-line of policing, the voluntary sector and the CPS need to be developed.

In summary, translating new policies into practice is problematic and takes time. All the recent policies, guidelines and strategies across agencies need further development and implementation throughout the various police and other relevant services across the country.

5. Recommendations for support provision and coordinated approaches

- **Safe refuge, outreach and support projects for women and girls subject to HBV.** The provision of support services is of key importance; the safety of victims and potential victims must be the first priority.
- **Joint approaches.** The police and women's agencies alone cannot address HBV. There needs to be round-the-clock contact between police, specialist NGOs, other relevant agencies and multi-agency networks and partnerships working on individual cases.
- **Networks.** Continued stress should be placed on building networks, both nationally and internationally, with a view to promoting exchange of information on efforts to prevent and eradicate honour killings and other forms of HBV.

- **Consistency.** All public responses should be consistent within this multi-systems approach: all actors must recognize that HBV is a crime requiring robust legal action and other kinds of intervention and support provision for victims.

6. Recommendations for information provision, education and awareness-raising activities

- **Information for possible victims, translation and availability.** It is vital to provide girls and women (particularly those who are perceived as facing a high risk of violence in their homes) with information on their rights and the help and remedies that are available to them. This information needs to be accessible (i.e. available in a variety of languages) and available to all girls and women. It is also important that information is coordinated, perhaps in a standard information package, which would include both advice and information on the work and functioning of public authorities, the police, women's NGOs, religious institutions etc.
- **Personal safety strategies.** These can be very helpful for individuals. However there needs to be a recognition that placing an emphasis on personal safety strategies, in isolation from discussion of police protection or intervention (as is sometimes still the case), can place the burden of responsibility for the prevention of HBV solely with victims.
- **Awareness-raising and Education.** Such initiatives are clearly needed within specific communities in the UK. Awareness-raising activities need to encompass human rights education, input on understandings of HBV, and information on the functioning of the criminal justice system, the availability of victim support services, legal assistance, refuge places and other forms of help. All awareness-raising campaigns would be expected to stress the fact that VAW occurs in all countries and that it is not specific to any religion, class, caste, or other category of person.
- **Wider public education campaigns.** These would be expected also to extend more generally to the general public, and to include the above information in appropriate form, plus information about what honour killings are, common motives for these crimes, illustrations of how to identify girls and women who may be at risk, and discussions of the concept of culture and the role it plays in HBV.

- **Input in schools.** The role of schools in the campaign to prevent and eradicate honour crimes and killings needs to be emphasized. Schools are important channels for distributing information and educating all young people about gender equality, HBV and related issues.
- **Professional training/education on the issue.** Education and information campaigns must also be directed towards public officials and professionals who are likely to be confronted with cases of HBV, including teachers, school counsellors and nurses, people working for the social services, members of the judiciary, and so on.
- **Education programmes for parents and family members in relevant communities.** Such programmes are essential to raise awareness and discuss relevant issues. These may take the form of discussion groups where parents/family members can meet to talk about issues relating to parenthood, adolescence and so forth, and to discuss gender equality, changing honour codes and societal values. These kinds of education and awareness-raising projects for families and communities can be conceptualised as a type of dialogue.
- Thus, the one-way form of communication that usually characterizes such programmes would be replaced by a focus on interactive discussion. Specialist community radio and media can be of assistance in this endeavour.
- **The role of religion.** Religious leaders in all religions have a responsibility to speak out against HBV and do what they can to prevent it
- **Training for journalists.** Human rights and cultural awareness training for journalists would help to ensure that they are aware of the complexities and contexts of the human rights issues they are reporting.
- **Best practice in working methods** (including, for example, in relation to working with families and risk assessment tools) must continue to be identified, improved and implemented consistently, and must therefore be part of all professional training.

Overall, a long-term perspective needs to be developed to further efforts to build and maintain infrastructures, good practice and support systems, including via educational programmes and training for the variety of professionals working on HBV issues.

Honour-based violence and policy and practice in Iraqi Kurdistan Region

1. Understanding honour in Iraqi Kurdistan

- It is important to understand what is meant by honour and why it is used to justify violence against women by some people in Iraqi Kurdistan Region. The collective entity, whether family, clan, local community or wider nation, provides the codes by which honour and dishonour are measured, and honour codes place a particularly heavy burden of responsibility upon women. Women are often expected to be chaste, virginal prior to marriage, obedient, subservient, docile and modest, and to comply with the demands and word of the male members of their family. The research found that highly restrictive boundaries are often created in relation to dress and attire codes, physical and social mobility, education, relationships with the opposite sex, and choice in love, marriage and divorce.
- Dishonour, '*a'r*', and shame, '*a'ib*', are caused by breaching such social and sexual boundaries. Maintaining and restoring honour requires removing the *a'r* through the act of cleansing or purifying "*ghasl*", the honour.

2. Effects of HBV on women and society

- The impacts of HBV on victims range from death, physical and mental assault, and disfigurement, to constant fear of violence from those closest to them and with whom they live side by side.
- For children, the practice and expectation of HBV provides damaging role models that are likely to be emulated and passed on through the generations.
- HBV creates a climate of fear and concealment, where the potential threat to reputation often precludes the possibility of transparent, honest social interaction and erodes possibilities for trust.

- The enforcement of honour codes places such a high tariff on deviation that it acts to generate practices of deception, which add fuel to the practice of constant observation and familial social policing, including gossip and rumour.
- With the confinement and silencing of women, fearful of the dangers of entering public spaces and interaction, their strength, vitality, skills and intelligence are diminished from the service of the society. Further, the overwhelming majority of those women subjected to honour-based violence in Iraqi Kurdistan Region, are between 14 and 30 years, who might otherwise have the greatest vitality to offer.
- In general, the climate created by HBV undermines the physical, emotional and psychological well-being of women, which can, in turn, lead to low self-esteem, emotional distress, and hopelessness. In extreme cases, these feelings can generate self-harming and suicidal thoughts and practices.
- The effect upon men is also destructive, generative of a one-dimensional being, where status and power are derived from an implied or actual aggression and dominance. This gives rise to a gendered authority which may act as a barrier to the potential for meaningful and full human interaction.
- It is not only women who suffer from violence, but also the wider society
- The research investigated individual cases of HBV which are detailed in the main Research Report. The Report presents statistics, information and discussions of the experiences of victims of different types of HBV. These included cases of burning and immolation. The report also presents detailed case studies of honour-based violence and recent honour killings in Iraqi Kurdistan.
- The research particularly highlighted the new problem of cyber-abuse in relation to honour and the degradation of women.

3. Action to combat HBV: What has been done in Iraqi Kurdistan?

- The study found that the Kurdistan Regional Government and the various agencies and organizations in Iraqi Kurdistan Region are to be congratulated on what they have achieved so far to combat honour-based violence in the Region, including helpful legal

amendments to reduce violence against women and crimes in the name of honour. However, implementation of these measures and the development of coordinated strategies remain at an early stage of development, despite the existence of a political will to address issues of honour-based violence in Iraqi Kurdistan, as part both of the democratization project locally, and of the wider global effort on the issue.

Women's organizations and NGOs

- In response to the pressing issue of VAW in general, and HBV in particular, the community, women's organizations and the KRG have worked towards combating this 'epidemic' in the society. Beginning strategies and actions have been developed by women's rights groups, official authorities, and the community, including media groups and faith leaders.
- Since 1991 and the formation of the KRG in general, and after the fall of Saddam Hussain 2003 in particular, the number of women's organizations has increased in Iraqi Kurdistan. This was facilitated by several factors, including the new space created by the departure of the Ba'athist regime, growing awareness of women's and human rights, the return of exiled women to Kurdistan after years of life in the Diaspora and the presence of international organizations in Kurdistan sponsoring women's projects.
- There are now more than fifty women's organizations, with many working on VAW, including, from the research evidence, on raising public awareness, training, campaigning, and providing outreach services and legal and psychological support to women, as well as protection. Although there is some criticism that there has not been enough cooperation and solidarity between the women's groups and that there is a need for greater professionalism, they have formed functioning networks, and have been involved in various awareness-raising activities, often trying to move beyond traditional or tribal loyalties.
- **Training programs.** Women's organizations in Kurdistan are well equipped to engage in training members of government institutions, such as the police, health and legal groups, faith leaders and social workers on women's rights protection as mechanisms to combat HBV. In this regard, the role of Diasporic Kurdish groups cannot be underestimated.

- **Protection, legal and outreach services.** These services provided by NGOs include receiving women in centres for counselling, accompanying them to court, to hospital and to the police, and providing lawyers, counselling, mediation and protection through the operation of safe shelters. Outreach services include, for example, the work of Zhnan, who in 2009 dealt with 499 cases. In addition to 14 hotlines provided by the government, women's organizations also provide 24-hour phone line services to distressed women and women at risk.
- **Shelters and relief services.** The most significant service that women's rights groups offer abused women, and those at risk of murder, has been refuge. In this regard, Zhnan Kurdistan Women's Union and Asuda for Combating VAW, both in Sulaimanya, have been running two women's shelters, without interruption since 1999-2000. There are also government provided shelters. However, safe provision remains inadequate to meet the need.

Government responses

- Until recent times, HBV was not integrated into government political agendas, not only in Iraqi Kurdistan Region, but around the world. However, in Iraqi Kurdistan Region, the continuing violence against women, and the response of local and international NGOs and campaigns, have increased awareness inside the KRG since 2000/2001. The establishment of the government Directorates to follow up and address VAW has been an extremely positive move by the Government.
- Police and legal bodies are very important government institutions for determining good governance, protecting citizens and securing justice through the rule of law. In relation to honour crimes, however, our research findings show that police and legal representatives in Kurdistan demonstrate reluctance and blame each other for the lack of rigorous investigation and poor judicial practice. The outcome is that there are a number of alleged murderers of women who walk free in Kurdistan.
- The government of Kurdistan is working within a transitional context, and informal law (solhi ashayri) also continues to have an important role. However, if the rule of formal law is to prevail, then there must be a clear commitment to making informal structures become subordinate to the nation's laws. In strengthening the rule of law, it is necessary

to recognize that the judiciary and police at times come under threat when pursuing honour crime. Nonetheless, the aim of the transition needs to be to reform all legal provisions that embody the subjugation of women, and to lead to the law being obeyed by all and at all levels of society, with implementation free from political and military intervention and in a coordinated way.

- The research identified an urgent need for:
 - A coordinated definition of VAW and HBV to be used across agencies and government.
 - Improved data collection on both VAW and HBV.

The Media

- In the last few years, media outlets in Iraqi Kurdistan have been generally involved in presenting news reports on violence against women inside Kurdish society and have integrated women's issues in general, and VAW in particular, into their coverage. 'Independent' and 'privately-owned' newspapers have been particularly active. However, the dominant media representation of HBV and honour killings has been limited to brief news reporting, without analysis and details of killings, self-immolation or other incidents.
- Media channels affiliated to political parties often demonstrate hesitancy in terms of referring to established bases of power, in particular with regard to government, party leadership and faith leaders. Independent and privately-owned media have been more critical of the political and religious authorities, but do not openly challenge the prevailing understanding of honour as embodied in women's bodies and sexuality.
- When a woman is killed, and her killing is confirmed to have been 'provoked' by 'infidelity' or 'wrong-doing' of women, media reports often debate the problematic of honour motivation and may seem to indirectly justify murder.
- The women's media have made attempts to cover the issues more fully, but are in need of support to develop professional reporting and analytical skills.

- Examples were discussed in the Research Report including analyses of individual cases and the media coverage to which they gave rise.

Faith Leaders

- Faith leaders have a leading position and are able to influence wide-ranging communities on issues of honour-based violence. Many have been helpfully involved in HBV cases and in awareness raising about the issue, but their intervention has been limited. Some key leaders have expressed a willingness to develop further helpful interventions, for example, in Friday prayers.
- However, traditional attitudes and conservative approaches were also demonstrated by some religious leaders in the study towards gender- and honour-based violence.
- It is worth noting that faith leaders often argue that the responsibility for the practice of HBV is to be found in Kurdish tribal structures as well as customs, and has little to do with Islam.
- In the context of the transitional status of contemporary Kurdistan, for both religious leaders and for traditional mediation structures, their supportive role can be useful and needs to be developed, but needs to be governed by formal secular law.

Honour-based violence and UK policy and practice

Large Kurdish communities from different groups within Iraqi Kurdistan have migrated to the UK in recent years.

1. Understanding 'honour' killings and HBV in Kurdish in the UK

- As discussed above, attempts to attribute so-called honour killings and HBV to particular geographical regions, cultural factors, faiths or societies have failed, because honour-based violence defies simplistic understandings. In the Kurdish community, honour is a multi-dimensional concept that encompasses familial respect and social prestige, which may be seen to be under threat after migration to a country like the UK which may be unwelcoming.
- An examination of agency practice and various government initiatives on HBV in the UK indicates that HBV has predominately been viewed, in the past at least, as a problem for immigrant or 'other' women and men, seen as outside the moral (and, by extension, liberal) culture of the country.
- HBV is often not conceptualized as related to male domination and control in families, but viewed as an expression of the different nature of minority cultures (i.e. Kurdish/South Asian and/or Hindu, Sikh and Muslim cultures). Causes have frequently been attributed (in the past, almost universally) to supposedly immutable and intrinsic traditions, customs and religious beliefs.
- Since 9/11, previous multi-cultural agendas in the UK have been rolled back in favour of a new community cohesion agenda. The latter tends to (re-)conceptualize HBV as an expression of the 'backward' cultural attitudes of minority communities.
- These rather unfortunate and stigmatizing attitudes have been combated by women's organizations, and by groups and organizations from within the minority communities concerned, including the Kurdish community.

- Instances of HBV often result from conflicting attitudes towards life and family codes. Several high profile killings, including the cases of Heshu Yones, Banaz Mahmood and Tulay Goren in the UK have raised the media profile of honour killings in UK Kurdish communities. Unfortunately, these media discourses have often ignored the efforts of Kurdish women's rights activists and organizations to address VAW from within their own communities.
- The Final Report includes detailed discussion of the honour killings noted above, and of other individual examples, together with analysis of the prosecution cases which resulted (including on-going court observations).

2. Action to combat HBV: What has been done in the UK?

- Until recently, the main government initiative on HBV in the UK focused specifically on forced marriage, rather than attempting to develop a better understanding of the range of forms of HBV and VAW and their interconnections.
- One of the key exceptions was the 1999 Project on Strategies to Address Crimes of Honour. At a grassroots and casework level, a number of community and women's groups, including the Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organization and Kurdish Women Action Against Honour Killings, have campaigned for many years to bring the true incidence of HBV to light.
- More recently, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) has taken the lead in efforts to prevent HBV, with further initiatives from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the government. The immediate catalyst for this work was the extensive media coverage, in 2002, of the murder of a sixteen year-old Turkish Kurdish young woman, Heshu Yones, who was killed by her father.
- In 2003, the MPS set up the Strategic Homicide Prevention Working Group on Honour Killings to cover the London area. A second national group was developed to deliver a training package for all police forces in the country. In 2007, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) began piloting a scheme to track HBV cases, trained 25 specialist

prosecutors to work in HBV 'hot-spots', and developed a system for flagging forced marriage and HBV cases.

- Building on the previous MPS guidance, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) has now developed, with extensive consultation, the ACPO Strategies on Honour-Based Violence and Forced Marriage, together with a two year implementation Action Plan. This Strategy contains comprehensive guidance and provision for training of police officers around the country, and is currently being rolled out.
- Police risk assessment is conducted through the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour-Based Violence (DASH) Risk Identification, Assessment and Management Model. This model means that, for the first time, all police services and a large number of partner agencies across the UK are, from 2009, using a common checklist for identifying and assessing risk.
- Thus, a holistic response, and good practice guidance and strategies, are being attempted. The trainings, guidelines and risk assessments which have been developed as part of the ACPO Honour-based Violence Strategy are very encouraging. The pioneering and dedicated officers concerned have begun to transform the response of the MPS, and now, through the Association of Chief Police Officers, the police response more widely. Some of these officers have spoken internationally about the new Strategy and the training and practice initiatives - which have been suggested to be world-leading - and have indicated their willingness to also work with their counterparts in Iraqi Kurdistan, should this be helpful.
- However, police protection is often conditional and discretionary and varies across the country and the nature and extent of the protection offered depends on individual police officers' perception of incidents.
- One of the longstanding criticisms of the police, levied by prosecutors, women's groups and victims of HBV alike, relates to police attitudes which may lead officers on the ground to dismiss this form of violence as part of the culture of black and minority ethnic communities, stereotyping both victims and abusers.

- Thus, the effectiveness of police responses to HBV is a postcode lottery. The forward-looking work at the strategic level has yet to be fully embedded and implemented, and only represents a start. HBV is not properly understood and is regarded as a remote, specialist subject by most police officers and by the majority of workers from helping agencies (including generalist refuge provision).
- However, the hope is that good practice is spreading with the roll-out of the new training and guidelines.
- The initiatives by the CPS have also contributed to establishing a new approach to policing HBV, combining a clear criminal justice policy with improved inter-agency services.
- Coordinated approaches and the development of multi-agency partnerships are now required to develop a holistic response, combining criminal justice approaches with social welfare and support services, public education and professional training for relevant workers.
- However, the main difficulty is the lack of enough support services for victims and their families, and the poor resourcing for specialist women's projects for black and minority ethnic women which have offered a dedicated service for many years, some of which are now under threat of funding loss.

Drawing the issues together and conclusions

1. Comparing issues across Iraqi Kurdistan and the UK

- In Kurdistan, awareness of honour-based violence is now emerging, and the commissioning and carrying out of this research study is part of a welcome trajectory towards improving responses. In this work, Iraqi Kurdistan is taking a lead across the wider global region of the Middle East.
- Nevertheless, HBV and so-called honour killings remain endemic in areas and localities in Kurdistan Region, as part of a wider spectrum of continued male control of family and community life and of violence against women.
- The genocides that the Kurdish people have experienced in recent years, together with the Iraq wars, internal conflicts and the militarization of the zone, have contributed to the continued practice of both honour- and gender-based violence.
- Thus, while there have been some helpful recent changes and developments, honour-based crime, and gender-based violence more generally, remain important and embedded problems. It is vital that the Kurdistan Regional Government, and agencies in the Region, continue to develop strong commitments to address honour-based violence in a committed way.
- Honour-based violence remains prevalent in Kurdish communities in different locations (as well as among other peoples in different countries across the world). The conclusions of the study were that honour-based violence manifested in broadly similar ways for Kurdish communities in both Kurdistan Region and the UK.
- However, there were some differences between the countries due to the impact of immigration in the UK, with communities sometimes holding on to old values in the face of a difficult new country.

- Kurdish immigrants often faced discrimination and racism in the UK which complicated both individual and community responses to HBV.
- Some differences were also noted during the research in terms of the impact of migration to the UK, where British-raised Kurdish young people might subscribe to different value systems in terms of sexual and family relationships, bringing them into conflict with their more traditional elders. New types of honour crimes might then result. Similar changes and conflicts can be seen in terms of the impacts of modernization in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Over-arching issues that emerged in the study

- In both Iraqi Kurdistan and the UK, there was a clear need for the respective governments of each to take further action, along with the police and the criminal justice systems. A firm message continues to be needed from both governments that HBV, and killings in the name of honour, will not be tolerated in the modern world of the 21st Century.
- However, the UK has progressed considerably in putting in place a criminal justice-focussed national strategy on HBV with risk assessments, guidance on identification, evidence-gathering and prosecution, and rolled-out training for police officer and others.
- Not surprisingly, given the recent history and formation of the Kurdistan Region, the progress in Iraqi Kurdistan has been slower. It may be that the KRG and agencies in the Region could benefit from the UK experience and from looking into these developments.
- These moves in the UK (within ACPO, for example) have been suggested to be world-leading within policing of HBV, at the present time. Some of the pioneering UK officers involved have expressed willingness to engage in joint work with their colleagues in Iraqi Kurdistan, should this be of help.

The UK

- Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go in the UK. Both HBV survivors and women's NGOs working with them continue to encounter inadequate responses and poor

practice which needs to be addressed, as well as potentially racist, judgmental and stigmatizing attitudes.

- In terms of support structures, and the provision of safety and protection for victims, the lack of focussed support services fails to complement the beginnings of improved practice in police investigation and in the prosecution of cases. The UK needs to further develop services, with adequate resources provided, to enable those experiencing HBV to be safe and protected. This includes improved witness protection services, women's support organizations and further safe refuges and outreach services. However, at the time of writing, these provisions appear to be being cut back.

- Our hope is that the UK recommendations in this study will stimulate the development of further good practice by ACPO, the Metropolitan Police Service, the wider police and criminal justice services across the country, and the government Foreign and Commonwealth Office, together with the women's support organizations and specialist provision. (For example, there may be scope for further action on honour-based violence under the current UK Government National Delivery Plan on Domestic Violence, see Home Office, 2005.)

Iraqi Kurdistan Region

- In Iraqi Kurdistan, there is an urgent need for a consolidation of the legal provisions, and for robust legal, policing and prosecution procedures to be put in place. Such dedicated service and policy development would demonstrate that the issue is taken seriously and that honour-based violence and killings are no longer acceptable in the way that they may have been in the past.

- Legal and government measures required from the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Kurdistan National Assembly need to be part of a coordinated and integrated response to be developed across agencies and services.

- Simultaneously, both resources and services for victims and their families in terms of protection (including safe refuge, witness protection, and wider safety and support measures) need further development and attention, building on the dedicated work of the women's NGOs in Kurdistan Region.

- There is a need for comprehensive work on cultural attitudes, public education and awareness-raising to enable development both in the cities, but also in the more remote rural areas where traditional attitudes endure. Public awareness-raising of this type, perhaps using drama and involving local people in the programs offered, needs to be complemented by training for all relevant professionals who might be dealing with the issue.
- *The Iraqi Kurdistan Action Plan* developed in this research now needs to be implemented with political will and commitment, both by the KRG and by relevant agencies, including the police and judiciary, religious and cultural leaders, and women's organizations. There will be a need for systematic monitoring to ensure such implementation happens.
- As with the UK Recommendations, our hope is that the Action Plan will lead to social development and change for women, men, communities and agencies in Iraqi Kurdistan.

In summary, for both Iraqi Kurdistan and the UK, the measures which are needed to be put in place in a coordinated, holistic way include both:

- *National initiatives* including legal changes and the development of further national strategies, criminal justice and policing policies, training for professionals, good practice guidelines and national resourcing for refuges and support projects.
- *Local initiatives* in terms of local training, improved prosecution of individual perpetrators and support projects for victims, together with comprehensive awareness-raising and public education in culturally sensitive ways.

3. A final word: internationally

In conclusion, States across the world have duties under international law to respect, protect and support women's rights, including by taking steps to tackle violence against women. Although abuses that occur in the private sphere, such as honour killings, are crimes under the domestic laws of most countries, many States around the world continue to fail to demonstrate due diligence in this regard. Even now in the 21st Century, they still fail to prevent or investigate all such crimes, and fail to hold perpetrators to account. Further, cultural practices that have the effect of rendering women 'invisible' create the conditions in which they suffer 'invisible violence', and may allow violators to act with impunity.

It is vital, then, that HBV and honour killings remain on the international human rights agenda. Addressing HBV meaningfully and effectively means having the political will and commitment to move on beyond basic awareness of the issue, to engaging in concrete action, providing resources and nurturing social change in a principled way. This is what this research was commissioned to do, and what the Action Plan and Recommendations seek to achieve.

Appendix: Methods used in the study

- Detailed contracts, management agreements, ethical agreements, risk assessments and security policies were developed initially to govern the research study. A research officer was employed by Kurdish Women's Rights Watch to assist with the fieldwork in Iraqi Kurdistan Region.
- One hundred and twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with government officials, police, women's NGOs and other agencies in Kurdistan, including 11 in-depth interviews with honour violence survivors/family members, and various further informal interviews with family members and victims, all with appropriate ethical and safety measures in place. The interviews in Iraqi Kurdistan numbered 131 overall.
- A total of 34 interviews were conducted with various professional agencies in the UK, including police, criminal justice and government officers, and front line women's organization working on HBV in London, together with four detailed case studies of cases of honour killing. Multiple interviews with family members and the professionals involved, and participant observation methods, were used to investigate these cases which were also followed through the courts.
- All the interviews were subjected to a thematic analysis, using both NVivo computer analysis software and manual analysis. A media monitoring exercise was carried out in Kurdistan across the life of the project, and subjected to a textual analysis. The findings across the different sections of the study were compared and further developed into policy evidence, recommendations for both Iraqi Kurdistan Region and the UK and an Action Plan for Iraqi Kurdistan.