

Podcast: Male Voice – Transcription

Podcast duration: 54 minutes

Hosts: Monica and Kate

Guest: Dr Maz Idriss, Matt Mahmood-Ogston and Lucky Roy Singh.

Kate: Hey everyone,

Kate/ Monica: I'm Kate and I'm Monica and this is the Perspectives podcast by Oxford Against Cutting, also known as OAC.

OAC is a rights-based charity working to end harmful practices suffered by girls and women.

Kate: In today's episode, we are going to be talking about honour-based abuse and forced marriage from men's perspective, and are joined by Matt Mahmood-Ogston, Dr Maz Idriss and Lucky Roy Singh.

Monica: Before we kick off, please note that this episode covers topics of a sensitive nature including references to suicide and domestic abuse. This podcast is age-appropriate for 16+

Monica: Well, thank you, Maz, Matt and Lucky for joining us today. I am actually going to hand over to you guys, and if you could introduce yourself and tell us a bit about your campaigning journey and your work.

Maz: Thanks, Monica, so my name is Dr Maz Idriss. I am a senior lecturer in Law and based at Manchester Law School. I have been researching honour-based violence and forced marriages for the past 15/16 years now. So, from my early stages of my academic research in this area, I have researched on violence against women and girls. My PhD and publications to date, I have been focusing on specifically on violence against women and girls, but over the last three years, once I completed my PhD, I started to focus on male victims of honour-based abuse and forced marriages. I have published a book recently called Men, Masculinities and Honour-based Abuse.

I have an article which I will be happy to share with you, specifically on male victims it's called 'Abuse by the Patriarchy: male victims of honour-based abuse and forced marriages'. I examine within that article twenty-nine case files specifically on male victims.

Monica: Thank you so much Maz, and we will definitely be happy to add that in as one of our resources under this podcast. Matt, can I hand over to you?

Matt: Hi everyone, my name is Matt Mahmood-Ogston, and I am from a charity called the Naz & Matt foundation.

Naz & Matt Foundation is a registered charity that was established in 2014. Sadly, as a result of my beautiful fiancé of 13 years, Doctor Naz Mahmood, Nazim Mahmood. Sadly, he took his own life in 2014, just two days after being confronted about being gay for the first time by his deeply religious family.

Struggling to make sense, trying to understand, and struggling to cope with what happened to the man that I love and the man that I wanted to spend the rest of my life with. You know, I was about to follow him on his journey and leave this earth, and at the moment when I was about to do that, I

heard his voice asking me to stay and do something that will try and stop what happened to ourselves happening to anyone else.

So, we set up the Naz & Matt Foundation and initially, we were campaigning in the press to bring awareness to the issue of religious homophobia, particularly towards individuals from conservative backgrounds, and since then, our charities been doing school talks.

We worked with a few central government departments. We have got a children's book for primary schools. We have got a new book for parents coming out. Really, what we are trying to do with all of the work that we do, is to remove the barriers that prevent religious and cultural conservative parents from accepting the LGBTQI children that they give birth to. So, our mission is to never let religion or culture coming between the unconditional love of a parent and their child.

Monica: Thank you so much for openly discussing that and also keeping that part of Naz alive in all of us. Lucky, over to you.

Lucky: Hiya, my name's Lucky Roy Singh. I am the author of 'Take A Walk in My Big Indian Heels', and my campaigning journey stems from the 'Silver Spoon' campaign to forced marriages, honour-based abuse campaigns, FGM, child marriage campaigns and NHS England campaigns. Social worker and police development and understanding of forced marriage seminars. Domestic violence work with Women's Aid and Menkind.

I have also collaborated with fashion publication like Vera Wang, Boohoo and PLT to show gender equality. I have teamed up with various charities like Karma Nirvana, Naz and Matt Foundation, the Albert Kennedy Trust to raise awareness for queer people of colour and the problems LGBTQ+ people face.

Monica: Thank you very much, Lucky. Kate. I am going to hand over to you now.

Kate: Do you think that experiences of honour-based abuse and forced marriage are different because of gender dynamics and cultural backgrounds?

Lucky: Yeah, I do. I believe men and women face HBA/FM differently because men are more reluctant to talk about it. I must be honest, though, it is because a lot of women nowadays, unfortunately, throw around the term – "I want a man's man, I don't want anyone sappy or man up" when people are going for depression and dealing with mental health. Also, LGBTQ+ people often forgot about, an afterthought. Regardless of their gender, we only really matter when it comes to Pride and we not really given the recognition of our feelings in our emotions and our stories of what we have been through with HBA and FM. So, it really comes down to stuff like that.

I also think it also comes down to how women still are expected to have this kind of thought of where they have to cook clean, look after the family, get pregnant, raising the family, deal with in-laws and deal with all this while sometimes having to be on their period as well. So, it is kind of a perspective from all angles if you look at it. Men and women have the same amount of pressures to marry at certain ages. Yet, men will just cheat with other men, say that they are in the closet because it is becoming the general norm of not to accept who we are as queer people.

I do believe definitely there is not a real amount of difference because of gender dynamics and cultural backgrounds. I believe it is the perception of it all still going on at the moment.

Kate: That's just so interesting, particularly your take on the limitations of movements like LGBTQ in terms of being considered under the heading of Pride, and what have you with things not being

explored or taken into account outside of those festivals and that, kind of, celebration. So, Matt, can I ask you the same thing?

Matt: Yes, I mean, until quite recently, our charity, I would say most of the individuals who come to our charity for support in this area were actually male or identify as male, and that was until quite recently. I think that quite often in our experience is that it is not felt, or it is not known that there are safe places to go as someone who identifies as a male and is experiencing honour-based abuse or the risk of forced marriage, and quite often individuals who come to our charity, we have those conversations.

Many, if not all, of the people who come to us, are not aware that forced marriage is even against the law in the UK. I think that is one of the big challenges that we all know, everyone listening to this and also everyone here. So, we need to make it more clear and more, kind of, accessible to the understanding that actually forced marriage is against the law in the UK, and actually what steps are that you can actually go through to prevent your family from forcing you, or in most cases, coercing you and making you believe that there is no other way forward except to marry the person that they are forcing you to get married to. So, I really think there seem to be a lot more discussions like this in the kind of in quotes 'mainstream areas', where people are not looking for podcasts or looking for videos when they are not seeking the information, but the information needs to be present in their daily lives. It needs to be present in the media that they access on a daily basis, so not specialist media, but everyday media. We need to have these conversations so that individuals, you know, in examples of people who identify as males, who come to our charity is to make them aware that they do not have to marry that female that the parents are coercing and trying to force them to get married to.

It is this feeling of sometimes not even knowing that there are options not to have to go down that road. That is actually the blocker because if the individuals who come to charity if they knew there was another option, then we can start having those conversations, and they can start making some steps along that journey.

Knowing that there is a different path, but quite often, individuals, like I said, who come to us, they do not often understand that there is a different path available to them, whether the law is on their side.

Kate: Thank you, Matt, that is really helpful. Maz, can I ask the same question of you?

Maz: Yeah, absolutely. It is a really interesting question because I think there are similarities and differences between the experiences of both men and women, and this, ironically, is actually the subject matter of my article, which is going to be published.

So, in terms of the similarities, I think both men and women do experience honour-based abuse and forced marriages, as Lucky and Matt have alluded to. I think the types of experience is also very similar, so we are talking about things like domestic abuse, coercive control, financial control, physical violence, imprisonment, being drugged – you know, to be forced into marriage and to be shipped off onto a plane to Pakistan or Bangladesh, these are the case examples that I have actually come across as part of my case file analysis.

I used to be a trustee of the Elm Foundation based in Chesterfield, so the twenty-nine case files were extracted from that particular organisation.

Yeah, these are the similarities in relation to both women's and men's experiences and also perhaps what has not been researched in great detail – is the actual links between feminism and also male victims' experiences. So, we talk about radical feminism, focus on women's experiences, the focus on the female body and how men may like to dominate/ control women. But I found in my case studies that especially with those whose sexuality was discovered, at least two of those cases, one was a Christian, one was a Muslim case for help, and in those particular instances, there was express focus on the male body once the sexuality of the victim was identified.

So, within the case files themselves, there was discussion of “I'm going to beat the gay out of you” or “I'm going to put a bullet through your head because I've discovered your sexuality”, but that for me is a striking analogy between the links between female victimisation and male victimisation - just how men, just how women and the focus of the body is placed upon women, the same can also be placed on men.

So, yes, I do agree with Lucky that men do exercise more freedoms to sleep around and to have extramarital affairs, but there comes a time when the patriarchal force and figureheads when they cast an eye upon junior males. When they begin to discover that you know our son, is homosexual/ gay or identify as transgender or these different issues that come to the fore. That is when violence and abuse is enacted in the name of honour. So, I do think there are some similarities between men and women in that sphere. So, you know, sexual studies intersection or it does concern both men and women.

As Lucky mentioned, there are some striking differences, and the issues of our masculinity can come to the fore here as well because one of the reasons why men may experience abuse is because they are perceived to have not been masculine enough, they do not 'match' hegemonic masculinity ideals as portrayed in the media or by society in general or based on religion and cultural backgrounds. That can add additional barriers to opening up and disclosing ones sexuality and also seeking support because quite plainly, quite clearly, there is a lack of male support organisations available for men to access.

We at the Elm Foundation were only one of nine male refuges in the country compared to the three to four hundred female refuges available. We also had only three-bedroom space available for three single men. So, the Elm Foundation often found itself in the unfortunate position of having to decline intervention and support. Simply because there was a lack of bedroom space, and these are the differences between men and women's experiences. I think service provision intervention is more formalised for women than it is for men, and I think that is something that we need to address very quickly in the near future.

Kate: Thank you, Maz. The three responses there fit together beautifully in terms of, sort of, looking at the different aspects of campaigning and support and also theoretical perspective.

That sort of leads me on quite nicely at what you there Maz, to our next question. We wondered what you would think about the statement that *'The male voice often goes unheard when discussing domestic and honour-based abuse'*. Perhaps, Matt - what would you say about that particular statement?

Matt: I kind of tend to agree in general terms. I mean that you know I can only ever speak from personal experience or the experiences of those who use our charity services. But certainly, you know, we do a lot to raise the visibility of the male voice, but that is perhaps why we tend to get more males or individuals who identify as male can come to our charity for help and support. I would say, and I just wanted to kind of connect back to something that Maz just said actually about the

absence or lack of spaces for males in refuges. So, we have on several occasions, we have had to find an emergency home, refuge, and safety for males, and that is particularly difficult because we are having to contact different databases and different charities to see what there is in terms of availability. Very often, it is few and far between spaces available.

Recently we had to provide emergency accommodation from a man and his two children, and that was especially difficult to find accommodation that was suitable for him. So, I think in the wider perspective, it is, there is a lack of understanding and visibility of the impact on males and the male voice, and therefore that is why perhaps the reduced number of services available to them.

Kate: Can I ask you the same question, Lucky?

Lucky: I think it goes unheard, but then it does not as well at the same time; it is just not seen in the same way. For instance, when a male will say to somebody that they are dealing with domestic violence, forced marriage, or, you know, honour-based abuse. It is not really heard in the same way as when a female says it. It comes down again to gender dynamics; I believe because a man's perspective will be different and the way they have ever been approached with it, the way that they handle it. There's a lack of resources, again going back to the hostels, refuges, and support that is out there for that.

They do not even seem to understand once the persons being placed into a hostel or refuge, what their actual victim goes through. My personal experience of staying in a refuge was really hard. I had to turn to drink and depression tablets just to get by. It is a very lonely and daunting place from having the abuse that you have been through it and then being thrown into a refuge.

I also do not think that there is enough charity actually advocating at the moment. If you look at it nationally and giving recognition for people that are speaking out, because a man just feels like telling their stories is like a bit of paper, being put down on statistics.

Men react differently to situations of domestic violence and honour-based abuse. For example, if a man is seen a bruise on another man, they would like, "oh, you softie, you need to toughen up, or it was done when you're probably lifting something". There really would not be a conversation as to why has that man got a bruise on him? But if a woman were seen with a bruise on her, now the reaction would be immediately different, and again it goes back to gender dynamics.

Kate: Thank you, that is really insightful. Maz, did you want to say anything about this idea of the male voice going unheard?

Maz: Yes, absolutely. Again, I agree with both Matt and Lucky about what they have said. I think it is improving. I think that is one thing we can say is because of the campaigning and the work that Lucky and Matt to undertake. Myself included, the Men and Boys Coalition, the Harm Network up in Preston.

There is a lot of work. Even the Home Office are beginning to recognise the male voice now. I was recently in a focus group meeting with the Home Office and other academics and campaigners specifically looking at the domestic abuse bill and the male voice; so, it is improving, and it's a much better position in the sense that they are beginning to have this discussion. So that is one positive. So, in that sense, it is not going unheard.

We are beginning to mount a campaign to improve men's voices. However, in general, I do agree with this statement - *the male voice does often go unheard* for several reasons that I can identify.

Lucky is absolutely right to mention this idea of social construction and masculinity because men are supposed to be the breadwinners and this idea of social constructions through the media, films often portray men as being strong, assertive, powerful and any issue related to domestic abuse, honour-based abuse, forced marriages provides men with a sense of femininity. That is the social construction anyway; that somehow, if you are a victim, you are powerless, and then you are demonstrating feminine qualities.

Linked to that is a discussion about the wider domestic abuse area, predominantly the feminist movement and the group have managed to successfully campaign against violence against women and girls; there is that recognition and awareness. But that has a double-edged sword in relation to male victims because if men are experiencing domestic abuse, honour-based abuse of forced marriages – they think to themselves, well I cannot be a victim, I am not a woman.

So, the constant messages in the violence against women and girl's arena campaigns against this issue can be counterproductive in the sense that men might not necessarily identify as being victims themselves if the constant social construction of community messages are that only women can be victims. So, this kind of debate and the way in which the policies and the law has developed, as in one sense made male victims invisible.

So, this is what I mentioned in my article. You know, in the 70s feminist campaigns and groups highlighted women's victimisation. Quite rightly so. You know that produced a valuable and important body of work, but that was introduced to highlight and to correct an invisible group, i.e., women. At the same time, over the past few decades, men have been denied the same kind of support provision and access, so rectifying one invisible group has led to the consequence of creating another invisible group, i.e., men and this, unfortunately, is the same in all spheres of victimisation for men. We can talk about honour-based abuse, domestic abuse, forced marriages, male rape, modern-day slavery and human trafficking.

Matt mentioned support provision and providing emergency accommodation. That is absolutely right because Elm Foundation only had three-bed spaces. We had to refer cases to other agencies, and by and large, most charities will have to at some point to another, even used their own funds now the Elm Foundation was no different to other charities. Now one really important point I would like to emphasis is often the racism and discrimination that men can face also by state agencies. It is already bad enough when individuals who are British born tried to access mainstream agencies like the police. They can be even more difficult if individuals experience honour-based abuse, forced marriages or domestic abuse and have no recourse to public funds because those Bangladeshi and Pakistani men have come from abroad to marry British women/ wives, only to be abused by the wives themselves or their in-laws.

Now when those individuals with no recourse to public funds phone the police, specifically, in my case files, I discovered on one occasion that one individual called the police nine times and still did not get their response because the police simply do not believe that men can be victims. Then, the undignified treatment of that individual as further compounded by the police when they did arrive, only to have to question the individual – well, *“why are you phoning us? Is it because you want to obtain indefinite leave to remain?”*

The police forces in this country automatically then became the immigration police/border control, which is not their remit. I have come across state agencies and charities who have said to me that accessing funds for men with no recourse to public funds takes twice as hard and takes twice as long because state agencies and the Home Office just do not believe that men can be victims. So, I

absolutely agree that the male voice in those circumstances often goes unheard, and there is an element I believe of discrimination and racism.

Kate: Thank you so much, Maz. Can I ask, my next question is around the role of shame and the role that it can play? We know that there is a big emphasis on shame in terms of women, but we are also interested in the idea that shame is something that really impacts on men and their experiences. Perhaps, Matt – you can say something a little bit about that for us?

Matt: Yes, of course. Thank you. In our line of work and field of work, shame is probably, or rather most definitely, the most damaging word that ever is present in the vocabulary of the individuals we speak to. So much so that if we hear the word shame in somebody's story when they contact us, that is the one that switches on the alarm bells and very quickly and actually triggers us to act in a very different way.

Shame, for example, was used by Naz's parents. Soon after Naz passed away, I was told by one of his parents I was not allowed; I should not tell anyone that Naz was gay because it would bring shame on the family. That was emotional blackmail towards me to actually keep it a secret that they had a gay son because they did not want to let anyone know under any circumstance that they gave birth to a gay child.

Sadly, a couple of years later, one of Naz and I's best friends, he was from a different religious background, and he had come out to his parents, and they are actually fine about it, but his uncles then started a campaign against him within the family. Again, using the word shame to actually shame and dishonour, bringing shame on the family.

You know you do not want to bring shame to your mother, and this is such a damaging word. I mean, the English translation does not even do justice for how damaging this word is, because really, the way that we use it in the English language is not really at all significant as it is used in different languages and cultures and communities.

So, for us, shame is one of the most dangerous words because it can be the trigger point. It can be the catalyst; it can be the most damaging part of the narrative that a parent can throw towards their child because you know which child ever wants to bring in quotes 'shame' to their parents. When a parent is aware of the damage, they can do with this word and sometimes they are not even aware of how damaging this word is.

But where that word is used and used in such a way that it actually makes their child, who is just perhaps just trying to exist as an LGBTQ person in the family, that word can actually trigger such a devastating response emotionally, physically, and mentally and psychologically within that individual. If ever we hear that word, we have to take immediate action to actually protect that person because we do not know how damaging that word can actually be to that person. So, I would say it is an incredibly important word that everyone is aware of, and everyone is aware of the impact that can have on somebody on the receiving end of it.

Kate: Thank you, Matt. Lucky, I was interested to know what you would say about that word – shame and the role it can play, particularly in relation to men?

Lucky: I definitely agree 100% with what Matt said. Shame is a very derogatory word that is used in communities, and it is used mainly for both men and women nowadays. Unfortunately, because some backdated systematic, unbiased term that still used.

For me, I see shame as something really hurtful that does do children harm. It does to any person in any community harm because it triggers. It is a trigger word for a lot of us. That is why I have chosen to reclaim that word - shame. I might be shameful, but you're shameful for having thought about me in the first place. So, for me, I have had to reclaim that word shame, but I understand from a community how they use it to coerce, to control, to make an unmasculine man and understand that it is wrong to be who you were born to be.

When in fact, it is wrong, you are the shameful one for having that thought in the first place if a lot of us understand nowadays that the word shame should be reclaimed back or something.

The facts of the matter are that it is shameful for them to have that word in their vocabulary, it is shameful for them to understand that they have got the right to use that word and understand that it is wrong for you to even have that opinion because that is going to dictate somebody's life. No, it should not!

I also feel like women again - you are very loosely using the word shame and mostly will be the perpetrator to use it on a man. Men are having to be the breadwinners, bring home the bacon like my ex-husband when I was outed, he had to face the community, the world, and I was locked away because I was obviously not allowed out. But the point of the matter is that word shame has to be dealt with it anyway and in any form. So, from somebody else's point of view, it is not right to use that word, but it is used because it is unbiased. It is a backdated, but it should be reclaimed by victims, I believe.

Kate: What a wonderful idea to try to reclaim some of these words that are so heavy on people. Maz, do you have any thoughts around this shame and the effect that it has particularly on men?

Maz: I fully agree with what Matt and Lucky have said. I think what I would like to add this idea of honour having a greater value to the family's name, so we should perhaps construct and visualise the concept of honour as having some sort of social capital and the kind of value which is very important to the family's reputation.

Anything that is done positively or honourably is considered to elevate the family's social status and hence social capital because the idea is that the family are then unable to interact with wider community networks, establish perhaps business contacts and also perhaps to allow their own children, both men and women, to have greater chances of or better marital prospects with other connections in the community. That is why honour becomes so important for those families.

Conversely, shame is to be avoided at all cost because in terms of social capital, a person's behaviour, whether it is in the context of a female victim, or for today's current discussions - male victims, it can be seen to devalue the social capital of that particular family.

As part of the discussions about an individual's sexuality and what Lucky and Matt have also alluded to in their discussions so far. The idea of coming out as gay can be perceived to devalue the social capital of the family, and then there needs to be some sort of reaction or action on the part of the family to rectify that behaviour, but that could be undertaken in a number of ways. There is no one hard-fast rule. It could be forcing the individual homosexual male to marry a female on account of trying to disguise their sexuality. Another example could be physical beatings and taking them to the local imam or priest. They may be completely ash ostracised and kicked out of the house.

So yeah, I agree with Lucky there would need to reclaim that kind of narrative, and that notion, because I firmly believe that Matt and Lucky will also agree that you know to harm children and to harm people is more dishonourable.

Matt: Can I just add something to what Maz said and also what Lucky said, please? - regarding the idea of reclaiming the word shame. I think it is an incredibly important idea to actually spend more time and actually more awareness and more kind of visibility around reclaiming that word. Within the LGBT+ community, you have this called 'queer', which is historically was used as a derogatory and very offensive term thrown towards somebody who appeared different or their sexual orientation or their kind of gender identity, and that was seen as very damaging.

But now the word queer is used as a celebratory word, where individuals, myself including we use it as a proud label, as a proud identifier to actually identify who we are, reclaiming that words that word can no longer hurt us. You know, if somebody calls me queer, for example, you know all I can do is say thank you very much because I identify as queer myself, and it is a very different thing to the word shame. I understand that completely, but the more that we can actually do to actually soften the way that that word is received by the person on the receiving end. I think it is not going to make it easier, but it might soften that damage that is caused when somebody hears those words.

Kate: Thank you, Matt. Again, thank you all three. That has been such an insightful and careful, and interesting dissection of how the word shame both operates a terrible kind of barrier and does so much damage, but also might be deconstructed, taken apart somewhat with work to make it be less harmful.

If I can hand over to Monica now, who has the next final couple of questions.

Monica: Thank you so much, so yeah, I have actually just been, not because I do not feel like there is anything to add. Actually, it has just taken some time to reflect, and I just think some of the cases and topics that you have touched on is just so relevant and actually just goes to show that Matt, how you said we need to just be a bit more forefront with how we communicate about these issues.

Maz as well, like how you said there has been cases where racism has been involved. There is, unfortunately, a vicious cycle that does exist, and we just need to be very careful as individuals about the terminology and the pressure that we do put on men.

There are lots of narratives out there on social media where men are expected to play the dominant role. So yeah, definitely lots to reflect on and just upon that, I wanted to ask the question about what reforms are needed to support male victims of honour-based abuse and forced marriage. So, I will hand that question over first to Lucky, then to you, Matt and Maz.

Lucky: I think that there needs to be more charities dedicated to supporting men. Open the forefront of the conversations and really stop making the topic such a taboo subject in the media.

It is a topic that needs to be addressed and putting a taboo on; it is adding another layer of insecurity and pain and something that is a trigger for people. Taboo subjects need to be normalised for the conversations to happen. I believe more recognition for men speaking out needs to be happening more talks targeted with men. Making it easier for them to access help and have a foundation ready, and have a clear perspective on the helpline to pick up signs of HBA/ DV and FM.

I also thinking funding wise, more money needs to be put into men's health charities as well, like mental health charities and make it easy and accessible because it all links in together because the

people that are denying being their true authentic self is not just harming them, it is harming their families, harming the work that they are doing.

It is a trigger. I cannot comprehend, and I do not understand how it is still seen shameful to be queer because for me it is the most amazing thing that I have experienced now, being my true authentic self. So there does need to be more. More stuff needs to be happening, more recognition, more help and support. Just make sure that the conversation is not just seen as a taboo subject because it is adding another layer to it, I believe.

Monica: Thank you Lucky, Matt?

Matt: Thank you. I agree with absolutely everything that Lucky's just said. We do need more charities. The vast, not just small numbers of charities who actually work in this area, particularly those who provide with great authority or kind of knowledge, really around supporting LGBTQ+ people in this area of honour-based abuse. You know, there needs to be far more services as well available to particularly male victims of forced marriage and HBA.

We struggle sometimes to actually find relevant services where we can actually refer individuals for counselling and therapy where we know they are going to be understood.

Quite often, when individuals come to our charity, you know we are not the first charity that people come to. You know, quite often, there has been a lot of research done. Often, they have contacted some of the bigger charities or the more mainstream charities because they have a bigger footprint. They have more visibility, and individuals will contact those charities, and they will get some kind of response, and that is what is fantastic.

These bigger charities, some of them open 24/7, which is amazing, but what is lacking is actually this place where that person is going to be understood. When individuals do eventually find themselves to our charity, and we are very, very small charity. But when they do find themselves and find their way to a charity, you know sometimes all that person wants to do is just sit in silence with somebody that understands their story, without me even having to speak their story.

Certainly, from, you know, what has been told to us in the way that people respond, it is comforting for them to come to a charity where they are going to be understood. So there needs to be more services widely available, not just support services like ourselves, but the counselling, the long-term plans which are actually going to help people to long time more robust and more secure future for them. So that is something that really needs to happen.

Also, you know, more police services need to be trained on this, and I am not really criticising police services. What I am saying is that there are a number of amazing police services that have actually done a huge amount of work and effort. For example, Karma Nirvana is an incredible charity that does a lot of training around the UK to bring awareness and actually ensure that you know front-line services, front-line law enforcement services are actually aware of the subtle differences; for example between domestic abuse and honour-based abuse.

There are significant differences there, and it is really important for those police forces to actually know how to respond, but not just at force level but also at the local level. So, the individuals on the streets who actually go out and meet individuals for the first time. You know we have worked with the number of police forces in England and Scotland, particularly around the male experience.

We are a very small charity, and we can only do so much. Coming back to Lucky's point, that needs to be substantially more investment, and there needs to be substantially more services. There needs to

be substantially more counselling and therapy available to individuals at no or low cost, which is accessible, readily available, and widely available enough so that people have actually aware of it in the first place.

Monica: Thank you so much, Matt. Maz, I am going to change the question slightly, but just with a focus on educational institutes, what do you think they can do around educating when it comes to the male voice, domestic abuse, forced marriage? Is there anything that they could do?

Maz: In terms of education, things like that, I think at a societal level, and also in places like schools, colleges and in universities, I think we need to change the social constructions of who can be a victim. I think your organisation and other charities similar to yours can help support that. So, I am very grateful that OAC, a charitable organisation primarily designed and for women, is actually having a conversation about male victims of honour-based abuse and forced marriages.

So, I think you know changing the narrative, changing social constructions about who can be a victim will help to change ideas about who can be a victim and will help in the long term. In those individuals who want to come forward and disclose abuse; so that would be very important in terms of societal education.

In terms of children's education, I think these issues need to be discussed in schools and form part of the National Curriculum. This has been going ongoing debate for about 12/13 years now. There were honour-based violence, domestic abuse and forced marriage report by the Home Affairs Select Committee in 2008 discussing issues about domestic abuse, HBA and forced marriages and how it should form part of the national curriculum.

Unfortunately, it is now 2021 and still not compulsory and quite surprising really given that so much effort and discussion has taken place in the past, you would expect the Government to talk about you know what a healthy relationship looks like and what support will be available to victims given that honour-based abuse and forced marriages affect mainly 16–24-year-olds.

I agree with what Matt said about improved training for police and would go a bit further than there and say well all front-line professionals who work for the Government in some shape or form, that includes the police, hospitals, GP's, local housing authorities; all those types of institutions where people come into contact with members of the public.

They need to have improved awareness, training on honour-based violence, forced marriages and also victims because you know what use is that if you have got the individual male victim coming up to somebody. I do not know the local jobcentre in please help me. I am a victim of forced marriage; I am going to be shipped off to Pakistan or Bangladesh, and the security guard just standing there.

Sometimes these individuals will only have one chance. We often talk about the one chance rule in this line of work, so I think education and awareness needs to really be improved across all sectors, across all front-line professionals and state agencies. That needs to be recurring as well, because in view of the high labour turnover in some of these sectors.

There is a separate violence against women and girl's strategy; there is also a separate violence against women and young girl's transformation fund at the moment. Men are subsumed under the violence against women and girl's strategy, which for definitional purposes, is incorrect, and it does not seek to validate male experiences separately. So as part of my work on the focus group at the Home Office, I, along with others, called for a separate strategy for men and young boys.

According to the Domestic Violence Bill and the consultation document, only two pages were dedicated to men, and in that document pages – I think 46 to 48, they had only earmarked ½ a million pounds to fund victim services for men across all the sectors. That is male rape, trafficking, exploitation, domestic abuse, honour-based abuse and forced marriage, which clearly is not enough, and there needs to be more funding for men. Whether that is a commitment, the Government want to pursue will have to wait and see. There is a lot of work that needs to be done in order to validate male experiences.

Matt: Can I just add something to that? If that is okay?

Monica: Yeah, of course – go for it.

Matt: Thank you. So yeah, I agree with everything that Maz has just said. I think you know more funding definitely needs to be available for research. Regardless of gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation, and there are agencies or organisations, as Maz mentioned them earlier. The Harm Network, which is headed up by Doctor Roxanne Khan from University Central Lancashire and what is particularly good about the work that the Harm Network does it actually brings together many different charities and organisations.

Front-line professionals, law enforcement professionals, individuals who work in social care, people who work in central Government and organisations like the Harm Network, what they do is not only to do with the research but actually distribute across all their members.

They bring together all the different members to one place through various events to actually share knowledge with each other, and I think that is one thing that probably needs to be done far more. All of the individuals who have got an interest in actually ending HBA and forced marriage is to actually have more opportunities, easier opportunities to come together and share knowledge with each other.

We cannot tackle this each in our own silos. So actually, bringing people together and talking to each other more and having an easy accessible platform to do that, which needs to be funded, that will, I hope, actually bring better, more faster solutions to a lot more people.

Maz: Can I add one more point, please?

Monica: Go for it.

Maz: I forgot to mention, I think it is really important, and it is perhaps one difference between male victimisation and female victimisation is the collection of statistics. Charities, government agencies are all willing and able, and perhaps, as a result of the feminist movement, quite correctly have made a concerted effort and drive to collect statistics on female victimisation.

Unfortunately, we do not see that for male victims as far as I am aware as an academic; only the forced marriage unit deals with the collection of statistics for all of its individuals who have supported. Over the past three or four years, what you are looking at is roughly 17 to 20 % of the Forced Marriage Unit caseload relate specifically to male victims; that is quite a sizeable chunk.

20% of the cases with the Forced Marriage Unit is concerned with male victims, and yet we do not see that kind of positive drive across all other institutions or other government agencies. Now, it

is really important that we collect statistics because statistics become evidence, or it provides a case for more intervention support and funding.

Without those statistics, we cannot put a case forward. So, if we had more organisations like the Forced Marriage Unit, the police or the charitable organisations now willing to collect statistics about male victimisation and put that forward for information purposes, further scrutiny and interrogation. Then we would perhaps see better support and intervention for male victims because at the moment if there are no statistics for male victims, that only goes to reinforce the messages out there that men cannot be victims. We need to change that narrative, and one way to begin to do that is to improve our databases and statistical information on male victims.

Monica: Thank you. I just want to ask one more question, and I think you have just picked up on that about changing our narratives and our mindset as well. As individuals, what can we do to help support male victims?

Maz: Each and every individual on this podcast is doing what they can do to help end honour-based abuse and forced marriages. As an academic, I will do my very best to address both female and male victimisation through my work, so my research, my campaigning is led through my work, and I think what we cannot do is give up. I think we need to carry on fighting and do exactly what we are doing now.

So what Lucky is doing in terms of his campaigning and raising awareness. What Matt is doing with the Harm Network and the Naz & Matt Foundation is absolutely brilliant because, without this, there is no information. There is no connection, and there is no data about people's experiences and what they are going through.

I will continue to fight for all victims of honour-based violence and forced marriages irrespective of gender and sexuality. It is my duty as a human being, an academic, and I will say this quite openly as well as part of my religion as well because I consider myself to be a traditional observing Muslim male. My role is to fight injustice according to my religious beliefs, and I see this particular line of work as fighting an injustice which I do not like; so, I will continue to work on this area until my last breath.

Monica: Thank you so much Maz. Matt, what would you like to see from the wider community in terms of their approaches they take to the topic?

Matt: Well, I believe all of us can do more - you know, myself included, my charity included, Naz & Matt Foundation included. We can all do more than what we are doing right now, and that might be we do it personally ourselves, or we reach out to more people to actually amplify the work and amplify the messages we are already sharing. We need more people to step forward, and I know it is very difficult, and it is very triggering, but we need more people to step forward to share their story. Allow us to document their stories and, more importantly than documenting their but actually share their stories publicly.

You know, for example, we recently released our first documentary called 'My God I am Queer', which is a platform not only for people to become aware of what happened sadly to my darling Naz but understand the different journeys of different individuals from different countries of birth. Here you are born into very similar families but actually is to see some of the stories which you know in our case is tragic, but in other cases, it is very dangerous, but the way we finished the film is actually a very positive supportive narrative.

It is really important that we share our stories so that people can understand that they are not on their own, and there is a more positive way forward. I think it is really also important that for individuals who were perhaps listening to this and think, well, I am not part of the charity. I am not part of an organisation. What can I do? I think it is really important for you to make it known to people in your community and people outside the community that you are a safe space.

You are a safe person to go to if there is a problem or challenge within their family home, and they need someone. See quite often, individuals are not aware of a safe place for them to go when they are trapped in a family environment, so you know a member of the public who is not affiliated to any organisations who perhaps does a job that is not connected to anything we are talking about if those individuals start to make themselves known to individuals that may not be experiencing any challenges right now but making them known as a safe place. A safe person who can be contacted in the urgent need of support. I think that is a really important way of extending the reach of the support networks that already out there.

Monica: Thank you so much Matt, Lucky over to you?

Lucky: So, I think we basically need to support both men and women in equal parts and make sure that we ask point equally. Let us put the same amount of dedication for queer people, queer people of colour and men and women. When I say this, I mean the support and dedication needs to be seen to be equal as well, not just shown to be equal. Show appreciation and recognition for each individual for speaking out regardless of their gender, colour and age.

I am talking about the fact that as survivors were telling our stories, we are trying to help you get statistics. We are trying to help this from happening to somebody else, but we need you to acknowledge that we will have nightmares having to relive this story by telling it.

There should be a way for individuals to meet and understand each other's stories, to show solidarity. I am talking about, it is easy for me to tell my story and understand it, but as another survivor, they need to mingle with that person to understand their story, and that is helping bring it to the forefront—the actual abuse in each individual case and the similarities towards it to gain the statistics.

I also think charities need to enforce more recognition for voicing their pain. Make them an ambassador or trustee; they are doing the work for you. Acknowledge what they are doing for you and make them recognisable by the work that they are doing.

Monica: Thank you, Maz, Matt and Lucky, for all the outstanding work that you continue to do, whether it is using your voice, campaigning or through literature. From us, I can definitely say that your contributions are so valued, and it has been an absolute honour talk to you today. Kate, I do not know if there is anything you want to add?

Kate: Just to emphasis what you have said, Monica. It was just an honour to be able to talk with you, listen to your stories, hear about the amazing work that you do on three quite different fronts in some ways, but also the kind of overlap, what you achieve, the audiences that you reach and the sentiments behind what you do.

Thank you so much, and I am really glad that OAC's been able to facilitate this discussion, and hopefully, it is the first of many such interactions.

Maz: Thank you for having us.

Matt: Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak.

Lucky: Thank you so much.

Monica: Thanks for listening! All the resources discussed in this podcast will be listed in the description.

Kate: If you enjoyed this episode, please share it with others and post about it on social media. Keep an ear out for our other podcasts. Until then stay safe, join the conversation and help us protect women and girls.