WHAT IS DOWRY ABUSE/ VIOLENCE?

A dowry can include gifts such as money, goods, land or property that a bride or groom's family gives to the family of the other when they marry.

Dowry abuse or violence refers to any act of coercion, violence or harassment associated with the giving or receiving of a dowry at any time before, during or after marriage. This is an ancient custom that is unfortunately still practised in some families and communities.

While dowry abuse/violence can affect all genders, the practice arises more commonly regarding those from the bride's family to the groom's.

A dowry can include providing gifts, money, goods or property to either the bride or groom's family. The receiving or giving of a dowry is not, in itself, an act of abuse. The abuse comes when there is violence, coercion, harassment or exploitation of any kind involved.

FACT SHEET

Key Facts

- Dowry abuse is a harmful practice and form of 'honour'-based abuse (HBA)
- Dowry abuse can occur before, during or after marriage
- Dowry abuse/violence occurs when demands for dowry such as money, gifts, or property result in coercion, harassment, violence, or exploitation
- Dowry-related abuse commonly involves claims that a dowry was not paid (or not paid in full) and coercion or threats may be used to gain further money or gifts from an individual and their family
- This abuse may include shaming the bride and her family, sometimes with the involvement of the family and/or community
- While dowries are practiced in many cultures, abuse arises when these expectations lead to harm
- Dowries are noted in UK history and have been very common across the world for centuries. Some countries/cultures have moved away from this practice, while in others it is still deeply ingrained and seen as a cultural practice/societal norm

Why Does Dowry Abuse/Violence Happen?

- Dowry abuse often stems from deeply ingrained patriarchal beliefs, economic pressures, and societal norms that place financial expectations on marriage
- Families may view dowry as a means to secure a bride's future or elevate their social status
- However, dowry can be used as a form of exploitation and manipulation, leading to financial and emotional distress, coercion, or violence

Other Names for Dowry

Dowry: A 'traditional' payment or gift, usually given by the bride's family to the groom's, but can also be made from the groom's family to the bride's.

Mahr: A mandatory gift from the groom to the bride in Islamic marriages, meant to ensure her financial security. This is usually not harmful and something that is usually agreed only between husband and wife, but sometimes family are involved. This can only lead to harm if exploitation is involved or this payment is used to control/abuse an individual.

Bride-Price: A payment made by the groom's family to the bride's family, used in some African and Asian cultures.

While these terms refer to different cultural practices that might not be harmful or abusive, all can become abuse when financial or social coercion is involved.

Who is at Risk?

- Individuals (mostly women and girls) from cultures where dowry practices are common
- Those in forced marriages where dowry expectations exist
- Those who have experienced 'honour'-based abuse (HBA) or other harmful practices
- Individuals whose family/community holds supportive views towards HBA and/or dowry is linked to family reputation

Signs and Indicators

- Excessive financial demands placed on the bride, groom or their family
- Physical violence, harassment, threats, or coercion linked to dowry disputes
- Emotional manipulation
- Isolation/abandonment
- Humiliation/being ostracised by family or community
- Forced marriage
- Reports of dowry-related deaths in the family, such as bride burnings or suicides

FACT SHEET

Impacts of Dowry Abuse

- **Physical Harm:** Domestic violence, injury, or even murder. For example, bride burnings, 'honour' killings and acid attacks have been reported in relation to dowry abuse
- **Emotional and Psychological Distress:** Depression, anxiety, PTSD, trauma and other long and short-term psychological issues
- **Financial Exploitation:** Families can be left in severe debt due to excessive dowry payments
- **Social Stigma:** those affected may be ostracised or disowned for not meeting dowry expectations.
- If matters are not resolved, the individual's life could be at risk (bride burning, forced suicide, honour killings, etc.)

Other forms of abuse

Other forms of abuse that are related to dowry abuse/violence include:

- Written or verbal threats
- Marital rape
- Abuse from other perpetrators (such as in-laws)
- Shaming and damaging reputation
- Transnational marriage abandonment
- Passport taken away (if arrived from abroad)
- Abandonment / isolation
- Bride burning
- Acid attacks
- Attacks on family
- Forced suicide

Dowry Abuse and the Law

The Prohibition of Dowry Act (India, 1961) is an Indian law that was implemented to curb dowry-related issues and serves to highlight international recognition of dowry abuse as a crime and violation of human rights.

There are no specific UK laws addressing dowry abuse/violence, but useful legislation that covers the characteristics of dowry abuse/violence are:

- **Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007:** Protects individuals from forced marriage, which is often linked to dowry abuse
- **Domestic Abuse Act 2021:** Recognises coercive control and financial abuse, including dowry-related mistreatment
- **Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Act 2022:** Protects children from forced and child marriage, which can be linked to dowry abuse

Responding to Risk of Dowry Abuse or Violence

Where someone discloses fear of dowry abuse or violence, professionals in all agencies should:

- Take the disclosure seriously and act on it
- Refer to Adult or Children's Social Care and the Police promptly
- Always follow your organisational policy and other relevant local/national policies and procedures
- Follow the ONE CHANCE RULE at all times. We believe that there might be only one chance to speak to someone who may be at risk or under threat, and, therefore, just one chance to prevent harm/abuse from happening
- Hold an emergency strategy/professional meeting with relevant agencies, (this should be immediately or within no less than 24 hours)

UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES

- Let the family, community or social network know about the disclosure
- Speak to the person at risk in front of family members or within the family home
- Approach the family or community leaders or attempt mediation
- Use members of the community to interpret
- Accidentally give out information which might jeopardise the person's safety

Caution is required about how information is shared, recorded, and safeguarded within the organisation. Information should only be shared on a need-to-know basis.

We will end 'honour'-based abuse and harmful practices

Helpline: **0800 107 0726**
10am - 4pm, Monday to Friday

SaveraUK

To make a professional referral to Savera UK, complete our online form:
saverauk.co.uk/get-help/referrals-for-professionals/

If you are an individual who needs help or advice, complete this form:
saverauk.co.uk/savera-uk-individual-referral-form/

In an emergency, please call 999.