Conversation Starters - 'Honour'-Based Abuse

If you are a health professional and you suspect a patient might be at risk of 'honour'-based abuse (HBA), it is essential to handle the situation with sensitivity, discretion and without judgement. The priority should be to create a safe and trusting environment, where the patient feels comfortable and encouraged to talk. Make sure privacy is ensured and see the patient on their own.
To help initiate this kind of conversation, here are some gentle questions that open the door to a discussion.
In case translation is needed, never use family members, children or community members.

Building trust and encouragement

- How are things at home?
- We ask everyone about their relationships and safety at home, would it be okay if I asked you a few questions?
- Is there anyone within your family you can talk to openly about your marriage?
- Do you ever feel isolated or feel like you can't talk to anyone about what's going on?
- How are you coping emotionally with the pressures you are facing?
- Has anyone ever tried to control where you go, who you see, or what you wear?
- What support do you wish you had right now?
- You don't have to share anything you are not comfortable with, but I'm here to listen and support you.

Understanding pressure

- Has anyone ever made you feel unsafe or ashamed for choices you have made?
- Are there expectations from your family or community that feel difficult or overwhelming?
- Do you feel you have a say in your marriage?
- Are there times when you've felt afraid of how someone might react to your choices?
- Do you think your family or community is aware of anything you have done that they might see as dishonourable or unacceptable?
- Are you under any pressure at home? Can you explain it to me?

Signs

- What do you think might happen if your family or community felt you were going against their expectations?
- Are there things that your family or community strongly disapprove of?
- What would happen if someone believed you had brought shame or dishonour to your family?
- How are those situations usually handled when someone goes against family beliefs or values?

- Can you explain to me the most serious outcome that could happen in this situation?
- Have there been situations in your family where someone was pressured into marriage?
- How is divorce viewed in your family or community? Is it something that is accepted?
- Who tends to make the key decisions in your family or community?
- Has there ever been a meeting or discussion about your behaviour? Did any family members come over?
- Are there any immediate concerns about your safety that you would like to talk about?

Safeguarding

- Take the disclosure seriously and don't delay any actions. Think about the 'one chance rule' and how this might be your only opportunity to intervene and offer support.
- Reassure the client there are services and support agencies that can help.
- Follow any safeguarding policies in place at your organisation.
- Record information factually using the same terminology as the patient.
- Share information strictly on a 'need to know' basis and seek consent from the patient if 18 or over.
- Offer the patient a referral or signposting to a local DV service.
- Never share any details with family or community members.
- Consider a referral to Adult Social Care.
- Always complete safety planning and book a follow up appointment.