

# WHAT IS 'HONOUR'?



## Urdu, Bangla & Punjabi Web Café Series January-February 2024

#Workshops #JoinTheConversation #TabooIssues  
#HonourBasedAbuse #OACWebCafe

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Oxford Against Cutting (OAC) is an Oxford-based charity working to end harmful practices suffered by girls and women living in the Thames Valley. These include female genital mutilation (FGM), 'honour'-based abuse (HBA) and early and forced marriage (EFM) and female cosmetic genital surgery. Our mission is to end practices that harm girls and women by providing education, supporting survivors, raising awareness of support services and empowering young people to champion initiatives against harmful practices. People from affected communities and young people are at the forefront of our activities.

*Many thanks to Doris Field Charitable Trust for supporting these web cafés.*

## This report

The following report gives a short description of three web cafés run during January and February 2024, entitled **What is 'Honour'?** along with feedback and evaluation to support our development. These web cafés were the first of their kind for OAC, as they were run almost entirely in languages other than English: the first in Urdu, the second in Bangla and the third in Punjabi. They were designed to appeal to those from the communities with the greatest interest in 'honour' as a topic, and we drew on the language skills of our diverse team.

## Our web cafés

Each of the hour-long sessions was based broadly around the following key questions, which guided the facilitators in their prompts:

- What is 'honour'? What does 'honour' mean to you? What is your experience of 'honour'?
- Whose 'honour' matters the most?
- Who can cause the most damage to 'honour'?
- Is 'honour' more important than life? Safety?
- Where can we go for support if we, or someone we know, is experiencing abuse linked to 'honour'?



In preparation for the series, a core planning team met to discuss the structure of the sessions. A key aim for all of our webinars has always been to keep them relaxed and informal, particularly for this programme. Facilitation was, though, supported by a structured 'template' to ensure consistency and that participants have clarity around safeguarding and respect for privacy (i.e., no one will mention names, etc outside of the webinar) and confidentiality around what was discussed, so that nothing is attributable.

Once the content and timetable for the programme was developed, drawing on ideas from our team, a set of flyers were created for dissemination. The web cafés were advertised, and the Zoom link shared via flyers<sup>1</sup> using OAC's social media channels, i.e. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram. They were also shared through our regular newsletter and to long-standing web-café supporters including via our organisation's WhatsApp groups.

<sup>1</sup> See front cover and social media examples in this report.

## Outputs & participant feedback



Across the three sessions, there were 18 attendees (including OAC staff and facilitators) with the Punjabi session attracting the highest number (7) and Bangla the lowest (4). A breakdown of attendee numbers and details of facilitators, etc are provided in the Annex below. Three of those who attended the cafés were doing so in a professional capacity (e.g., they work for a service).

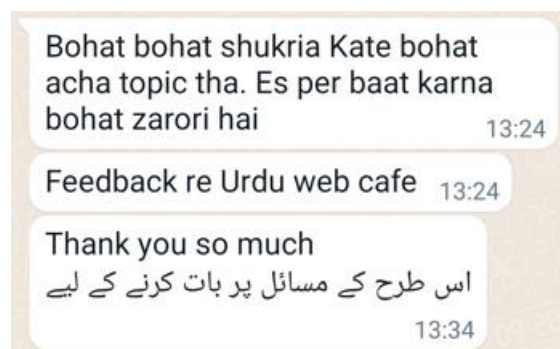
Overall, the numbers were low for this initial programme, possibly due to the novel approach we took, i.e., reaching out to communities in a new way through language. From

previous experience, we recognise it can take time to build an audience. However, we are confident that we can build on these sessions with what we have learned.

Unlike many of our web cafés, the sessions were not recorded, with the aim of encouraging free-flowing discussion. The 'chat' feature in Zoom was also made available throughout for questions and feedback. After the sessions we recorded short clips with the facilitators with their thoughts. These were posted to our social media accounts to publicise this work and share the ideas.

We also ran a Zoom debrief discussion with the facilitators after each session to understand what key themes had emerged for the different communities and to capture any learning points. The questions we asked them to reflect on were: whether the participants talked about what 'honour' is and/or what it means to them, whose 'honour' they felt matters the most, whether there was any questioning or thoughts that it should/could change, and were there any particular places to go for support? We also considered, in terms of process, what had worked well, and what we might do differently another time.

**Further feedback:** Thank you for giving a safe space to share ... enlightening conversations; extremely grateful for sharing experiences ... hopefully everyone to be themselves in my lifetime...



**Translation from Zoom chat above:** *Thank you very very much, Kate. Very good topic. This subject is very important.*

**Translation from Zoom chat above:** *It's difficult to talk about this.*

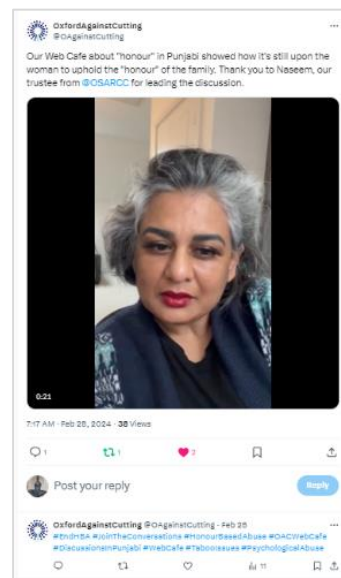
## Key discussion points

The **Urdu** session included attendees based in Pakistan, and at least one individual with expertise on the history and ideas around ‘honour’. This additional input was informative and appeared to improve the knowledge of others in the group, particularly about the widespread nature of ‘honour’-based abuse, e.g., the impact of education/lack of education within some geographical areas. The focus of this session was clearly on the impact on girls and women, with an emphasis that they ‘carry’ the community ‘honour’ and that the pressure is always on them. There was also discussion comparing the UK to Pakistan, e.g., ‘honour’ killings are more likely to be viewed as a crime in the UK, or that domestic abuse might be seen as a norm in Pakistan. There was, though, felt to be a small shift in attitudes because of high profile cases e.g., Qandeel Baloch who was murdered by her brother for perceived shame to her family.

The **Bangla** session was run more on an ‘in conversation’ format between a facilitator and OAC ambassador, due to low numbers of attendees. Having an open discussion between two Bengali women was felt to be really beneficial, particularly because this was with women of different ages and upbringing. This led them to focus on commonalities and shared recognition of language and how words and ideas can ‘stick’ within a culture. Discussions included ‘honour’ as being multi-layered, e.g., one which is social relating to status, wealth, property, caste and one relating to gender where women ‘uphold honour’ and are recipients of blame. It is about collective thought, predominantly by elders and men, and where women are involved they are expected to implement decisions, being under the elders’/mens’ direction and having little choice. Seeking advice and support is possible, but it should be trusted and confidential and a ‘gossiping mentality’ can act as a barrier.

Within the **Punjabi** session, there were a number of lived experience discussions, which added a rich context to discussions about ‘honour’ in the historical sense compared to the ‘here and now’. Topics included patriarchal and matriarchal influences, and how hard it is to break away from these roles given the way that women are expected to uphold the codes, with both sisters and aunts playing a key role. Messages can ripple down by making an example of family members, particularly siblings.

‘Honour’ was seen as coming from a cultural collective with meanings that could differ according to the networks they were part of. Intersectional factors – immigration status, education, where you/your parents were born, etc, could all make a difference in your experience. A willingness to maintain codes from “back home”, even though these are from the 1950s and 60s, was seen as a driver even where these are no longer so entrenched in home countries. This was seen as a ‘comfort’ factor of home, and also, in the face of some family members being westernised, a sense of pride in maintaining traditional standards and not having “succumbed to western ways”. Some with lived experience who had spoken up against their constraints felt they were upholding general ideas of equality, rather than trying to openly challenge ideas relating to ‘honour’.



## Learning points

The process of the web cafés was felt to have run smoothly, and the smaller numbers allowed for fairly intimate and informal discussions. Though the sessions are not necessarily about large numbers, it was felt that having a few more attendees in future would enhance the quality of discussion as well as taking the pressure off of one or two individuals. Some more strategic approaches to obtaining attendees were suggested, e.g.:

- Working with some targeted community groups and building an audience from within. This could include ‘piggy-backing’ on existing community group meetings as a guest speaker.
- Recognising that being online can be a new experience or is sometimes uncomfortable for people. One approach may be to encourage attendance with cameras off (which might particularly work for further Bangla sessions, as we do not currently have many contacts from this community).
- Increasing visibility of sessions like these and our speakers with initial in-person discussions which can then be taken online. This approach may make individuals feel safe to talk about this topic openly. Even attending an online session could feel like a threat, especially as this would be a new forum for many, plus our speakers may, as yet, be unknown to them.

It was also suggested that we could disseminate these ideas with an ‘in conversation’ podcast in the respective languages.

### **Going forward...**

The sessions added to our existing successful webinars and web cafés, which are important for us to stay connected with our audience and those who support them as well as enriching and enhancing our networks. We have learned a lot from running these sessions, and are grateful to those involved for their input and feedback on both the web café process and the topic of ‘honour’.

These have been thought-provoking web cafés, which support our work in leading important conversations and challenging taboos. Our learning will be used to develop this type of webinar discussion further, and we have plans to run sessions in **Mandinka**, **Arabic**, **Sorani (Kurdish)**, **Kurmanji (Northern Kurdish)** and **Nepali** languages. We will use these to build more connections with diverse and minoritised local communities.

**Our thanks to [Panah Shelter](#), Pakistan and Oxfordshire Asian Women’s Voice and as always, our skilled and talented facilitators and ambassadors.**

## Annex – Web café teams

<b>Date</b>	<b>Language</b>	<b>Total participants</b> (OAC/professionals, e.g., someone working for a service, in brackets)	<b>Lead facilitator</b>	<b>Monitor &amp; safeguarding</b>
26/01/24	Urdu	9 (4/2)	Sobia Afridi	Sobia Afridi, Vania Martins
2/02/24	Bangla	4 (3/0)	Monica Majumdar	Monica Majumdar, Vania Martins
9/02/24	Punjabi	7 (3/1)	Naseem Sarbatta-Walia/Sabeena (Oxfordshire Asian Women’s Voice)	Tanya Vyas*

\*Also providing technical support for the sessions

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