



MARAC and Harmful Practices – Coaction Hub Data Collection Guidance for MARACs

Why Collect Data on Harmful Practices at MARAC?

It is currently estimated that about 5% of MARAC cases involve forms of abuse which can be termed harmful practices¹. In a survey of 50 MARAC Co-ordinators in England and Wales, less than half kept any type of data on these cases. Where data is kept it is often on one or a small number of forms of harmful practices, such as 'honour' based abuse or forced marriage, as opposed to a wider range of these types of abuse. Reasons given by MARAC Co-ordinators for keeping this data included identifying gaps, research, monitoring, and improving practice. We know that harmful practices are often 'hidden' and we have limited data nationally on the prevalence of these forms of VAWG. An effective co-ordinated community response to violence against women and girls includes an understanding of all forms of VAWG, including those which are less discussed. Collecting data in your local area can start to give an understanding of who is being affected by harmful practices, where the gaps are and crucially whether victim/ survivors are receiving adequate and appropriate support. This can also be used to inform local VAWG strategies.

Amendments to the MARAC Operational and Information Sharing Protocol

Depending on who is collecting this data and what it is being used for, there might be a need to amend the MARAC protocol. For example, if the person collating or analysing this data does not usually have access to operating systems or MARAC minutes. The MARAC Steering Group should also explore any potential risks, for example making sure that any discussion of data will not make victim/ survivors identifiable. This may be of particular concern in areas where there are low numbers of cases or in cases of lesser identified forms of harmful practices.

What Is the Data For?

Before deciding what data to collect, it is imperative that there are discussions around why the data is being collected, and ensuring that it is relevant, proportionate and in line with data protection legislation. Reasons could be to better understand local responses to harmful practices, identify training needs, improve MARAC risk management and action planning, or to influence commissioning.

What Data to Collect?

In deciding what data to collect, consideration will need to be given to how much time is able to be allocated to the task. If there are limited time and resources, then you may wish to consider how to incorporate this into pre-existing data collection, for example for SafeLives data submissions. At the very least this can include the number of harmful practices cases heard at your MARAC, separated by type of abuse. A more thorough collection of data will yield information which can be used to greater inform local responses to harmful practices. In 2020 as part of a local Harmful Practices Operational Group (HPOG) templates were created for collecting harmful practices data from MARAC and agencies. The group spent some time deciding what data they wished to collect and analyse, which was then used by the co-ordinator of the group, employed by Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse (STADA), to create a template spreadsheet. This can be used as a template for other areas who

are interested in gaining a dataset on MARAC and harmful practices and forms part of this toolkit. We would recommend consulting local harmful practices specialists such as by and for agencies if creating a data template, as they will be able to advise on what they are seeing locally. If collecting extensive data over a long period of time is not possible in your area, we would advise considering a 'deep dive', collating data from previous MARACs over a period of a year, or longer if possible.

Ways to Collect the Data

As previously noted, with limited resources data collection may need to be incorporated into pre existing data collections. To collect the data over a greater period of time, either cases should be flagged at the time of MARAC and data collated after each meeting, or at the end of the quarter. Adding harmful practices data categories to pre existing software, or to spreadsheets used for existing data collection may be the most straightforward way to achieve this. Alternatively, previous MARACs can be explored over a set period of time. In the data collection for the HPOG previously mentioned, the co-ordinator collated 2 years of backdated data, as well as continuing to collect data going forward, resulting in a dataset of more than 4 years. Data was collected through a series of keyword searches of the minutes, such as 'forced marriage', 'FGM', 'Honour Based Abuse' etc. The co-ordinator quickly became aware that these forms of abuse were not always made explicit, for example a forced marriage might be referred to as the victim/ survivor being 'made to have an arranged marriage'. Therefore, the terms 'marriage', 'forced', 'arranged', and 'FM' were used to search for forced marriages. Using a wide variety of terms not only will be more likely to identify all cases, but also may indicate training gaps. Due to the sometimes oblique nature of the way harmful practices is discussed, we would advise the person carrying out data searches to have knowledge of or training in the dynamics of these forms of abuse. In some cases the harmful practices appeared to be unidentified in the minutes, which suggests the need for MARAC co-ordinators to also be trained to better understand these forms of abuse. This will both improve practice at the MARAC to ensure victim/survivors are better supported, but also means they will be able to flag these cases for data collection. An extensive list of keywords used can be found below.

Data Analysis

Many organisations will have their own methods of data analysis and some will have a data specialist who can advise on the best way to analyse the data collected. In the HPOG data collection outlined above, Power BI was used to analyse the data collected over the four years. This software was both accessible and made it easy to analyse different aspects of the data. It was found that Power BI was effective in analysing large data sets to spot trends, patterns and insights. Data was cleaned prior to this in an excel format which was necessary as it was received from a wide variety of sources, often using different data collection techniques, thus avoiding repetition and inaccuracy.

Use of the Data

Data collection is a first step to understanding the responses to high risk victim/ survivors of harmful practices in your area. It can highlight good practice, as well as challenges. Within the work of the HPOG it has been used in meetings and webinars to influence MARAC reps and co-ordinators as well as more widely to highlight the need to focus on harmful practices and improve responses. Collecting MARAC data should be one aspect of a wider strategy towards improving responses to harmful practices which should include training, commissioning expert by and for services, a harmful practices operational group and having harmful practices leads within different settings. Collecting data is a useful tool to support your area to identify the need for these services and where they should be targeted.

Keyword Searches

Keywords used to search the MARAC minutes included: forced, marriage, arranged, FM, FGM, female genital mutilation, cutting, honour, HBV, HBA, dowry, bride price, spiritual, faith, black magic, witchcraft, virginity, hymenoplasty, breast, ironing, acid, forced abortion, forced pregnancy.

Information on the HPOG data collection and findings can be found [here](#)

ⁱ Bates, Lis (2017). Honour-based Abuse in England and Wales: Who Does What to Whom? PhD thesis. University of Bristol.