

'Honour' killing: How many more?

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Murder in the name of family 'honour'

Crimes committed in the name of so-called 'honour' are crimes which occur within the framework of collective family structures, in which predominantly women are killed for actual or perceived immoral behaviour, which is deemed to have breached the honour codes of a household or community, causing shame.



The underlying purpose of "honour crimes" is to maintain men's power in families and communities by denying women basic—and internationally recognized—rights to make autonomous decisions about issues such as marriage, divorce, and whether and with whom to have sex, in order to control female sexuality and reproductive function. Crimes range from forced marriage, violence and mutilation to murder.

My father's gaze guards me all the time, sternly, angrily...We, the women, work in the fields all day long, bear the heat and the sun, sweat and toil and we tremble all day long, not knowing who may cast a look upon us, we stand accused and condemned to be declared a kari and murdered.

ATTIYA DAWOOD, 'A QUESTION OF HONOUR, BUT WHOSE HONOUR?'

These killings are justified in the name of 'honour'; murderers are believed to have cleansed the shame and may escape censure in their communities. In some countries, there is a lesser sentence for murders justified as a defence of family 'honour'; in others police and the judiciary ignore the laws. Murderers often attempt to justify

their actions through appeals to religious belief, culture and tradition and nationalism.

The culture of 'honour' views women as ancillary to men. Women's 'honour' is defined in terms of submissiveness and docility, in following a circumscribed life, where the only acceptable roles for a woman are as a father's virginal property, a man's dutiful wife and the self-sacrificing mother of sons.

Any deviation from the restrictive life-script of virginity, marriage according to the choice of the family and fidelity afterwards is believed to bring shame upon the entire family, a shame which can often only be removed by murder. The 'crime' does not need to have occurred in reality: community gossip and the loss of reputation is enough of a rationale for murder. Rape also is often counted as not as a crime against the victim but as something which she has invited, and is a cause for murder if it implies a loss of virginity or an act of infidelity.

The 'honour' culture is threatened by any act of female autonomy, but autonomy within the sphere of sexuality and relationships is the most significant, as the code originates in the commodification and control of women.

'Honour' crime worldwide

The United Nations special rapporteur Asma Jehangir recorded 5,000 murders committed in the name of honour in the year 2000. Many activists believe this figure

to be an understatement due to the conspiratorial nature of such crimes and that often girls births are not officially registered.

The Pakistan-based group Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid recorded over 1,000 murders in 2005 from reports in Pakistani pa-

pers. They estimate that less than 10% of actual crime is reported. 'Honour' killing is a widespread phenomenon but is endemic to South Asia and the Middle East amongst other regions, and also in places with immigrants from these areas.

This year ICAHK have recorded 'honour' killings in Afghanistan, Britain, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kuwait, Pakistan, Palestine, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates.

'Honour' crime in Britain

British police estimate that there are at least 12 murders in the name of honour in Britain every year; in 1995, IKWRO managed to help 14 women and men find safety from threats of murder by family members.

Many infamous cases of 'honour' killing have brought the phenomenon to public attention: the murder of Rukshana Naz in 1998, killed by her mother and brother for becoming pregnant after escaping a forced marriage; of Heshu Yunes, stabbed to death in 2003 for forming a relationship with a young man'; Sahjdar Bibi, murdered on her wedding day for refusing to follow the tradition of cousin marriage; Anita Gindha, heavily pregnant when she was strangled to death by her father in front of her 18 month old son; and this year Samaira Nazir, stabbed to death because she had chosen her own marriage partner and refused an arranged marriage, and Alisha Begum, just six years old, burnt to death in an arson attack inspired by 'honour.'

Forced marriage, which is often related to honour crime (and can itself be a form of honour crime) is a significant problem also, with the FCO's Forced Marriage Unit dealing with around 250 cases a year, and many many more coerced marriages go unreported.

Trigger factors

'Honour' killing, 'honour' related violence, and forced marriage can be triggered by a number of factors. Public sector workers should be aware that individuals may be at serious risk from familial violence through any display of autonomy, particularly in the area of sexuality, reproduction and lifestyle choices. Particularly hazardous factors are:

- Loss of virginity
- Causing gossip
- Refusing an arranged marriage
- Non-approved relationships
- Seeking divorce
- Ideological conflicts
- Homosexuality
- Child custody issues
- Running away from home
- Coming home late
- Dress or make-up deemed inappropriate
- Fleeing/reporting domestic violence/forced marriage
- Rape
- Pregnancy (if suspected that the child may have been conceived outside a relationship approved by the family)

Warning signs

Women, girls and men at risk of 'honour' crime or 'honour' murder often understate the risk they are under. It is essential to take any suggestions of 'honour' crime or forced marriage with the utmost seriousness. The following warning signs are indicative of violent and patriarchal attitudes which may lead to forced marriage, extreme violence and murder.

The hallmark of this form of crime is violent control. Any intensification in abusive and violent behaviour may well indicate that a planned attack is imminent.

- History of violence within the family
- Forced marriage; whether it is the complainant's marriage or other instances of coerced marriage within the family circle

- Restriction of movement; an intensification of restrictions or imprisonment may indicate that an attack is imminent
- Restrictions of freedom; including free choices of friends and clothing
- Threats of violence; insults and abuse
- Constant surveillance by members of the family and extended family
- Suicide attempts or suicidal behaviour
- Sudden travel to the 'home' country

Families set on enacting an 'honour' murder will try to exploit police and other services to carry out their crime. They may, for example, register a person who has fled the risk of murder as a missing person or accuse them of committing a crime in order to use the police as accomplices to track down a family member for the purposes of murder. Be aware also, that one in nine 'honour' murders in the UK are performed by professional hitmen and that bounty hunters may also be used.

Support and protection

The most important and dangerous time for victims is when they seek help from the services. Service providers may only have this one chance to provide effective support and potentially to save a life. IKWRO have a three point plan for public service providers to give advice in their production of protocols to assist potential victims of 'honour'

- BE AWARE
- BE READY
- BELIEVE

Be aware

- Provide training for all frontline staff in the nature and reality of 'honour' killing
- Raise awareness within the affected communities,

amongst men and women, and particularly young people

- Provide publicity materials translated into the appropriate languages

Be ready

Policies and protocols to deal with potential victims of 'honour' crime should be established in advance of any demands on the service: the danger and risk is too real to leave their development to the time when the need arises.

- Create plans to deal with every contingency in advance
- Build links with other agencies, including police and solicitors
- Plan for the protection of a wide range of service users: old, young, male, female, with or without children, employed, unemployed, and with all levels of linguistic ability
- Ensure the safety of all shelters and housing
- Establish a specific unit to deal with survivors
- Find ways to prosecute the perpetrators

Believe

- Treat all potential victims with the utmost sensitivity and seriousness
- Do not make assumptions based on perceptions of 'cultural difference'.
- Avoid racist attitudes
- Do not pass judgement
- NEVER send a potential victim back to their family
- DO NOT attempt mediation with the family

Inhibiting factors

Individuals at risk of 'honour'-related violence may not seek help immediately. It is important to recognise and where possible address the factors which may inhibit a person from seeking help.

- Lack of awareness of their human rights and their rights under British law

IKWRO Case studies: 1

S and M formed a relationship of which neither family approved. They were forced to flee from the threat of 'honour' killing by both sets of relatives. They appealed to the police for help, but were sent to the council to find accommodation. The council were unable to help without a crime reference and report. S and M returned to the police but were told to return to their local police station, which was in an area which was dangerous for them to go, and in another, distant town. They asked IKWRO for help and we were able to sort out their situation.

- Lack of awareness of the services available to help them
- Feelings of guilt and shame
- Protective feelings towards family
- Low self-esteem and lack of confidence
- Poor perception of the police and other agencies
- Fear of poor confidentiality
- Fear of losing children
- Fear of aggravating their situation
- Language problems
- Asylum status
- Risk of deportation
- No recourse to public funding
- Do not allow prejudices to colour your treatment of a victim; do not make comments about their culture. Restrict your intervention to the facts of the case
- Make sure your victim has a contact that they feel comfortable with; this may be a member of the same or opposite sex, or their own, or another community. Some potential victims are very concerned with confidentiality and may feel more relaxed with a person of a different background.

Guidelines for continued support

- Establish a means of continued contact immediately; you may only have one chance to make a difference
- Consider using a codeword to establish that you are talking to the right person
- Arrange meetings in neutral sites; be aware the victim may be followed
- Never meet the victim at a sensitive location such as a hostel or safe-house
- Always use official interpreters; never use family, friends, relations or community figures
- Meetings must take place in absolute privacy, no-one must be able to overhear the conversations, even friends of the victim
- Confidentiality is essential; particularly from the family, but also from other community members

Psychological effects

The experience and trauma of 'honour'-related violence inevitably leaves psychological after-effects which may need to be addressed. These include:

- Internalising her second-class status
- Living in constant fear
- Hyper-vigilance
- Post-traumatic shock disorder
- Loss of self-esteem
- Feelings of guilt and shame
- Self-blame
- Suicidal thoughts

- Depression
- Dependency
- Isolation
- Flashbacks
- Nightmares

Long-term support

Victims of 'honour' crime require a long-term investment of support and rehabilitation. A successful programme should include:

- Long-term counselling
- Training and skill building
- Confidence and self-esteem building
- Assessment and monitoring
- Establishing support networks for survivors
- Breaking isolation through activity
- Establishing a safe way for survivors to maintain contact with their families without compromising their safety

Domestic and 'honour' related violence

Superficially, domestic and honour-related violence have many factors in common; however the risks of honour-violence are much more exacting in terms of support and domestic violence resources may not be adequate to address the needs of potential victims of honour-motivated violence.

- Victims of HRV face many potential aggressors from the extended family, whereas a victim of DV more often has only one known aggressor
- HRV are often premeditated and planned with the collusion of the entire family who may

IKWRO Case studies: 2

L had an arranged marriage, but her husband was forced to flee Iraq due to his political affiliations. L faced rejection and violence from her family as her status as a married woman living alone was felt to bring shame upon them. She fled a potential 'honour' killing and came to the UK to be reunited with her husband. He became jealous and violent and beat her. As her asylum claim had been rejected, L was unable to press charges as she has no recourse to public funding. For the same reason, IKWRO have been so far unable to find safe accommodation for her.

instigate elaborate stratagems to enact the crime.

- Criminals committing murders in the name of 'honour' may receive a degree of community support (including from the family of the victim) which a domestic abuser would not enjoy
- Families wishing to carry out an 'honour' related crime may resort to using professional agencies of bounty hunters and hit-men which is unusual in domestic violence cases

Few statistics on HRV are available in Europe and this is due to its categorisation as a form of domestic violence which obscures the true

country where she faces ostracism or even murder as a divorced or separated woman. It can be impossible to find shelters that are able to accept women in need of them because of the restriction on public funds, and as asylum hearings can be very slow, often shelters are required for more than short term protection.

Southall Black Sisters estimate that there are at least 500 victims of violence who are affected by these regulations and they are amongst the organisations spearheading the campaign for the abolition of this discriminatory regulation.

- Dedicated 'honour' related crime team/officer within each police force and all London boroughs
- Long-term, secured resources for all organisations providing support to survivors and help to potential victims
- Abolition of 'no recourse to public funding' regulations for victims of violence

IKWRO Case studies: 3

H came to the UK to escape a forced marriage; she had been threatened with death for her refusal. The Home Office ruled that there was no evidence of women being forced into marriage by threat of honour killing in Iran. With no recourse to public funding, H was pushed into a life of destitution and homelessness and she stayed in a number of abusive relationships just to stay alive. After two years, H accepted repatriation to Iran. We have had no further contact with her.

extent of the phenomenon.

Asylum, immigration and public funds

Women with insecure immigration status are very difficult to help due to the regulation stipulating that failed asylum seekers have 'no recourse to public funding'. Their insecure status leaves them extremely vulnerable to abuse, where partners and others can treat them with extreme violence in relative impunity, in the knowledge that if they are reported to the police or other authorities, the woman faces deportation to a

Recommendations for national policy

- Police to perform full risk assessments
- National protection scheme, including the provision of new identities and histories
- National advisory group for 'honour' related crime
- Councils to provide secure accommodation to potential victims nationwide
- Mandatory training in 'honour' related crime for all service providers

IKWRO Case studies: 4

J's husband was forced to flee Iraq to the United Kingdom. Her father threatened her with death unless she divorced her husband and remarried a man of his choice. J refused and came to the UK with the help of family members. Subsequently, her husband became extremely violent. With no recourse to public funding we were unable to help her despite our best efforts, and she was compelled to return to a violent and abusive husband.

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