

# Gender-based violence of honour crimes

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# Introduction

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- The honour and shame ethics are the creation of the patriarchal system, which are strongly and forcefully regulated in the honour culture.
- It is estimated that 5,000 honour killings occur every year worldwide; the crime - perpetrated by families, often conducted abroad - means that the true number is likely to be greater.
- Although the practice is often associated with Islam and takes place predominantly in Pakistan or India, it has also happened in Sikh and Hindu families.
- It doesn't have anything to do with religion its about control.

## **Definition: 'Crimes of Honour'**

“One of a range of violent or abusive acts committed in the name of ‘honour’, including emotional, physical or sexual abuse and other controlling and coercive behaviours, such as forced marriage and female genital mutilation, which can end, in some extreme cases in suicide or murder.”

# What is a Forced Marriage?

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- A **forced marriage** is one that when families find and choose a spouse but the person does not consent and consent is carried out under duress, without the explicit consent of the individual pressure and coercion is applied.
- An **arranged marriage** is when families help find and choose a spouse and both parties are in agreement to marry each other and it is consensual. Both parties consent to the marriage taking place. The person is free to accept or decline.
- Sometimes there is ambiguity between the two forms of marriage. It is important to recognise the **distinction between the two forms**.
- A forced marriage can never be justified and is against the law. It carries a prison sentence **of up to 7 years in England and Wales**.

# Common reasons used to justify a forced marriage

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## *Honour (Izzat)*

- “Our family’s honour is at stake. You have to marry this person, otherwise it will bring shame upon us all”.
- In many cultures honour is used to control behaviour especially of young girls. Uphold status and reputation. Enforce someone’s will or way. Religion does not sanction, condone, or support such practices.
- Violence towards women isn’t cultural its criminal.

# Concept of cultural patriarchy

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- Patriarchy is a system of domination by which males control society both in public and private domains, but in this instance cultural patriarchy defines the position of young women in their respective group settings.
- Cultural patriarchy's main goal is from the mother and father to prepare a daughter of the household from her very young age to become a good wife.
- She has to prove her worth by extending her love and care to all members of the family she is married into.
- In contemporary British-Pakistani community it is believed that this practice no longer exists but even to this day it is hard to believe that it has completely vanished. In fact, it is still alive in different forms in ethnic communities.

# Culture of honour

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- According to a study by Dobash and Dobash (1980), in their work on Domestic violence - Females' are 'born' to be wives. To be a 'real' woman requires becoming a wife and to be a complete wife means being a good mother. Nothing less is really acceptable and little more is tolerated' (Dobash & Dobash 1980, p76.).
- What Dobash and Dobash (1980) have said about Western culture can be applied to the South Asian communities. This specific ideology is also embedded in their lives. Therefore, parents are stressed to make their children follow their rules.
- Some parents achieve this goal but some do not. The ones who prefer not to live in constant conflict with their children feel guilty and make their children feel guilty too.
- These are grounded in community beliefs reinforcing multiple complexities in controlling young British born women's lives to generate family's required reputation as an ethnic identity in the community.

# Practice of honour

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- At present, honour crimes are most often Muslim girls. However, the practice of honour crimes is present in several communities worldwide where the concept of shame dominates daily life. Actions that can bring dishonour differ within these communities.
- They can result from a girl's refusal of a marriage, choice of her own husband, or status as a victim of sexual assault. She might also be dressed in a way others consider inappropriate, pursue an education, drive, or have a profile on social media.
- Usually, before the actual murder takes place, the victim may encounter imprisonment within the home, battery, and torture. These actions can drive the victim to commit suicide, sometimes considered more "honourable" than the "dishonour" of one's family.

# Prominent case

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- 2003 - Shafilea Ahmed (Aged 17, dreamed of being a lawyer)– Was killed by both her parents by being suffocated in front of their 4 children after she rejected a marriage from Pakistan.
- In 2003, she had run away, they drugged her and put her on a flight to Pakistan, to be married to a man ten years older.
- Shafilea was regularly locked in her room, starved and beaten.
- The couple escaped justice for almost nine years, accusing officers of victimisation and stereotyping for suspecting them after her body was found months later in a river in Cumbria.
- Detectives made a breakthrough in 2010, when Shafilea's younger sister admitted having seen her mother and father kill their daughter.

# Prominent case (2)

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- Mr Justice Roderick Evans, at Chester Crown Court, told her parents: “Your concern about being shamed in your community is greater than the love of your child”.
- “She was being squeezed between two cultures, the culture and way of life that she saw around her and wanted to embrace, and the culture and way of life you wanted to impose upon her ... an expectation that she live in a sealed cultural environment separate from the culture of the country in which she lived was unrealistic, destructive and cruel.”
- They were jailed for life after being found guilty of honour killing. They were told they would serve at least 25 years. (Bunyan & Evans, 2012).

# Recent Landmark case

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- A mother who forced her daughter to marry an older relative has been jailed in May, 2018.
- It's the first successful prosecution for forced marriage, even though 1,196 cases of possible forced marriage were reported to the Government's Forced Marriage Unit last year alone.
- The mother was found guilty of two counts of forced marriage and one of perjury, because she lied about the incident in court.
- The case came to light when the victim's father found out about the forced marriage, and alerted social services.
- The daughter became pregnant by the man aged 13, when he was 29.
- She was forced to have an abortion, but her mother was reported to have viewed the sexual encounter as a 'marriage contract'.
- She was then duped by her mother into going to Pakistan to marry him in 2016, when she was 17.

# Recent Landmark case (2)

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- The girl made it clear that she didn't want to travel to Pakistan to marry the relative, but her mother assaulted her and threatened to burn her passport.
- In a victim impact statement, the girl described being proud of herself for speaking out and expressed hope that other girls who'd been forced into marriage would do the same.
- The mother was sentenced to four-and-a-half years in prison at Birmingham Crown Court.
- This is the first time a victim has given evidence in court against her mother.
- [For some parents] the 'honour' bar is above the 'love' bar. What they will do to defend their honour is much more than you could imagine.
- The reason things like this don't come to successful prosecutions is... who wants to see their family being prosecuted? It's a very difficult decision for young people to take. (Tyler et al. 2018)

# Justification of honour killings

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- Honour crimes are justified in the name of cultural tradition.
- These traditions have become blurred and corrupted, allowing for widespread abuse.
- Young girls are being killed by their mothers, fathers, brothers, husbands who feel shame has been brought upon their family.
- Similar practices of honour killings have been known since ancient Roman times.

# Abuse of power

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- Just as patriarchy is a system of abuse of power and authority, similarly honour is a system of abuse that hugely controls young women's sexuality through its so-called norms because women's sexuality has a social, cultural and economic value.
- The honour culture constructs women as a commodity objectification which undermines women's power and position and their rights in a number of ways.
- Drugging, beating, shooting, drowning: the methods by which honour crimes are carried out are various, but the motives behind these abhorrent crimes are similar.
- Perpetrators of abuse often make their victims believe that they are somehow responsible for their own abuse. Such misplaced notions shift the blame of the abuse from the abuser to the victim.
- More research is required to understand men's behaviour in conjunction with domestic, sexual and cultural violence in order to address the issues of why men are most accountable for the abuse.

# Wearing the Hijab

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- Since post 9/11 image of Islam provides huge challenges for Muslims and for the Muslim world and, obviously, British-Pakistani Muslim women are part of that scenario.
- Young women have naturally responded to that challenge; part of that response was an increase in wearing the hijab. Yet wearing the hijab was a notion which most of the (parents) welcomed cheerfully and most of them interpreted it from a cultural perspective without realising that the women's reaction was strongly political and was based upon solidarity and integrity with global Muslims.
- When the women realised their community and parents had different interpretations on wearing the hijab to their own, they made a challenge at a local level to explain to the community that wearing the hijab means something different to what the community perceived.

# Status in society

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- For a number of families, their status and position in the society is so much more important than their kids that they do not mind killing them or sacrificing them just to maintain their desired status.
- Only one question comes into the mind of all the people - Is the society more important than your children?
- If asked parents will say their children are more important. But in some of the cases the reality is totally different. These people who kill their children for the breach of so called code of conduct of their societies are actually only concerned about their status and position in the society.

# Crimes unreported

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- The crimes are usually aimed at women, and can include abductions, beatings and even murders.
- So-called honour crimes are acts which have been committed to protect or defend the supposed honour or reputation of a family and community
- The figures revealed 11,744 incidences of these crimes between 2010 and 2014, consisting of data from 39 out of 52 police forces in the UK. They included forced marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM).
- The Metropolitan Police recorded the highest number of incidents at 2,188, followed by West Midlands Police with 1,269 and Bedfordshire Police with 1,106 examples recorded.
- South Yorkshire had 1,009 unconfirmed incidents in 2014 alone while Lancashire Police had 1,049. (Talwar, D., & Ahmad, A. (2015).

# What can we do to help

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- We need to develop more educational programmes or awareness around this issue into the school curriculum just like we have with radicalisation and sex education.
- Children need to be targeted from age 11-18 years, as after that age parents will withdraw their child from further education and it will be difficult to access them.
- We need to be vigilant and as professionals working with vulnerable young girls let them know they can report concerns to a trusted person such as a friend, teacher, police or contact a helpline.
- If they feel at risk, they shouldn't travel abroad with family.
- Alert airport staff if they are being forced to leave the country.
- If travelling abroad, then ensure they can provide trusted person with:
  - ❖ Passport details, a recent photo and address where travelling to.
  - ❖ Travel details - Flight number and dates of travel including return date.

# References

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