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Honour killings on the rise in Canada: Study

Brian Daly : 6-8 minutes : 1/26/2012

[Skip to Content](#)

- [News](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Sports Betting](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Entertainment](#)
- [Life](#)
- [Remembering](#)
- [Sunshine Girls](#)
- [Driving](#)
- [Comics](#)
- [Puzzles](#)
- [Horoscopes](#)
- [Newsletters](#)
- [Healthing](#)
- [TheGrowthOp](#)
- [ePaper](#)

1. [Canada](#)
2. [News](#)

Honour killings on the rise in Canada: Study

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MONTREAL

As the highest-profile honour killing trial in Canadian history draws to a close, new numbers indicate the brutal practice is on the rise.

A study by the University of Sherbrooke shows there have been 12 honour-killing victims in Canada since 1999 compared with three between 1954 and 1983.

All of the cases involved at least one female victim, and all of the killers were immigrants, according to the study that appears in the latest issue of the Canadian Criminal Law Review.

Most of the perpetrators were men, usually of Muslim or Sikh background, and the average victim was 21 years old.

Honour killings sparked a new wave of outrage because of an ongoing case in Kingston, Ont., in which a couple and their son allegedly murdered the couple's three young daughters and the husband's first wife from a polygamous marriage.

The Crown says Mohammad Shafia, his wife Tooba Mohammad Yahya and son Hamed murdered the four women because the eldest daughters were dishonouring the family by having sexual relations with boyfriends.

The four bodies were found submerged in the Rideau Canal inside the family's Nissan Sentra on the morning of June 30, 2009.

The case prompted a debate about the possibility of creating a separate Criminal Code category for honour killings.

Law professor Marie-Pierre Robert, who authored the study, said data indicates such a move isn't needed because honour killers are always prosecuted to the maximum under Canadian law.

"Often it's first-degree murder, which means life in prison in the great majority of cases," she said. "Even in the other cases, there are very severe sentences."

The Conservative government said last year it has no plans to change the Criminal Code to specifically punish honour killings, but Justice Minister Rob Nicholson said some changes to Canada's hate crime legislation are being considered.

Some believe that targeting women and girls because of what they wear or who they date could be considered a gender-based hate crime.

The law professor suggested a focus on prevention that stresses an education in Canadian values for newcomers.

"The culture of equality between men and women . . . must be stressed," said Robert.

Honour killings in Canada

- Aqsa Parvez, 16, strangled to death in Toronto in 2007 for refusing to wear the hijab. Father Muhammad Parvez and brother Waqas Parvez sentenced to life in prison

- Hasibullah Sadiqi, sentenced to life in prison for shooting his sister and her fiance in Edmonton on Sept. 19, 2006. He claimed they had brought dishonour on his family.

-Rajinder Singh Atwal stabbed his 17-year-old daughter Amandeep to death in 2003 for insisting on living with her boyfriend. Atwal found guilty of second-degree murder in 2005 and sentenced to life in prison.

-Adi Abdul Humaid stabbed his wife, Aysar Abbas, 23 times in the neck and once in the heart on a lonely stretch of B.C. road on Oct. 14, 1999. He said he thought she was sleeping with her business associate. Sentenced to life in prison.

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