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Honour based Violence – Indo Canadian Women's Association

6-8 minutes

What are 'Honour' Killings?

Violence against women is not a new phenomenon. It has plagued communities around the world and continues to subject innocent women and girls to physical, mental and emotional harms. Honour based violence is a term frequently used to differentiate a particular form of violence against women on the basis that it transpires within the framework of the family and community sphere, it is an act deliberately intended to restore 'honour' to the family and is rooted in men's efforts to control women's sexual and social lives. ¹(Aisha Gill). Honour killing refers to a family member, close relative or a self-appointed community leader killing another person when they perceive that the person in question has brought dishonor to the family or community by breaking from traditional social conduct. Most often than not, the person in question is female because girls and women are seen to uphold or embody the family or communities honour.

Controversy over the term

Legally, such killings are considered murders, but because this cruel conduct is performed in the name of tradition, religion or culture, the term 'Honour' killings is used to specify the motives behind this heinous act. Given the nature of this crime, it is common to see the dissenters silenced while perpetrators feel justified that they have completed a moral or ethical duty. The silence and the lack of willingness to intervene contribute to a culture of impunity in which justice is denied and the roots of gender inequality grow deeper. ³ Far too often, perpetrators are not prosecuted with rigor and if perpetrators are ever punished they receive light punishment.

What does 'Honour' refer to?

While there is no honour in 'honour' killing, the term *honour* is defined in terms of women's assigned sexual and familial roles as dictated by traditional family ideology. Thus, adultery, premarital relationships (which may or may not include sexual relations) rape and falling in love with an 'inappropriate' person many constitute violations of family honour. Other accusations victims of 'honour' based violence are faulted for include identifying too much with western culture and ideas, such as refusing to wear traditional clothing, refusing arranged marriages, dating, pursuing a higher education or career, leaving an abusive spouse, or being disobedient toward family.

Causes of HBV

To understand 'Honour' based violence, it is important to outline reasons why the violence continues and why it is seen in our communities to this day. This abhorrent practice is rooted in a number of motives. One reason is an acceptance of 'Honour' based violence and spousal abuse by the community when a woman is accused of transgressing from family or clan rules. Perpetrators often see themselves as duty bound to enforce virtuous

conducts and save women from the corrupting vices of modern society, and thus take it upon themselves to 'correct' women when they step out of the bounds of their traditional dictates. Family power structures and family dynamics also play an important role in determining whether a particular family is safe or unsafe for a woman. For example, because there is usually a disconnect in immigrant families between tradition-bound parents and their girls growing up in Canada's multicultural communities, there is a rift in ideas of what is considered right and wrong. As a result, these girls can be subjected to punishment and violence as repercussions for actions their parents deem as being unacceptable or inappropriate. Furthermore, for immigrant women this problem is frequently exacerbated by a lack of knowledge about Canadian protections or their rights according to Canadian laws, and they are restricted in their ability to access legal remedies due to high costs.

Where do 'Honour' Killings happen?

Honour Killing happens everywhere in the world, for instance, they have occurred in Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Ecuador, England, Egypt, India, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Pakistan, Morocco, Sweden, Turkey, and Uganda. Due to the hidden nature of the crime, honour killings are hard to label and many have contested the use of the term stating that murder is murder regardless of circumstances. That said, while acknowledging murder is condemned everywhere and there is absolutely no honour in killing, unfortunately the concept of honour has been used to excuse, if not condone murdering girls and women. Canada experienced 13 cases of honour-based murders, between 2002 and 2010 and two more women have met their fate in supposed honour motivated murders in this year.

Honour killings are on the rise in Canada and the UN posits that throughout the world, perhaps as many as 5,000 women and girls a year are murdered by members of their own families, many of them for the "dishonour" of having been raped, often as not by a member of their own extended family.

What is the ICWA doing to help?

Our mission at the ICWA is to protect women of all ethnic, religious and cultural origins from practices that place them in harm's way. In 2011, the ICWA launched a project funded by the Status of Women called... that aims to bring an end to harmful cultural practices that hurt women and girls. Through this project, the ICWA is mobilizing the community, particularly women towards a zero tolerance attitude for honour based violence, becoming active agents of change and making the case for stricter enforcement of criminal law. This project also aims to empower girls and women vulnerable to honour-based violence. As stated by the Status of Women Minister Rona Ambrose, "All Canadian girls and women under the law, have the right to live free from violence and abuse... This type of violence, often known as 'honour killings' is a heinous abuse of power and human rights".

1. Gill, Aisha. Honour killings and the quest for justice in black and minority ethnic communities in the UK and moving toward a "multiculturalism without culture": constructing a victim-friendly human rights approach to forced marriage in the UK
2. Coomaraswamy, Radhika. UN. Violence Against Women. Web.
3. "Ending Impunity for Violence against Women and Girls." UN Backgrounder, Web. 21 Aug 2011.
4. "Culturally Motivated Violence Against Women" Fact Sheet. Edmonton social planning council, Web 27 July 2012.

5. Hopper, Tristan. Murders spark fears of honour killings. National Post . Web. 19 Aug 2011. [Learn more](#)
6. UNFPA; State of the World's Population 2000. [Learn more](#)