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## Honour Crimes: Transdisciplinary Issue

### KEY WORDS

Honour crime, immigrants, cross-cultural psychology, prevention

### ABSTRACT

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This article introduces so-called honour crimes (sometimes termed honour based violence), which tends to occur within Islamic communities located within 'host' countries in Europe. It is a very specific type of crime, which takes place in the family setting in Muslim families, and is in direct contradiction with the democratic values and legal systems of Western states. The aim of this paper is to introduce the issue and illustrate it in relation to selected cases. It offers both an evaluative and descriptive stance.

### Crime among minorities

Arguably, the majority society is more sensitive to crimes committed by minorities and foreigners than those for which its own members are responsible. The general public often sees crime committed by members of minorities as being a more serious problem than it really is (Gřivna, Scheinost, Zoubková et al., 2014: 461). The mass media is integral to the general perception of minority crimes; choosing frequently to report incidences of honour crimes taking place in the countries of Western Europe.

Findings from the fields of criminology and psychology imply the greater the distance between the cultures of the two groups (majority/minority), the more likely it is that conflicts might arise, resulting in criminal behaviour. Therefore, it is important to understand how the leaders of the majority respond to these differences (Gřivna, Scheinost, Zoubková et al., 2014: 476).

Fiala (2010) observed a number of issues affecting the integration of Muslim minority groups. These individuals often reject Western values, preferring to

promote their own. In this context, Huntington (2001) observed a conflict takes place between sacred and secular values, resulting in value differences between Western and Islamic cultures.

Certain kinds of crime, such as honour crime, can be interpreted against the backdrop of cultural differences, as the norms and values of the majority society do not entirely correspond with those of the various minorities (cf. Kuchta, Válková et al., 2005: 304; Doğan, 2016: 55–57).

### **Honour crime: a definition**

According to Doğan (2016: 54), in classical Latin, the word “honour” (*honor, honoris*) is associated with the ideas of respect, esteem, and prestige, and connected with the existence of public dignities and offices. Seen from this perspective, the word “honour” has a gender-neutral meaning to do with reputation or prestige, and is not compatible with violence or killing. However, in the context of honour killing, the concept of honor has a different meaning than that of reputation and prestige. In this context, a person’s honour is believed to be a sacred value, and the loss of honor is equated with the loss of life. (Doğan, 2016: 53–54)

“Honour crime” and “honour killing” is a highly contested term (cf. Shier, Shor, 1165).

Honour crimes have been operationalized as offences where male family members attack a woman because she violated the honour of her family. (Hayes, Freilich, Chermak, 2016: 304).

In some cultures is huge rate of violence against women. These cultures are so-called *honour cultures*. Example of these cultures are Mediterranean regions, Middle East and Arab societies, and Latin American countries. While in the Latin American countries the concept of honour is strongly linked to masculine honour, in Mediterranean regions and Middle East and Arab societies is this type linked to family honour and religious traditions (cf. Caffaro, Ferraris, Schmidt, 2014: 297, cf. Hayes, Freilich, Chermak, 2016: 304).

Although honour crime is not a new topic within the domain of the social sciences, it is principally in fiction that one finds detailed treatment of individual instances. Honour crimes are also referred to as ‘*signal crimes*’. A signal crime is a serious offence that can

(...) significantly change the momentary mood and atmosphere in society and arouses in the majority of people an impression that there is something wrong with the world they live in and hence the situation must be remedied as a matter of urgency. This creates a noticeable shift in opinions on and positions towards crime and criminal justice, necessitating that, not just politicians, but also law enforcement authorities find a proper

response, in order to save their face in front of citizens. What these incidents tend to have in common is public shock and outrage, duly fed by media reports. (Tomášek, 2010: 81)

This explains why honour crime can be viewed as highly transdisciplinary issue; one located in the theory and practice of sociology and psychology, security, jurisprudence, social policy, media and intercultural studies, and in education (cf. Shier, Shor, 2015; Al Gharaibeh, 2016; Čeněk, Smolík, Vykoukalová, 2016). In addition, the criminal law in countries where these crimes occur also takes an important role.

Among other areas, research into social education focuses on socially pathological phenomena (including offences and dysfunctional families), the category to which honour crime certainly belongs. Social education seeks to address and evaluate new trends, while also enhancing public awareness of the varied socially pathological phenomena that appear in marginalised groups as they are being integrated into society; in this case, migrants from Muslim countries.

Honour crimes are relatively easy to define: they are offences motivated by religious and family traditions, and involving violent behaviour against members of Muslim families who choose not to adhere to accepted traditions. Although these traditions might be based on the principles of sharia law, this law can be interpreted subjectively. Sharia law does not recognise 'honour crime' and Islam forbids murder (cf. Ostránský, 2014; Al Gharaibeh, 2016). Certainly, the Islamic family unit (and Islamic family law) constitutes the element that most strongly resists secularisation tendencies (see Ostránský, 2014: 121), and this is one of the reasons why the honour of a Muslim family is seen as crucial.

An individual's sense of belonging and identity are anchored in their family and the Muslim community (cf. Scruton, 2007), and they are expected to observe the rituals, traditional rules and norms<sup>1</sup> of that community. In the Islamic world, family cohesion is much stronger than in the West; family relationships are of paramount importance in one's life and are manifest at every step. In their polemics with the West, Muslim scholars often praise large and strong family as the basis of society; contrasting it with Western family life, which is allegedly in crisis and the locus of various ills, such as divorce, promiscuity and prostitution (Ostránský, 2009: 123). Such values are reinforced by upbringing and education.

The most serious of honour crimes are honour killings (cf. Doğan, 2016: 53–54; Shier, Shor, 2015: 1165). These often take the form of strangulation, stabbing to death, burning to death, poisoning and similar methods. Other offences

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<sup>1</sup> Honour norms dictate that a man has to protect his reputation, while the role of a woman is to maintain her man's and family's honour by behaving accordingly, regardless of whatever situation is involved in (including rape and arranged or unhappy marriage): what really matters is only the responsibility the woman has in front of her community. (Caffaro, Ferraris, Schmidt, 2014: 397)

include illegal restraint (house arrest), psychological terror, threats, kidnappings, and long-term violence within the family framework. These acts may even lead a victim to suicide.

Honour killings have four key characteristics, which distinguish them from other forms of murder within the family. First, the killing is planned and carried out by a member of the victim's (typically a young woman) family of birth rather than family of marriage (e.g., a father, brother, cousin, or paternal uncle). Second, the perpetrator usually does not act alone. Rather, he has the support of a collective that is ready to reward the murder with honour. The honour is thus restored for the collective, not just the individual. Third, suspicion is usually enough to prompt the killing, and no proof or evidence of sexual transgressions is actually needed. Finally, honour killings are premeditated; these are planned crimes rather than "crimes of passion." (Shier, Shor, 2016: 1165)

According to Al Gharaibeh (2016: 122) is honour killing "violence committed within the context of the extended family. It is motivated by a perceived need to restore standing within the community, which is presumed to have been lost through the behaviour of the victim. Most victims of honour killing are woman or girls, although men may also be at risk if they believed to be homosexual".

The primary motive for honour crime is the perpetrator's belief that the victim (usually a young woman) is bringing disgrace to her family.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, the perpetrator is normally part of the family (at least the extended family) of the victim. Instances of honour crime that have attracted media attention are where the perpetrator is often an uncle, cousin, father, brother, or, in some cases, even the mother of the victim.

Perpetrators of honour crimes may seek support from extended family members. Therefore, policy should focus on the role of community. Parallel systems of justice based on the communities where honour crimes happen not only hold the offender criminally accountable, but also have an effect on his status within the community (Hayes, Freilich, Chermak, 2016: 311).

Motives for honour crimes are diverse. An important role is played by traditional Muslim values and their transmutation, under the impact of the new culture and the influence exerted by what the perpetrator sees as Western anomie. Muslim immigrants often seek refuge in their faith, which they perceive as a superior tool to navigate the moral confusion that surrounds them (Scruton, 2007: 95).

Western values are also criticised and rejected. For example, the adoption of Western materialism and life-style with regard to clothing and make-up; non-

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<sup>2</sup> Also rather shocking is the fact that when a young woman is raped, family members reject her; rape is often a motive for honour crime due to the woman's loss of chastity. Women who have been raped have been murdered because 'disgrace' her rape bring to their family (Al Gharaibeh, 2016: 131).

submission to arranged marriage; renunciation of faith; forbidden relationships<sup>3</sup> (not just of a sexual nature) with people outside the Muslim community; and homosexuality are all disapproved of (Kropáček, 2002).

Islam sets precise limits on human sexuality. Married life and family provide the basic framework for sexual life. Islamic law strictly punishes adultery, i.e. both premarital<sup>4</sup> and extramarital sex (Ostřanský, 2009: 178).

Honour crimes are committed exclusively within minority groups, which means the victims are also members of these minorities (Kuchta, Válková et al., 2005: 305). Some of the crimes relating to family honour are frequently latent (often they are long-standing cases of psychological and physical violence), in contrast to honour killings, in which the perpetrators are generally prosecuted and sentenced.

In Muslim countries, these crimes are frequently viewed as minor infringements, and relatively often, judges sympathise with perpetrators, giving them penalties that are not commensurable with those awarded for other types of murder. In the West, by contrast, honour killings, and other violence committed by Muslims is seen as a serious problem, one that often stirs up broader disputes about Islam in Europe. Polemics are waged among leaders of European Muslims, but also among non-Muslim scholars, regarding to what extent phenomena are conditioned by religion, and to what extent they are socially or culturally determined, as there are evident differences between the various ethnic groups (Ostřanský, 2014: 170).

Although honour crimes are relatively frequent, the clear-up rate is affected by the high rate of crime latency, especially in cases of long-term psychological and physical violence. This is partly because the perpetrators are members of the victim's (extended) family. Another factor is the victims' lack of trust in the Western system, the presence of language barriers and their fears for their own survival.

Honour crimes are not committed solely in Muslim countries such as Afghanistan, but, due to immigration to the West, often occur in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and France (Laqueur, 2006; cf. Hayes, Freilich, Chermak, 2016; Shier, Shor, 2016). This fuels the ongoing debate in these countries over the efficiency of the integration of migrants of a Muslim background. Laqueur (2006) also notes a generational conflict within the Muslim communities in European coun-

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<sup>3</sup> A woman should only see men to whom she is related, and the reverse also applies to men (see Klímová-Pumerová, 2005: 163).

<sup>4</sup> Central to the code of honour in many societies is a woman's virginity, which is expected to be preserved until marriage (Al Gharaibeh, 2016: 130).

tries, with adolescents often experiencing a confusion of their identity as they seek to establish relations with themselves, their families, traditional values, religion, and the majority of society.

### **The principle of honour crimes**

In principle, honour crimes are a consequence of the patriarchal structure of the Muslim family, in which fathers or brothers might decide to punish their daughters or sisters by locking them up, maltreating or even killing them. Often reports of these crimes are tucked away in the back pages of newspapers and the general public does not register them, while at other times are called by their proper name (Čeněk, Smolík, Vykoukalová, 2016).

A large number of honour crimes (especially murders) can be cited; however, reasons of space here compel us to name but a few. In 2005, for instance, Hatun Sürücü, originally from Turkey, was murdered in Berlin by her own brothers, because she stopped wearing her headscarf, stopped visiting her family regularly and chosen not to see friends they had foisted upon her. In 2006 in Brescia, Italy, a Pakistani father cut the throat of his own daughter, Hina Saleem, because she had decided to earn her own living, live away from her family and dress as she liked; that is, she had adopted the Western way of life, which her father found dishonourable. In 2007, Shadia Sheikh, a girl of Pakistani extraction living in Charleroi, Belgium, was shot dead at close range by her brother, for rejecting the marriage arranged by her parents as she wished to make her own life decisions (for details see Todorov, 2011: 93).

These few examples serve to illustrate the situations that can arise within Muslim communities in European states.

As already indicated, honour crimes are difficult to quantify, as they are characterised by a high degree of latency. Furthermore, these crimes undermine the view that, despite having family values and rules that differ from those of the majority, immigrants from Muslim countries can be integrated into Western societies without difficulty. As part of the process of prevention, social education should pay attention to the phenomenon of honour based violence, using its existing focus on social pathology, crime and intercultural understanding. A teacher's acquaintance with cases of honour crime might be an advantage, not just in terms of prevention, but also for minority programmes generally.

The cases mentioned above have called into question the integration approaches employed towards Muslim immigrants. There is also the related issue of Muslim communities' loyalty towards their host countries. This issue has been particularly conspicuous in traditional host countries, such as the United King-

dom, Germany, Spain, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands. Instances have been recorded of Muslims settling in these countries, integrating themselves and embracing a loyalty of some kind to Western institutions and customs; although in some case their children, who have been born and brought up in the West, failed to identify with these values.<sup>5</sup> In many cases, the new generation seeks its identity in the countries from which their families originate, sometimes adopting a radical form of Islam, and occasionally becoming entangled in religious conflicts outside Europe (Huntington, 2001; Scruton, 2007; Čeněk, Smolík, Vykoukalová, 2016).

## Conclusion

How then can we separate what is an acceptable part of tradition from what is not, where it contradicts the fundamental values of democracy? In principle, the answer is not difficult; although the application of the principle in specific cases might be problematic. Notably, in a democracy, law prevails over custom (Todorov, 2011: 94). This is one of the reasons for referring to honour crimes as a specific type of crime occurring within Muslim communities, relating to their traditional values. Nevertheless, these are often serious crimes, which a democratic society must prosecute.

Other measures can be made available to address prevention, build public awareness and establish educational procedures. This presents challenges for researchers and practitioners in the fields of cross-cultural psychology and social education.

Law enforcement agencies, sociologists, psychologists and educationalists need to draw attention to instances of honour crimes, to help to uncover the mechanisms that abet this type of crime, so they can engage in preventive measures. Theoretical findings should also be applied to various prevention programmes (support helplines, counselling centres, etc.). As far as integration efforts are concerned, these must be endorsed by the minorities themselves, who should seek to improve their social status. In these endeavours, they need the support of the majority of society, support which takes the form of public education and changes to legislation (Gřivna, Scheinost, Zoubková et al., 2014: 479).

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<sup>5</sup> Laqueur (2006) cites a February 2006 sociological survey according to which 26 per cent of British Muslims felt no loyalty to Britain, 40 per cent were in favour of sharia law being introduced in certain parts of Britain, 13 per cent justified terrorist attacks in the Al-Qaeda style, and 47 per cent supported suicide attacks, such as those occurring in Israel. The results of opinion polls were often contradictory; in the February 2006 survey, 91 per cent of respondents expressed their loyalty to Britain, but 20 per cent felt sympathies for the terrorists who committed the 7/7 bombings in 2005, killing more than 40 people (Laqueur, 2006: 60).

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