



Definitions

According to the United Nations' *Declaration of the Elimination of Violence Against Women* (1993):



- Article 1 defines “violence against women” as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”
- Article 2 of the *Declaration* states that violence against women includes but is not limited to the following:
 - ◆ Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;
 - ◆ Physical, sexual and psychology violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;
 - ◆ Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.
- Honour killings are unique from other forms of domestic violence and femicide in the Western world, despite insistence from some people that it is discriminatory to classify them separately. Evidence suggests the motivation behind the killings is rooted in morality common to certain cultures and fundamentalist religious groups, specifically with regard to regulating the behavior of women (Chesler, 2010).

Statistics and Trends

Global

According to Amnesty International (2012), at least one in three women globally have been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in their lifetime.

A report by the UN Population Fund in 2000 estimated that approximately 5,000 honour killings take place each year. Other sources suggest that the figure may be closer to 20,000 based on information received by women’s groups in the Middle East and Southwest Asia (CBC News, 2011).

North America

In North America, 91% of honour-killing victims were murdered for being “too Western” (Chesler, 2010). Being “too Western” is defined by behaviors such as: refusing to wear Islamic clothing, turning down an arranged marriage, associating with or dating people from outside the religious/cultural group, wanting higher education or a career, leaving an abusive spouse, or being disobedient toward family. The remaining 9% were murdered for “sexual impropriety”, meaning they were raped, were accused of an extra-marital affair, or simply seen as “promiscuous” regardless of sexual activity (Chesler, 2010).

Canada

In Canada, there have been 12 cases of “honour crimes” involving 15 victims since 1954. The crimes involving 12 of those victims have taken place since 1999 (Wilton, 2012).

A study conducted by Marie-Pierre Robert, a law professor at the L'Université de Sherbrooke, suggested that all those convicted of murders involving “honour killings” were almost always first generation Canadians (Wilton, 2012).

Edmonton

Changing Together, a charitable organization based in Edmonton that assists immigrant women, reported to the *Edmonton Sun* that family violence was very common in some immigrant communities in Edmonton. At times, the agency helps at least three women a week whose lives are at risk. The agency reported that they counseled approximately 400 women over a 12 month period, mostly related to abuse. Of those women, about 80 were sent to women’s shelters. Most women had experienced spousal abuse, however some were daughters who had refused arranged marriages, or wanted to marry someone against their parents’ wishes (Jacobs, 2011).

Organizations in the Edmonton region which provide services for immigrant, refugee, and non-status women experiencing violence or threats within their own environment include: Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, Changing Together: a Centre for Immigrant Women, Family Violence Info Line, The Support Network, Rosenet: Law and Abused Immigrant Women, Indo-Canadian Women’s Association, Edmonton Women’s Shelter (WIN House), Hope Mission,

Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying, Saffron – Strathcona Sexual Assault Centre, Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton (SACE), St. Albert Stop Abuse In Families (SAIF) Society, Strathcona Shelter Society Ltd. 'A Safe Place', University of Alberta: Sexual Assault Centre, and Wings of Providence (Alberta Children and Youth Services, 2009).

Where Does Canada Stand?

While the Canadian Criminal Code does not specifically refer to honour crimes, they are dealt with in the same fashion as murder. A total of 14 people have been convicted of participating in honour crimes; 12 people have been convicted of murder, in most cases first-degree murder. There have been no acquittals (Wilton, 2012).

The Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration of the Government of Canada introduced a revised citizenship guide, *Discover Canada: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship* (2011). This guide includes a section on the equality of women and men. Specifically, it states that, "In Canada, men and women are equal under the law. Canada's openness and generosity do not extend to barbaric cultural practices that tolerate spousal abuse, 'honour killings', female genital mutilation, forced marriage or other gender-based violence. Those guilty of these crimes are severely punished under Canada's criminal laws.

Due to increased immigration, the issue of culturally-motivated violence is becoming a growing concern in Canada (CBC News, 2011).

What Do We Need To Consider?

An article by the Canadian Council for Refugees (2012) reports that immigrant women face unique barriers, such as:

- Language - held back from learning English or French;
- Kept isolated in the home;
- Face threats - e.g. taking custody of children, alienation from cultural community, spreading rumours that they are a bad wife/mother, deportation;
- Difficulty accessing programs and services in place and a lack of knowledge of legal rights;
- Lack of awareness by some women's organizations regarding the unique problems faced by immigrant women.

In order to adjust attitudes toward violence against women (Flood & Pease, 2009):

- We must have a strategy in place to change the underlying negative familial, organizational, communal and social norms that support violence against women.
- We must broaden our focus to include the "cluster of attitudes" regarding gender and sexuality, such as sexist, patriarchal and hostile attitudes towards women, as these attitudes are linked to those that condone violence against women.
- We cannot simply relay the message that violence against women is wrong. We must also seek to provide alternative sets of norms and values that focus on gender equality and nonviolence.
- We must be sensitive to ethnic diversities and cultures when developing violence prevention programs.
- In order to be effective, programs that attempt to change public attitudes toward violence against women must be paired with positive changes in "structural relations and social practices".

The formation of attitudes that condone violence against women is related to "intergenerational transmission". For example, children experiencing or witnessing violence are more likely to develop such attitudes and to perpetrate aggression in adulthood.

The cycle of abuse needs to break, and there is a need for children educational programs need to continuously reinforce the idea that violence is not appropriate or effective, and will not be tolerated. In addition, there must be programs and resources in place that deal specifically with children experiencing or witnessing violence.

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