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Britains 'honor' Killings - posted by saved_matt (), on: 2005/12/9 3:09

what has happened to our 'christian' nation?

LONDON (Reuters) - Rukhsana Naz was 19 when her mother pinned her to the floor of their family house and her brother strangled her with a length of plastic cable.

Sahjda Bibi, 21, was preparing to celebrate her wedding when her cousin stabbed her 22 times with a kitchen knife. The father of 16-year-old Heshu Yones slit her throat because he disapproved of her Western habits and non-Muslim boyfriend. All were victims of "honor killings," murdered by relatives who believed they had brought shame on their families through their behavior or choice of boyfriend, husband or lover.

Until recently, honor crime was rarely reported and often misunderstood in Britain, viewed as something which happened elsewhere -- mainly in the Middle East or southern Asia. But a series of gruesome killings has forced Britons to recognize that such crimes, although still rare, are committed here too, often within the country's large ethnic Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani communities.

Girls and young women have been killed, abducted, physically abused and held prisoner in their own homes. Police believe scores have been taken out of the country, often to the Indian subcontinent, and have disappeared.

Nazir Afzal, director of Britain's Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in west London where there is a large south Asian community, says there have been at least a dozen honor killings in the country in the past year. "And murder is just the tip of the iceberg," he said. "There are other crimes, like rape, abduction and physical violence, which we would consider steps on the stairway to murder."

ON THE RISE

The CPS, which decides whether to press charges against suspects in British criminal cases, says such crimes are on the rise, particularly since the July 7 London bombings. The bombs, which killed 52 people on the city's transport system, were planted by four Islamist suicide bombers, all of them British. That shone a harsh spotlight on the country's 1.6 million Muslims and, according to the CPS, prompted some Muslim families to turn in on themselves, with worrying consequences.

"I've certainly seen more cases of honor crime since July 7," said Afzal. "When communities perceive themselves to be under threat they tend to turn in on themselves, regardless of whether that perception has any basis in fact. "They try to restore and reinforce their own social norms. They put pressure on their own members to conform, and if they don't conform there is sometimes some kind of retribution."

Specialists on violence against women also say social cultural changes, partly spread by globalization and mass media, have left men from southern Asia feeling threatened and women are bearing the brunt of their fear.

The CPS stresses honor crime is not just a Muslim issue. "I'm aware of crimes being committed in Eastern Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, Brazil, Spain, France, Italy, and also within those communities in this country," Afzal said. "That said, the bulk of these crimes involve the South Asian community and in particular the Muslim community."

GIRLS AS YOUNG AS 11

Jasvinder Sanghera set up the Karma Nirvana center for women from the Asian subcontinent in Derby, central England, because of her own experiences.

At 14, her family showed her a photograph of the man she was told to marry. Her mother refused to heed her objections and a week before her wedding day Sanghera ran away, never to return.

Her sister failed to escape.

She accepted her parents' choice of husband, found herself in an abusive relationship and eventually committed suicide. "She suffered horrific violence in her marriage but when she turned to my family, they sent her back to an abusive partner because of 'honor', because of the family name, because of the family's reputation," Sanghera said.

"Within days she killed herself. She set herself on fire."

Sanghera says she has dealt with cases of children as young as 11, betrothed to husbands against their will.

Reunite, a charity which campaigns to stop child abduction, estimates that around 1,000 British Asian girls are forced into marriage each year. Between a third and a half are minors.

MEN TARGETS TOO

While young women are the primary victims of honor crimes, two court cases have shown how men have been targeted too.

In early November, two brothers aged 16 and 19 were convicted of murdering a British Iranian because their family disapproved of his relationship with their sister. The brothers, from an ethnic Bangladeshi family, stopped their victim in his car, pinned him to the seat and stabbed him 46 times in the chest. Less than three weeks later, a Muslim man was convicted of hacking a 21-year-old Afghan to death with a scimitar after finding out he was having a relationship with his sister.

Honor crimes, often carried out behind closed doors in tight-knit communities, are notoriously difficult to prevent, and police say they struggle to garner enough evidence to bring suspects to trial.

Two years ago, London's police force set up a task force to tackle the issue and it is re-examining over 100 unsolved murder cases to see if they may have been honor crimes, even though they were not recognized as such at the time. The government is also considering changing the law to make forced marriage a criminal offense.

Ultimately though, campaigners say that what is needed to bring an end to honor crimes is a change of attitude among more conservative elements within some of Britain's communities.

Until then, young girls and women like Rukhsana Naz, Sahjda Bibi and Heshu Yones will remain at risk.

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