

Honour crime 'is underestimated'

The true extent of so-called "honour" crime is being underestimated by the government, the Centre for Social Cohesion think-tank claims.

Based on some 80 interviews, its report says forced marriage, imprisonment and "honour" killings are not restricted to first generation immigrant families.

Report author Salam Hafez said this was "being perpetuated within second and third immigrant generations".

The Home Office said an action plan to address the issue was being developed.

The report, entitled Crimes of the Community, is based on interviews with women's groups, community activists and victims of "honour"-based violence.

It argues that the extent of such violence against men and women is underestimated by the government, police and local services, and political correctness is preventing the authorities from tackling the issue.

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Gina Khan

Women's activists who were interviewed said teachers, police and local authorities were afraid to take action to stop honour-based violence for fear of being called "racist" or "Islamophobic".

They also said radical Islamic groups have sought to limit the activities of women's groups.

According to the report, ethnic and religious segregation is fuelling "honour"-based violence.

Groups dealing with women from minority communities - particularly in the Midlands and northern England - claimed segregation is entrenching certain attitudes, fuelling violence against women.

'Overlooked' crimes

Mr Hafez told the BBC the idea of honour was still important to younger members of immigrant families.

He said: "This phenomenon is kind of being perpetuated within second and third immigrant generations. And it's a cultural thing, and it exists, and it's going on. We're talking about forced marriage, we're talking about ideals, and you know, largely, it's been overlooked."

Fellow report author James Brandon said the findings showed that "the government is still not taking honour crime seriously".

"Until this happens, the ideas of honour which perpetuate this violence will continue to be passed from generation to generation," he said, calling on religious leaders, local authorities and central government to work together to tackle the issue.

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Home Office

His assertion was backed by Gina Khan who campaigns against forced marriages and the mistreatment of women.

Birmingham-based Ms Khan told BBC Radio 4's Today programme she was "manipulated into an arranged marriage" at the age of 16 during a holiday to Pakistan.

"When I wanted to get out of the marriage, that's where I was told that if I decided to divorce him, I would be excommunicated from the family, which I was for a year or so," she said.

And, on the wider issue of combating this issue, she went on: "I don't really see anything happening from within the community - from leaders, or from mosques - to help."

Raising awareness

A Home Office spokesman said the government welcomed the report, is "determined to tackle honour based violence" and would be "taking action to ensure that any gaps in services can be filled".

He said: "We are developing a cross-government action plan to tackle honour based violence which includes, forced marriage, honour killings and female genital mutilation.

"The plan is being developed with Acpo and other criminal justice system agencies and aims to improve the response of police and other agencies, to all forms of honour-based violence and ensure that victims are encouraged to come forward with the knowledge that they will receive the help and support they need."

The spokesman said the plan would also address the issue of raising awareness, improving training, and monitoring in communities and professional bodies.

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