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Honour-based Violence –a Knowledge and Research Report

Summary

This report surveys Swedish research in the field of honour-based violence, as well as arranged and forced marriages. Important theoretical perspectives are presented as well as the various approaches within different disciplines. In order to put Swedish research in a larger context, influential international research, published in English, is referred to throughout the report. The report starts with a discussion about the term honour-related violence and how the concept was introduced in Sweden, followed by a presentation of three major perspectives on honoured-based violence. Subsequently, research on arranged and forced marriages is presented. The report is finally summed up giving an overall picture of the research field. A number of areas and issues are highlighted and pointed out as particularly important for further studies.

During the last ten years, honour-based violence has become known to the Swedish public. The murders of the young women Pela, Sara and Fadime lead to an intense debate in the media, as well as in the academic world. The issue was thus put on the political agenda and extensive political measures were taken. Between the years of 2003 and 2007, the Swedish government invested around 180 million Swedish kronor (SEK) to establish shelters for girls who were victims of honour-based violence. The county administrative boards were instructed to survey the problem, to create handbooks on the topic and to implement strategies aiming at changing attitudes within the target groups. Since then, funds have been allocated for, among all, country administrative boards to take preventative action against honour-based violence. Moreover, in the year of 2008, new funds were added in connection with the launch of the Swedish government's *Action plan for combating men's violence against women, violence and oppression in the name of honour and violence in same-sex relationships* (Skr. 2007/08:39). As the debate continued, an array of new words were introduced into the Swedish language, words like honour-violence, honour-problems, honour-conflicts, honour-restrictions, honour-related family life and girls oppressed in the name of honour.

The term honour-based violence is controversial and has generated questions concerning "us and the others"; about normality and anomaly, about integration and about what counts as Swedish. How does one speak of honour and violence without stigmatising and marginalising particular ethnic minorities? The debate among researchers has sometimes been loud and there is still no consensus concerning the meaning of the term honour and how it is related to the use of violence. Above all, it is the explanations of why the violence occurs that is the issue of disagreement, not the forms of violence. There is, however, a consensus about the fact that the violence and oppression are collectively enforced by a number of perpetrators and that women, as well as men, can be victims. Three main perspectives can be distinguished, each of them emphasizing different kinds of analysis and explanations of the problem of honour-related violence and oppression. Firstly there is the cultural perspective interpreting honour-based violence as cultural, focusing on value-based traditions and actions. According to this perspective, the violence is based on a so-called honour ideology. The second analysis is the so-called gender perspective. According to the gender perspective honour-based violence is linked to men's

global and structural dominance over women and women's general exposure to men's violence. Lastly, the intersectional perspective examines the problem through analysing how structures of gender, ethnicity and class are interrelated. An intersectional analysis puts emphasis on multiple power relations, both local and global. To this point, this type of integrated approach has not been prominent in Swedish research on men's violence against women.

The three perspectives share the perception of violence as originating from patriarchal power. Within the more firm cultural explanations however, western culture is not seen as patriarchal, whilst the gender perspective emphasises the similarities of violence against women across cultural borders. The intersectional perspective goes beyond the division between culture and gender and views the two categories as interlinked.

Researchers within all the three perspectives have focused their attention on different societal institutions' treatment of victims of honour-based violence. Representatives of the cultural perspective have urged social services to regard the violence as related to honour, to a larger extent than they have done previously. These researchers have also questioned the social services' ambition concerning the unity of the family and its "natural net-work". Researchers from the intersectional perspective, on the other hand, have pointed out that victims of honour-based violence have stated that they have felt obliged to adapt to the social services' interpretation of honour as cultural in order to obtain help.

In the other Nordic countries, the question of honour-based violence has been discussed mostly in terms of arranged marriages and/or forced marriages. The definitions and interpretations of these terms are debated. Some researchers consider arranged marriages and forced marriages to be completely different customs. Others make the point that arranged marriages in fact are the same phenomena as forced marriages. A third point of view is that the difference between forced marriages and arranged marriages should be made clear, but that the meaning of "free will" requires further discussion and analysis. These researchers examine the boundaries between forced and arranged marriages.

The report ends with a reflection and an analysis of the current needs for research in the field of honour-related violence and oppression in Sweden. There are, in particular, three unexplored areas that are highlighted. Firstly, it is of great importance to study the different forms of violence and its manifestations. Furthermore, few studies analyse the complexity of honour-based violence in families, so there is an urgent need for research investigating how ethnic discrimination, cultural stereotypes and class affect the problem. Moreover, how the perpetrators – men as well as women – are viewed, needs to be nuanced by use of qualitative studies in the specific situations in which violence occurs. Research on men as victims is also required. Studies regarding lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-gendered persons' exposure to honour-based violence is also called for. Additionally there is a need for research which examines public policy. Taking into account the relatively extensive efforts by the Swedish government to combat honour-based violence, an analysis and evaluation of the political solutions is called for. Additional studies are required regarding how the social services, the educational system and other institutions address the issue, as well as research that scrutinize governmental and non-governmental organisations' preventive and attitude-changing strategies. The variation between different authorities in the treatment of girls, boys and families has still not been the subject of scientific studies. Finally, there is a need for both qualitative and quantitative research, as well as a legal evaluation of arranged and forced marriages in Sweden.