



HONOUR KILLINGS & FORCED MARRIAGE ARE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & CHILD ABUSE

Violence against women was the main impetus for the founding of the **SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN'S COMMUNITY CENTRE (SAWCC)** in Montreal 33 years ago. We provide services, support and advocacy for South Asian¹ women and their families. Our analysis of violence against women is based on our work and informed by our understanding of patriarchy, a system that has existed for millennia, which privileges male dominance and control. While we have made significant advances towards achieving gender equality around the world, we have not eliminated patriarchy, which is so ubiquitous and insidious, that even those who suffer inequality because of it – women as well as many men -- often fail to clearly see this and buy into its systems of oppression.

Patriarchal systems and institutions are cross-cultural; what varies are the specifics. Coming from this understanding, we at the SAWCC feel very strongly that the **current focus on 'honour killings' and 'forced marriage'**² in Canada and parts of the western world is **misplaced, dangerous and racist**. 'Honour killings' and 'forced marriage' are nothing more nor less than 'violence against women', and depending on the age of the victim, 'child abuse'.

This is not about being defensive or not airing dirty linen in public. Essentializing this violence as something specific to certain communities, ethnicities, religious groups, etc. does a disservice and **denies the very long struggle all over the world, to end violence against women**. We need in all contexts and situations to recognize and identify the dynamics of patriarchy, which creates and justifies the male prerogative to use violence or the threat of violence to maintain patriarchal control over women. Anything else is extremely dangerous; **the implication is that women and children in non-minority communities are safe, when they are not**. Speaking about violence they may suffer, is difficult for all women and girls. Potentially inviting the stigma of racism on one's community by doing so, makes this even harder.

Essentializing these crimes is racist and based on ignorance. Men who kill their ex-partners and their children because they have a sense of emasculation, are not unique to certain communities. We have tragic proof of this in Québec and elsewhere. Patriarchy does not only exist in South Asian, Middle Eastern or religiously-observant communities. As a member of networks and organizations that work on the issue of violence against women cross-culturally, we know this to be **totally inaccurate and false**. We do not need new laws. We already have many in place, yet they have done little to end the violence against women and children. What we need is to target patriarchy and the sense of entitlement it generates that results in violence by men against women and children. This is much more challenging than scape-goating some communities with respect to 'honour killings' and 'forced marriage'.

Today there is an honour-killing and forced marriage 'industry'. Focussing on cultural specificities is often politically motivated, erroneous, dangerous, racist and totally misplaced. **We strongly believe all efforts and funds should focus on eliminating violence against women and children without cultural essentialism**. Anything else is a disservice to all the many and continuing victims of patriarchal violence.

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¹ South Asia includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan. Since the war in Afghanistan, we have also been providing services to women of Afghan origin.

² Traditions of 'arranged marriage' are long-standing and continue in many communities around the world. However equating all 'arranged marriages' with 'forced marriage' is totally erroneous. While in no way denying violence and coercion that may come into play, like with most things that affects the lives of women and girls in the context of patriarchal violence, the threat of violence and coercion may exist but it is far from the majority of cases. Equating 'forced marriage' with 'arranged marriage' does a disservice to individual young women and men who continue to choose this way of selecting their marriage partner. Moreover there is an implicit assumption that self-choice marriage is free of violence, something what we know is absolutely untrue.