



What is honor violence? Honor violence describes physical violence against a woman or girl by another family member for engaging in behavior deemed by the family to be shameful. Conduct such as resisting a marriage, seeking a divorce, dating, dressing in Western attire and wearing make-up, and having non-Muslim friends has resulted in honor violence. The beatings are intended to be corrective and usually stop if the girl changes her behavior.

What is an honor killing? When honor violence fails to dissuade a girl or woman from complying with the wishes of her family and giving up the behavior they consider shameful, family members may conclude that the only way they can regain the “honor” lost through her behavior is to kill her. Honor killings are usually premeditated and are often carried out with the knowledge and aid of multiple family members.

How is honor violence different from domestic violence? Although honor violence involves violence by one family member against another, it has characteristics that make it unique and warrant a different approach by social service providers and law enforcement. In the West, domestic violence is viewed as a crime and perpetrators do not enjoy the support of their families or communities. In contrast, honor violence is based on a centuries-old legal code and the conduct is justified in the name of religion. Additionally, honor violence is not planned and committed by the individual alone; rather the perpetrator has the support of his own family, and may even have the support of the victim’s family as well. A victim of domestic violence may have an extensive support network of family and friends, whereas a victim of honor violence is likely to be shunned by family and community because she is perceived to have caused the violence through her own behavior.

Does this happen in the United States? Yes. There are numerous recent examples of honor violence and honor killings in the U.S., a few of which are described below. We suspect that the number of these crimes is underreported because these crimes are generally considered simple domestic violence and no government agency tracks instances of honor violence.

Jessica Mokdad

In May 2011, Rahim Alfetlawi drove from his home in Minnesota to Michigan to track down his stepdaughter, 20-year-old Jessica Mokdad, who had recently moved away from Alfetlawi and her mother. After a confrontation, Alfetlawi shot Mokdad in the head, killing her. Investigators believe that Alfetlawi was angry with Mokdad for not strictly adhering to Muslim customs. He has been apprehended by police and is awaiting trial.

Sarah and Amina Said

In Texas in January 2008, Yaser Said shot and killed his teenage daughters, Sarah and Amina, because he was enraged by their Western lifestyle, particularly that they each had boyfriends. During a vigil held for the girls after their deaths, their brother took the microphone and suggested that his sisters were responsible for what had happened to them, saying “They pulled the trigger, not my dad.” Said fled after the murders and has not yet been apprehended.

Noor Almaleki

In Arizona in October 2009, Faleh Almaleki murdered his 20-year-old daughter, Noor, by running her down with his vehicle because he believed that she had shamed the family by becoming too Western and refusing to marry a man he had selected for her in Iraq. In February 2011, Almaleki was convicted of murder and sentenced to 34 ½ years in prison.

Fauzia A. Mohammad

In May 2008, Waheed Allah Mohammad stabbed his 19-year-old sister, Fauzia, outside of their home in Henrietta, New York. The stabbing occurred during a heated argument between Fauzia and a number of family members over Fauzia’s plan to move to New York City with a friend. Mohammad told investigators that he had stabbed his sister because she had disgraced their family by going to clubs and wearing immodest clothing and was a “bad Muslim girl.” Mohammad pleaded guilty to attempted murder and assault and was sentenced to 10 years in prison.