



At 20 it starts to rot

A book about
honour-related violence and
brave women

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Maria Hagberg, who has a B.A. in social work, is also a social worker, consultant, teacher, lecturer and public debater. She has worked for many years with vulnerable children, young people and women and she is one of the founders of the international Network against honour-related violence that was initiated in 2006. For the last few years she has worked as a project leader to build protected housing for young people, particularly girls, who have been exposed to honour-related violence and oppression.

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The international Network against honour-related violence was formed two years ago to make honour-related violence against women visible in public debates.

In the manifesto it is emphasised that honour-related violence is an international phenomenon that is misogynous, racist and homophobic. Legislation and the forming of society founded on religious and moral values foment the violence that, when it is being practiced, is a strong threat to equality work, both in Sweden and in other countries. Today the network has a membership of 600 individuals from all over the world and around 60 organisations. It is non-political, non-religious and non-affiliated to any unions. All the Swedish parliamentary parties are represented as well as researchers, journalists, a committed general public and many others. The idea is that we together can work as lobbyists so that honour-related violence is taken seriously and so that society does its utmost to oppose it. The network also wants to work for a secular and equal society where legislation is civil and based on human rights and where religion is a private matter.

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He told me that I couldn't move, however old I was. If I lived at home, and wasn't married, then I should obey him. I was his property, "a rag on the floor, something one steps on." Regardless of whether I was 30 or 40, as long as I wasn't married, he could kick me. (Laura 25 years old)

Honour-related violence and oppression against women is the subject of Maria Hagberg's book AT 20 IT STARTS TO ROT. It is based on interviews with young women with different ethnic backgrounds who have all lived in Sweden for all or most of their lives. They talk about their childhoods, their youth and growing up, about health and sexuality, about their everyday lives, their families and work, of their personal experiences of violence, beatings and vulnerability, but also about how they finally managed to break loose and take the step to an independent life. The book

finishes with an analysis based on the women's tales where the author also takes up the role of religion.

Maria Hagberg is a social worker, consultant, teacher and public debater with a good deal of experience of working with vulnerable women and children.

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Preface

Almost two years ago, I started to think about writing a book about the experiences I have had through my work with honour-related violence in Sweden. At that time, I could never have imagined that this project would start my interest in looking even more profoundly into this global social problem. I began to work on the book by contacting some of the young women I had met over the years, both professionally in my capacity as a social worker and in my charity work. The contacts we had established initially had gradually changed into a voluntary contact, in those cases where they had not always been that way. The contacts have continued for periods of between almost six months and up to four years.

Through the think tank Agora, I applied for and was later given a grant to produce the book through the Olof Palme Memorial Fund. I have carried this out through in-depth interviews with the women. I have then transcribed these interviews and rewritten them as tales. In spite of my contact with the women often stretching over several years, I discovered new things through our conversations and these things have had a great significance for their life choices so far. I hope that the reader will learn a great deal about honour-related violence and what we can do to eradicate it. Further, I hope that the young women's courage and tales will help other children, young people and adults in similar situations in order to take the step leading to an independent life.

I would like to thank my editor at Premiss publishers for the support and constructive discussions during my writing of the book. The young women's personal reflections and points of view have been most important, as have those views of friends who have read the book and expressed opinions on its contents. My own family's critical opinions and incredible patience, during the time I was interviewing and writing, have been invaluable. I would also like to thank all those who contributed to the production of the book as I feel this is an important contribution to the debate on honour-related violence, both in Sweden and in other countries. My hope is that it will contribute to a positive change for those subjected to violence and in public discussion of social problems.

Höganäs, December 2008

Maria Hagberg

Why a book on violence in the name of honour?

"The call resounds, nursery school for everyone." That was what was shouted in the demonstrations in the 1970s when I was young. Women should have the right to a job of their own and their own income, which presumed well-developed childcare, then as well as now. It turned out that this demand was insufficient. Childcare became a trap for women where the women themselves, to a great extent, had to work with children and sick and old people outside the home, with a salary commensurate with that.

Similar consequences affected parents' guaranteed income whilst staying home with a child and contributed to the preservation of female salaries that once had been established based on the idea that the woman was the "weaker sex." Today young women at interviews are still asked when they are going to have children or if they are pregnant and then winnowed out. Men in Sweden today take out a considerably smaller part of the legal right to stay at home with the child. The work market is still adjusted to the idea that the man is the breadwinner and the woman has chief responsibility for the home and children, as well as a strong emphasis on the heterosexual nuclear family as the only family constellation.

Back in the 1960s and 1970s, the sexual revolution was at its zenith, and *Blommor och Bin* (Birds and Bees) shops could be found on almost every street corner. Vilgot Sjöman's informational films, the Curious films, were very successful in much of the world and Sweden became known as a "bed of sin" where the Swedish women were unusually liberated. Sexual education in schools became a matter of course.

Sex outside marriage became possible because of the dissemination of contraception.

Everyone participated in the state school's educational curriculum. Religious knowledge was introduced and education in Christianity disappeared. Now the situation is once again different. The independent school reform that was introduced a few years ago was initially a pretext to introduce a wider choice of alternative teaching methods. Instead, a plethora of different religious independent schools have been started where children are indoctrinated from an early age in different beliefs and into being brought up segregated by gender, with financial support from the state and local authorities.

Cohabiting became more common than marriage at the end of the 20th century. It was possible to live together, divorce and have children without either the blessing or condemnation of the church.

The women's movement was powerful and introduced several important demands such as individual taxation and the right to an abortion. However, this latter only came about following a tough battle and with help from our sisters in Poland. Today the situation is quite different in Poland with a very strict ban on abortions, enforced by conservative forces and the Catholic church.

Skå GustavJonsson and Anna Lisa Kälvesten's reports from the children's village Skå proved the importance of the social heritage. Social services and the Social Insurance Office were expanded to look after children who were being badly treated and to contribute with economic support to badly paid single parents, particularly women. In today's Sweden, single women with children constitute the poorest group.

At the start of the 1970s, Sweden brought in a law prohibiting corporal punishment and a change of attitude occurred in our view of children. Development of the Swedish nursery school has had a great importance on the women's emancipation movement as that element of working with children and sick and old people was located outside the home. Moreover, pedagogy that has been designed for the needs and development of the child has also influenced the view of children in our society.

I was personally involved in politics in the 1970s in general, and specifically in women's issues.

During my more than 30 professional years to date, I have primarily worked with children and young people, over recent years on matters concerning violence and oppression in close relationships and the last five years with young people who have been subjected to honour-related violence and oppression in Sweden. I saw at an early stage that this violence was strikingly different from that labelled partner violence. That is why I also took a stand against calling it "men's violence against women." It was obvious that this violence was very complicated in the actual work I had. In fact, honour-related violence is amongst the hardest I have had to deal with during my almost 20 years as a social worker. It is practiced collectively throughout the country and across borders. It is an international problem that occurs all over the world. The violence is vehemently misogynous and also homophobic and racist. The perpetrators of violence are considered heroes by those closest to them, as opposed to the perpetrators I have met of domestic violence. These latter are considered perpetrators by those closest to them. The main aim is to control the woman's sexuality but it is also important to control the blood-relationship and heteronormativity is important.

I meet employees within different activities, organisations and authorities, with different positions and power, and I meet the victims directly in my work. There is still an enormous lack of knowledge within the area of honour-related violence, which leads to consequences for the victims.

I have continued to work politically all the time and naturally raised these issues there. It soon became apparent that there was a great political resistance to this. So I left the party I worked with at the time for another that had a feminist agenda in its manifesto, which I saw as a prerequisite for working against this violence. But even here I met with opposition and left party politics.

The central element in honour-related violence, the control of women's sexuality, the myth of the hymen and control of virginity has clear connections to the preservation of stereotypical gender roles and the subordination of women. This has been confirmed to me further through my interviews with the young women. I saw that this violence is a strong threat to politics that advocates equality between the sexes. Now I work with all politicians in the Swedish parliament, regardless of party affiliation, who want to work for change.

I have met resistance within politics when I have highlighted the significance of religion and tradition for female oppression. It is still taboo to question the influence of religion on people's lives and values. In surveys on secular states, that is to say where legislation is secular and religion should be a private matter, it is claimed that Sweden is the most secular country in the world. However, it is only a few years since the church was disestablished, and at that time state religion had been the norm since Gustav Vasa in the 16th century.

The catechism, Martin Luther's interpretation of the Bible, for a long time, was the only teaching material and the priest held parish catechetical meetings. The church was often the authority that imposed punishments for moral transgressions, punishments founded on the religious texts. Later the imposition of punishments for moral crimes was transferred to the secular society.

The myth of virginity or the "myth of the hymen", that is to say that a young woman should bleed on her wedding night, still lives on even in Swedish society. Control of sexuality means mortal danger for women, but also for men, all over the world where the concept of honour is strong and where this is further reinforced by the interpretation of religious texts or where religion constitutes the legislation of the country. Where religion is politics and where religious texts constitute the legislation of the country, women's and children's rights are very much neglected.

In the ongoing debates in Sweden, those with contrary opinions have claimed that to talk of honour-related violence stigmatises immigrants and so we who have highlighted this issue have often been called racists.

This is a peculiar argument for many reasons. First and foremost the violence itself is racist!

Most of the almost 150 young people I have met over the last few years say that they cannot marry a partner of another ethnicity, skin colour or religious affiliation (which is not racist, but discriminatory). Many believe that you are born into a religion, and this is genetic, therefore a confusion of religious affiliation and ethnicity is made, which is called racism.

Many of those who have chosen to be a part of the Network against honour-related violence (of which I was one of the founder members) are immigrants themselves, or are entire immigrant organisations that even in their former home countries fought against this violence, for human rights and for democracy. Honour-related violence is also extremely oppressive to LGBT people and occurs all over the world. It is not an isolated "Swedish" problem, but an international one. It is carried out both in war, where systematic rapes are often used to "dishonour" the enemy's women, and in the family. The woman is seen as a chattel that can be sold within the family, or into trafficking that flourishes in the aftermath of war.

Honour-related violence is large worldwide violence and is carried on further through conservative traditions and dogmatically practiced religion.

There is a clearly expressed ideology within parts of the Swedish women's movement that talks of "men's violence to women". It is separatist and excludes men from the battle against violence. The attitude makes women victims and men perpetrators.

We formed the Network against honour-related violence because we saw that this violence affects women, men and children and we also saw that the violence is maintained by men and women all over the world.

Almost a year ago I felt I had had enough of the skewed debate being carried on in Sweden for several years, and which I had partly become involved in. My aim with this book is to show the importance of women's emancipation, which to a certain degree has been neglected and made invisible owing to the ideological attitudes that parts of the women's movement in Sweden have taken regarding men's violence to women. I also want to highlight the brave young women who, sometimes at risk to their own lives or their plans for the future, dare to take that step forward. Today they have to pay an exceptionally high price for it. Sometimes they carry out their emancipation in less than 24 hours: an emancipation that has taken us in Sweden almost a century to achieve. We have had peace in Sweden for 200 years, which naturally has contributed to women having been able to improve their situations. Collaboration with the working-class movement should not be underestimated and the transfer of social work from the church to the state and municipality has also been of great importance. It is significant that religion has acquired a subordinate role, but even that is thanks to the female political progress of the last century.

But laws do not change attitudes. That is why we still have a good deal of work ahead of us. When a rape victim is questioned as to her behaviour or choice of clothes before the crime, this is explained in ancient values with their origin in the religious texts. "Eve is eternally condemned as she allowed the serpent to talk through her mouth." The view of a woman either as a whore or a madonna still has a firm stronghold and is written in the religious texts, specifically in the monotheistic religions of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. They have largely been interpreted by a patriarchal clergy all over the world.

Through my interviews, I want to highlight the traditions of honour that have been incorporated into the religious texts for patriarchal and racist purposes. These interpreters have then chosen to emphasise certain elements, but it is apparent that their interest is to retain those elements that subordinate women. The oppression is worst where religion and religious values are the only grounds for legislation – particularly against women and children, but also against LGBT people, regardless of gender. Honour-related violence is, as I have already mentioned, misogynous, racist and homophobic and its main aim is to control women's sexuality. The importance of the offspring to maintain the blood-relationship ensures the impossibility of mixed relations. The woman is particularly exposed during war as a raped woman dishonours "the honour of the enemy and his property." The maintenance of ownership through the woman turns her into a chattel in marriage agreements and the importance of sexuality makes anything that threatens the heteronormative "dangerous".

The book has come about through in-depth interviews with seven adults, young women I have had contact with. They are, or have been, subjected to honour-related oppression and violence in Sweden. Most of them have lived in Sweden for most of their lives. The women come from different countries. We have maintained contact over several years through meetings, telephone conversations, text messages and emails, and I have followed their emancipation processes.

The interviews have concerned their own life stories from childhood to where they are today.

They are arranged into different themes such as childhood, youth, education, leisure time, reproductive health and sexuality, relationships/marriage, possible religious affiliation, family attitude, view of bringing up children, view of reasons for honour-related violence, studies/profession/choice of occupation or profession and dreams for the future.

Two of the women whom I interviewed decided later not to continue any further. One abstained right at the start, shortly after the interview and one abstained at the end, as the final editing was being done.

Both of them have a complicated and ambivalent relationship to their families and their standpoints are regrettable but understandable. It also shows the incredibly strong ties that exist in these dysfunctional families and how difficult it is for these young women to break away and get on with their lives. Often the easiest decision is to choose a path that involves adapting to the demands of the family and subordination within the system.

It was both through my professional work and also my voluntary involvement in the Network against honour-related violence that I came into contact with the young women. At the time I asked them to participate in the book, the professional contact had led to a totally voluntary contact. All of those have given their permission for me to use their life stories in the book. They have actively participated in the production of the texts with their points of view and criticism.

My background

I have a lifelong experience of violence in close relationships, both personal and professional. For the last 15 years I have been working primarily with issues of violence in close relationships and the last five years specifically with honour-related violence. Through my 30 years of political and trade union involvement, I am very aware of the problems and gender-perspective thinking. It has also made me aware that the difficulties are much more profound when a country like ours still has a long way to go to achieve

social equality. Norms and values that have been fixed by religion and traditions still have a strong foothold and, when it comes to equality, there is often only superficial knowledge.

I am involved with honour-related violence as I work with it professionally and also meet those subjected to it. But I also influence through my voluntary involvement with the Network against honour-related violence. I have been a woman's activist since I was a teenager. I, and many others, see the threat that this violence represents for equality. A global backlash is taking place now concerning equality between women and men, where religious and traditional dogmatism are not insignificant elements, and these forces obstruct a world that respects human rights. It is both dangerous and naive not to be aware that these forces have clear connections to extremism. It is obvious to me that we need a secular society with a civil legal system based on human rights to safeguard democracy and freedom of speech. It is also the best way to safeguard religious freedom where religion should be a private matter.

Now an academic reinterpretation of grounds for discrimination is fashionable where women are seen as a minority group. It is called intersectionality and briefly means that different mechanisms of oppression all work together. In honour-related violence, this is obvious but in spite of this, the academic world does not dare take honour-related violence seriously. Even before it was even invented as a concept, intersectionality has been well known in the women's movement as it affects women in particular. The consequence has unfortunately been that the extent of oppression of women has not been seen and the academic world can, with a few exceptions, see itself as a participant in the backlash of the politics of equality.

Who thinks that a young person shouldn't be able to choose her own life? Those who are subjected to honour-related violence may not, whether they are in Sweden or another part of the world.

Honour-related violence is a charged concept. The fact that it is also racist and homophobic does not make the issue easier. When part of the political left-wing, in the shape of young feminists and of researchers with a culturally relativist attitude, reacted so strongly I could only find one explanation: This was a sign of the left-wing's increasingly nationalistic attitude – to question religious fundamentalism was also to question political fundamentalism. Politically it is remarkable that one doesn't want to see the fascist undertones involved in honour-related violence, characterised as it is by contempt for women and a conservative view of women, homophobia and racism.

I have a good deal of support both in my professional and voluntary work with honour violence, not least from the young women I meet in my daily work. That support, and my long feminist involvement, are strong motivators for me. My hope is that the girls' tales will open those people's eyes who have not understood the danger of a society that trivialises or hides violence in the name of honour. I also hope that my book will give courage and hope to the young women, and men, who have not yet dared look for help for the violence and oppression they are subjected to. Last, but not least, I hope that the tales will inspire those in power, researchers and professionals to become active and to make decisions to ensure that all young people in Sweden have the same human rights, regardless of gender, ethnicity and religious affiliation. Naturally I hope that the book impartially reproduces the descriptions of these young women's lives and gives hope for change for them, their families and for many others who live in similar circumstances.

Sofia

Sofia and I met before she moved to a safe house the first time and we have met several times during the periods she needed protection because of her family. Since then we have continued to maintain contact for several years.

Laura

Laura made contact with me through a mutual friend who was a client of hers. She knew that I worked with feminist issues and specifically with honour-related violence. Laura needed support in the process of moving out of her home and we met in spring 2007.

Maryam

I came into contact with Maryam about six months ago when I interviewed another young woman. Some time ago she decided to participate in the book with her story and this shows how violence and oppression in the name of honour can lead to dire consequences for the young person.

Ida

We also met when I was working with a safe house. She had been taken abroad by her family and returned under dramatic circumstances and was placed in a safe house. The relationship she had at that time didn't last and she was in a difficult situation before she found a flat and work again. We have had contact for almost four years now.

Susanne

She contacted me through a mutual acquaintance and we began to see each other from time to time.

The reason she contacted me was that she had heard about my involvement in honour-related violence. We have known each other for about two years.

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Sofia was three years old when her family came to Sweden from what was then Palestine. Her journey to Sweden went via Denmark and Germany. Sofia has four siblings. Today she is 20 years old.

My sister, who is 19, married a friend of our father's. My father was very jealous and he didn't like the set-up. Her marriage was unhappy. She is strictly controlled and is forced to be on her own a great deal.

Sofia ran away from home the first time when she was being threatened into a forced marriage. The first suitor she was introduced to lived in Lebanon and was a cousin of her brother-in-law. Her sister knew that Sofia had a boyfriend in Lebanon, but she didn't worry about that. Instead the sister and her husband nagged the parents until they managed to get them to accept the man's cousin.

"You can go there with us at his expense," they said. According to my family they didn't force anyone, but I knew that in actual fact it meant that I had to accept the marriage. I didn't want to and my brother promised that he would protect me. But when it came to it, he let me down.

Now I had two men in my life – the guy in Lebanon and my brother-in-law's cousin. I didn't know which one I should choose. Later, just before I ran away from home, I had another suitor. He was 35 and came from Saudi Arabia. My father was against him as he thought he was too old. But my mother tried to influence my father to change his mind. This suitor was rich. Money is important to my mother, but not as important for my father, who wants a good man, but for my mother it's enough if he is rich so I don't have to live in a bad financial situation, as our family lived all the time.

The ideal suitor for Sofia's parents is a man who prays, fasts and is a practising Muslim. He should be from the same culture, country and preferably village as Sofia. The husband-to-be must absolutely not come from Lebanon, but should be a Palestinian in Lebanon, as they themselves are. The father doesn't want him to be related, but any possible relationship is not very important to the mother.

THE LIES AND THE FORBIDDEN

Sofia can hardly remember anything from her childhood that was permissible, almost everything was forbidden. For example, it was absolutely forbidden to play with boys and once girls became seven, they weren't even allowed to talk to boys.

Once my father saw me with a boy and beat me hard. My mother had asked me to keep quiet about her having allowed me, otherwise she would also have been beaten.

It became a matter of lying about everything from an early age, even things that weren't wrong.

SIBLINGS

The siblings were brought up being told that their father was always right. The family had a world of their own, they shouldn't look at the world around them, because everyone else behaved unacceptably according to their parents.

"The Swedes don't want us," my father said, "They want our grandchildren, so they can be Swedes."

This is what they said to us as we grew up. I couldn't have any friends I wanted. My parents have always isolated us so we wouldn't know how others function and so know right from wrong. That was why my father was doubtful when I was to start university. He said it was there that I got friends who influenced me.

Sofia's brother is 27 and has never had a girlfriend. Sofia has never seen him talk or be around a girl in general and she is sorry for him. He is super-shy, doesn't dare talk to a girl and was scared that he wouldn't manage to be with a woman.

Now the brother has started studying at university. It is a long way to travel and he commutes every day. But he can't move away from his family, he can't cook and he can't take responsibility for himself. Now when he comes home late at night, his sister-in-law has cooked for him and she is trying to get him married to her sister.

HELPING AT HOME

Sofia always had to help at home, wash, cook food and do absolutely everything, plus work outside the home. The father did nothing, he didn't even make his own bed. The mother just managed to cook food. Is she ever did the washing up, then the whole family heard about it, and Sofia was told off. At the time she was the only daughter living at home. From time to time she and her mother fought.

My mother claimed that the washing wasn't clean. "I have washed for you, and still you are not satisfied!" "I don't want gratitude from you, I just want you to be nice to me."

"Oh, should I say thank you?? I who have brought you up all these years, and who has managed your father. If it hadn't been for you two I would have had another life!"

My brother sat and listened. He told my mother that I did everything that the other daughters didn't do, and still received abuse. I felt then that he was on my side, in spite of everything. My mother is bitter.

Father became so angry that Sofia was beaten just because she came home at 8 o'clock at night.

Once he beat me when I had been at a friend's and had come home late. Then no one else in the family got involved. It wasn't just a simple slap. He took his belt and hit me with it all over my body. But no one dared do anything. My mother said I deserved it as "I had become Swedish."

My mother has also beaten me. As I understand it, it's normal that mothers carry out beatings. My mother beat me and then complained that her hands hurt because of me. My mother is good at boxing ears.

Beatings went on throughout my growing up. I don't remember the first time I was beaten, but it happened a lot when I was younger.

From time to time Sofia still suffers psychologically even today as does her sister who was married off early. According to Sofia, her sister was always on the outside and as she remembers, was beaten on a daily basis.

If I had been my sister, I would never talk to my father again. I once told my mother that it is forbidden to beat people and then she got angry with me.

When I ran away and was with my sister, she asked me why I had run away from home. I asked her if she remembered when our father beat me with an antenna. Then my sister answered that he was my father and has the right to beat his daughter. I answered that he hasn't the right, not that way. My sister thought he did, and that it was no reason to leave home. "He has done the same thing to all of us other siblings and we haven't done what you have done."

I told her that I would never accept that my husband beat me, but then I would leave him. "Once – then that's enough!"

Then she answered: "Yes, you really are Swedish. There's nothing wrong in beating your wife a few times, that's what our mother says."

I maintained that it was wrong while my sister explained that this is the way it is because "a man is a man and a woman is a woman. He has the right to beat his wife if he is angry with her."

Sofia doesn't think that her mother was beaten when she grew up. But she married the children's father. He beat her while the children watched. There has been a good deal of fighting between the parents, sometimes involving knives and there was a good deal of violence.

Sofia remembers that her brother once had to go to hospital because his father had beaten him.

My brother was 15-16 and had been at football training. My mother told him to go shopping. He said that he was very tired and didn't want to. Then our father came and boxed him round the ears so he started to bleed and there was blood everywhere. An ambulance fetched him. He was bleeding so much that the blood wouldn't stop. I was small then but I remember all the blood and I also remember wondering why our father had done that.

Our father sat crying and wondered why "someone had done such a thing to his son?" I sat like a question mark. "Why is he saying that when he had beaten him? Whatever is going on?"

"He beat him," I thought. "What's happening? I saw our father beat him and now is he saying that he didn't do it? Whatever is happening?"

We still lived in a refugee camp and we hadn't got our residence permits. That event has haunted me over the years.

Sofia remembers that the children were very frightened when their parents were fighting. Once her brother pulled a knife on their mother. The only thing Sofia could do was to go to her room, put a pillow over her head, cry and hope that her parents would stop fighting.

There was no safety net around the family. Sofia was never at a friend's or in another family. Neither she nor her sisters were allowed to sleep over at anyone's. It wasn't until she got to the sixth form that Sofia realised that the violence in her family was wrong. But she was brought up to believe it was right. Many girls in her class came from the same culture as she did.

My father says that "It is just us who are right, and all the others are wrong." "It is just us who are at the top of the list, all the others are at the bottom." "Everyone, most people, have a bad reputation, people talk about them." "We have a good reputation, people say that my daughters have a good reputation, we don't do anything wrong."

I don't think that my father understands that regardless of whether we do something or not, they will talk behind our backs. But he neither sees nor hears that. According to him, we have the best reputation and so we are better than everyone else. He says that no one is like him. That is how he has brought us up.

At school, Sofia's class was going to talk about psychology and violence. They were discussing what it meant to be assaulted and how it influences you. This was a shock for Sofia. She had heard the word assault but she had believed that it was something very serious.

I asked my friend. "But is it assault when you beat your children? Don't you get beaten every day? Her friend answered "Ssh, don't say anything".

When we got out of the lesson we talked about it.

"But you know," said the friend, "we live differently from Swedes, we allow beatings but they don't."

Then I told my friend that that was wrong. She answered: "Yes, but that's just how our parents are." So she was more aware of it than I was.

Sofia found out when she was in her second year of sixth form that it was forbidden to beat children in Sweden.

STUDIES

Sofia was the first in her family to go into higher studies. The day she was to start her father came to her.

My father who had previously encouraged my plans to continue studying, had now changed his mind. He realised that he had begun to lose his hold, that I was becoming freer and more Swedish and so he felt that my studies would lead me into "wrong paths". My father reasoned that it was just as good to marry me off at once. That was his way of saying that I should be a housewife like my sisters.

ECONOMIC BLACKMAIL

Sometimes she got her brother on her side in the fights at home. Such as the time she argued about when whether she should go to school or go and get a job.

I said that "If I don't go to school, I won't receive a study grant."

Even though Sofia lived at home, her parents forced her to get a grant. She could have managed without a grant as she also had a job, but her parents wanted the money. Sofia worked almost every weekend and she took a grant. Her parents demanded her money from her, even though they lived on social security.

My grant money went to my brother's address; he and I had decided that. My brother also had bad experiences from home and he tried to help me and hide how much I received from my parents. My parents couldn't see exactly what my loan was. I said that I just took half the loan and received 5,000 kronor per month, and they accepted that.

But it was hard for her to hide from her parents when the loan came, as the pay slip was sent to her home. It could be for 6,000 kronor.

I remember particularly one occasion when my pay slip arrived. My mother wanted half of it.

"And what do I get for myself?" I asked.

"But you don't need anything for yourself. If you can borrow money from CSN, we should have 3,000 – 4,000 of it." My father asked how much I had left and I answered 2,000. I needed 1,000 of that for my bus card and 1,000 for myself.

He said that I didn't need 1,000 for myself but I explained that I had to buy books. "Give your mother the money now," he just said.

There were discussions about the money every single month and it became increasingly difficult for Sofia to keep up with her studies. Her oldest brother had also had to obey strict rules. Basically, he had to give all his study grant to his parents and so could not live an independent life like student friends of his own age. Now Sofia's father wanted to continue with her. But he didn't.

DEPRESSION

At the end of the second year of sixth form, Sofia studied ethics and was doing a group project on the death sentence. She asked her teacher if it was normal to have suicidal thoughts. That was the only thing she asked but the teacher took her hand, ignored the lesson and led her away. She ran with Sofia to the school nurse who talked to Sofia and made some appointment times, although Sofia sat there on the first occasions without saying anything.

I just thought that they had told us at home that we shouldn't say anything outside the home, that everything that took place at home was secret. Not even my best friend knew that I had a boyfriend in Lebanon. I was scared, very scared, everything was wrong. I felt really ashamed.

Over time I dared to open up more to the nurse. I went to her for about a year. During this time they took my mobile away from me at home and I began to think about running away. My mother knew I had contact with a boy in Lebanon. I had told her. We had met in Syria when my family were visiting.

My mother called me everything under the sun, the least despicable was whore. The others are such terrible words, words I don't even know, they just sound so terrible but I don't know what they mean. I don't even want to say them in Arabic, I don't want to say them at all. Some of them mean more or less the following, and they are really ugly words: "You are the lowest there is, you are nothing." You say them to a bad person who doesn't have respect for anyone, someone who just tricks people. She said these to me, her own daughter. And then she hit me, boxed my ears.

My brother stopped my mother and protected me even though he was furious with me and took away my mobile phone. I didn't have a mobile for more than six months.

I had a mobile at school, secretly, it was really important. I talked to my boyfriend on the home telephone with a special card. Today I can't understand how I dared, but I did anyhow. We, me and my boyfriend in Lebanon, also kept in touch at school via the Internet. If I sat at the Internet at home, my sister was right next to me and checked what I did all the time. My mother is not so stupid so she just shouted "When will you stop with this, it will only end badly." They were looking for suitors for me.

VIRGINITY

My mother was so suspicious "What has happened with your boyfriend and you?" She thought that a lot of things had happened between us. I didn't want to leave him. My siblings had married directly after school, before they were 20, so I should be married too. If a boy asks a girl how old she is and she answers 20, that sounds old. So they think "aha, there's no one who wanted her, that's why she is 20 and unmarried." My father explained it like this: "When it is 16-17, it begins to open and by 20, it rots!" That was the hymen he was talking about. I laughed: "So quickly."

But Sofia thought that this was just rubbish, that the hymen would rot after three years. She thought that he said that just so she would get married young and that it was easier to have children then. She should marry to avoid doing anything wrong, that is to say "lose her virginity" before she was married. Her father was not stupid. He thought that soon she would want to try sex and so she must be married off before she did that.

Virginity is the most important thing. That the hymen doesn't exist is something we don't believe in Islam. Neither the boy or the girl should "lose their virginity" applies similarly to both of them.

But then you come to different interpretations of the Koran. I have personally read "not to fast is worse than losing your virginity." But people don't see it like that. It has become cultural.

"Don't lose your virginity, it is something big, because if you get pregnant with a boy and then with another, then you have children with several men. Then the children get older, they don't know each other and go and marry each other, and that is wrong," my father said to me.

It becomes inbreeding when you don't know the background of a person.

I told him that it is the same thing with a boy if he marries several girls and leaves them. But then my father answered that "a woman is a woman and a man is a man."

My mother said that you can't see on a boy if he has lost his virginity, but you can see it on a girl. Then I asked what that had to do with God, my mother answered that "It is because it is wrong, it is large and important."

Sofia didn't have much knowledge about her body. She had heard about periods in her school but no more. Her parents did not allow her to go to lessons about sex and cohabitation and she never went to biology lessons. Her sisters had gone to them anyhow. They were interested and dared, and they had friends they talked to.

I had heard that it is harder to get pregnant if you use contraceptives and that you could be sterile if you took them. My mother said all the time that none of my sisters used contraceptives, for they didn't want to lose the capacity to get pregnant. For you should have plenty of children. The problem with my mother is that as she has not had a good life, she thinks that her children shouldn't have good lives either.

FIRST ESCAPE

One day a few years ago Sofia had enough of her home conditions and decided to escape. The reason was that she was threatened with being married off to her brother-in-law's cousin.

I planned the escape with the school nurse for a year. There was a good deal going on at home and my brother had just taken my mobile from me when he found out that I had contact with the boy in Lebanon. I started to gather my things from home that I then gave to the school nurse who in her turn gave them to the social secretary.

At home they checked on how and who I met so it was hard to sneak around. I decided to escape one day when my parents were not at home. No one knew about it, not even my neighbour Leo who I had got to know, or my best friend. I told Leo that I was going to my grandmother and wouldn't be back for several months.

FIRST STAY IN A SAFE HOUSE

The social secretary fetched me near my home in her car. It all went wrong when we were to get going and I couldn't open the car door. Leo came and wondered what was going on.

He has interpreted a lot for the social services so he recognised the social secretary and became suspicious. The car was full of bags and cases. Leo stood there with his girlfriend and looked, and at any moment my sister was coming visiting. We left anyway and I turned off my mobile phone.

But Sofia only stayed away from home one week. There were several things that influenced her to return. She had a tough time and didn't feel good. In the safe house, there was no one she had confidence in and could talk to.

Through a friend I had contact with via the mobile, I heard that my mother was in hospital and it was serious.

I became faint, cried and started to doubt. I thought that if I returned home, my brother would sign papers that he wouldn't hurt me and that no one would know that I had left home.

The first night I slept at home after the escape, I was terrified. My brother would hardly talk to me but then he changed quite a lot. Before I ran away from home, he had been rather strict with me and controlled everything. Afterwards he didn't care if I talked on the mobile and no longer asked me who I was talking to.

Sofia had returned home from the safe house because her mother was sick but it turned out that this wasn't true and she was angry with her brother when she came home. He had tricked her, but answered that it was only a way of getting hold of her. Sofia thought that she was stupid as she had forgotten that her mother was not at home at the time. But there were also many other things that contributed to her returning home. Sofia had felt insecure in the home she had lived in.

One day we were going out to bathe. They asked me if I had swimming clothes. They wanted to buy a swimsuit for me, but I didn't want one, as I wanted to bathe in shorts and a top. It felt like they were forcing me. They nagged me but I was determined; I didn't want a swimsuit. Finally it felt as though they wanted to force me into something I didn't want.

For me, being undressed at a beach is not freedom. I am not accustomed to that, I wanted to be dressed a bit more. At the time I didn't know that my brother lied about my mother's illness so I decided to return home. My social secretary came and tried to convince me to stay in the home, but I didn't want to. They drove me to the train and I went back home. My sister came and met me.

Her parents hadn't returned home yet, and they still don't know that she has run away from home twice. The secret was strictly kept within the family, for better or worse.

THE NEIGHBOUR

Sofia had her first contact with her neighbour Leo once when she was in conflict with his ex-girlfriend. Then Leo became a good friend who she asked advice of in the beginning. He often said: "Don't do anything you don't want to do." To begin with, he didn't show his emotions, but he was there for her.

Leo's girlfriend at the time had thrown out my sisters' pram from the stairwell. I was angry with her but she just turned on her heels and left. The next time I met Leo I told him what I thought about what had happened. I asked him to tell his wife not to do that again. He said that it wasn't his wife and that they only lived together because they had a daughter together. I asked him anyhow to tell his girlfriend to stop that. He said OK and laughed, but he also said that I shouldn't pay any attention about what had happened.

Leo had a dog that he went out with every day, and every morning at 8 o'clock he knocked on Sofia's window to see her. One day he threw a bit of paper onto the window as he wanted her to open the window. But it took several weeks before she dared to do that. When she finally did it, he threw in a note and went away. On the note was his email address, name and telephone number. Sofia didn't dare open the window and talk to him again. She was frightened and didn't know what this meant when she had a boyfriend in Lebanon. It felt wrong.

Then it took several weeks before Leo came back. Then she opened the window and started to talk to him. He asked her to ring so they could talk some more.

I began to send text messages and he got my number and we began a serious contact. First he wondered if it was possibly more than just friendship. Then he asked me if I had someone already. I told Leo that I had a boyfriend in Lebanon and that influenced my relationship with him. He lost interest a bit, changed his mind, just made contact by text messages and not as often as before. He stopped ringing. But then we met each other again, in the basement, and talked about everything. After that our relationship began to develop more and more.

Sofia had feelings for Leo that she had never felt before. At the same time the contact with the boyfriend in Lebanon petered out and didn't feel as it had done before. Everything became so difficult – she had a boyfriend waiting for her in Lebanon, there was the family suitor who was going to fetch her and here was Leo who she wanted to be with.

PREGNANCY

Sofia became pregnant and when she went to the medical service she was in her seventh week. She waited such a long time as she didn't know she could get pregnant when she had got sperm in her.

I got pregnant but didn't know how it had happened. We tried to be so careful that I didn't "lose my virginity" before I got married. But I still got pregnant. I was ignorant. Even when I was 18 I still believed that you could get pregnant by kissing. First Leo asked for a hug, he got that after a few months: I had to think carefully before he got anything. Then it just moved forwards without my being able to handle it.

I began to be scared the second month without a period. When I then started to feel sick and throw up I realised that something wasn't right. I rang the local surgery and asked if a cold could affect my period. They answered that it would be a good idea if I took a pregnancy test. When I did that it showed positive immediately.

It was an utter nightmare. I didn't know what to do. If my family had found out that would have been the end for me. I felt terrible. I don't think I would have been around now if they had found out. Or I would have been treated like an animal or been locked in, without being able to go out anywhere. I don't know how far it would have gone.

Every time I saw a series or a film from our culture that discusses honour my father said: "She deserves death." His way of saying it made me take it seriously. The feeling is even stronger for my mother. I have a feeling that my mother is stricter than my father is. That is why I think my mother would have done a lot.

Leo and I had been given a time at the guidance centre for young people to find out exactly when I got pregnant. Luckily my family believed I was throwing up because of my cold. The evening before I found out I was pregnant I really felt awful and was sick all night. Then my father said: "They should go in with you to the emergency ward, you are really sick."

I panicked and thought it might be something else. I couldn't get that thought out of my mind. Something was not right in my body. My brother luckily couldn't drive but we were going to go the following day.

It was Ramadan at this time. My father didn't think I should fast when I had such a cold. My mother complained that I didn't fast and told me that I had become "Swedish." I had to hear that from one person and then others. One day I shouted. "Your wife says that I don't fast because I am not religious any more. You say that I shouldn't fast because I am sick. What should I do?"

It was difficult at home but even school was difficult.

At this stage Sofia had left sixth form. She had applied to nursing school and got in but began to lose interest in studying. When she realised that she was pregnant, she became worried that Leo wouldn't support her, for that is how it is in her culture.

In my culture the boy would say that I had been with someone else. But Leo was there for me and our feelings for each other began to grow. He started to show more feelings than before. Leo was with me all the way; he rang the guidance centre and took care of that, and he booked a time and took me there. Leo also came with me when I had the abortion. Afterwards he fetched me in a taxi and drove me home.

Then I felt awful for a few days and had stomach pains. So he took me to the hospital every day. He took his responsibility. We continued to have sex without protection so I thought I was pregnant again. But it was a false alarm and now I got contraceptives from the guidance centre.

SECOND ESCAPE

Sofia still lived at home with her parents but the situation there became increasingly untenable and she felt worse and worse. She knew that her elder brother had asked her younger brother to keep an eye on her. In spite of Sofia now going to higher education, she still had contact with the school nurse who had inspired her with confidence and this nurse advised her to run away again. And Sofia finally did this when her parents once again started to talk about the suitor who was going to come to Sweden from Lebanon.

The same evening it happened again, my father beat me. Leo heard everything through the wall, he became furious and rang the police. There was a great turmoil. My one brother tried to protect me again, but my father and my other brother shoved him away. I felt that: "No, now it has to stop! I felt so strongly that, I didn't want what happened to my big sister to happen to me.

The following day was a holiday. On the Monday I tried to get hold of the social secretary and the school nurse and we started to plan my second escape.

While the preparations for the second escape were going on, Leo moved to a flat in town. It became easier for him and Sofia to meet there.

I told him that I would stay with him. He supported me and promised not to leave me. He helped me pack up my bags and I got all my things out of my home. It was easy as I did the washing every week. Sometimes my mother was on the Internet when I worked with the washing, and sometimes I could throw rubbish away and move things at the same time. And when Leo moved he took my things with him at the same time. No one noticed anything at home.

The time just before the escape Sofia didn't go to school. Instead, she was at home at Leo's preparing herself.

We decided on a day. I had a lot of things left to fetch. My friend helped me. We had to carry so many things. On the bus we naturally met someone who knew my mother. We made up a story about doing a project at college where we gave clothes away to children. My friend almost exploded with laughter, but my mother's friend believed the story.

Later that day Sofia met the social secretary, and they went and fetched Sofia's things from Leo's flat and she went to another town, in her own flat with supervision, a form of protected living.

ALONE IN THE FLAT

After having had such a difficult time at home, it wasn't easy for Sofia to live alone in a flat. She felt terrible. After just one day she made contact with all the members of her family, it went as quickly as that. They just shouted when she rang and her father just screamed at her. But then one day, before she was going to visit her sister, she talked to her family again. She decided to return home, but had been advised to talk to her family first. She spoke to her father.

The situation became a little disturbing as he was rather angry and asked: "Why did you do this?" I answered that I had felt bad. "Well, OK," said my father, but you are coming home?" He forgot to put the receiver down so I heard him talk to my mother. He told my mother that what had happened had happened because she had let me go to a camp when I was in the sixth form. My mother twisted it and said that she had been scared that I would get used to sleeping away from home.

"God, how stupid he is!" I thought.

My father continued and explained to my mother that there could be something else as well, he was very worried about it. He was suspicious that Leo had moved just after I had run away from home.

THINKING ABOUT MOVING BACK HOME

Sofia didn't move home directly but talked to her contact person first. She went to her sister, and there she was going to meet her mother the following day. Sofia went there, but left half of her belongings in the safe house. Her mother didn't greet her, instead she almost spat at her and looked down at her. Sofia felt most uncomfortable and regretted that she had re-established contact with her family again.

My mother wondered why I wasn't like my sisters and why I had done what I had done. "Something big must have happened, otherwise you wouldn't have run away," said my mother. Then she started to shout and gave me a box round the ears. I got an anxiety attack, fainted, fell onto the floor and was unconscious for some hours. When I woke up my mother was crying and said that she couldn't live without me and that I was her life. My mother said that she wouldn't make me unhappy any more.

Late that night my social secretary rang and wondered how it had gone. My mother and sister listened to the conversation. My sister forced me to interpret. But my social secretary wasn't so stupid and said she would ring my brother, who was the only one I trusted. He would guarantee that they wouldn't hurt me. I appealed to her not to ring as my brother was angry with me now. But she said that she would do it for it was for my safety and she was worried about me.

I put the phone down and went directly to the toilet and sent a text message: "Please don't do it." At the same time I informed my contact person that my mother was nearby and I couldn't talk freely. But she had already rang my brother. He had answered the social secretary that I was only worried for my father and that I was fine. When she heard that, she became very worried and she and the contact person began to talk about taking me away from there.

My mother started to scream again: "What has happened, you have to tell me now!"

"Nothing has happened," I said.

"Yes, something has happened or you wouldn't have run away from home," shouted my mother. "Have you lost your virginity?"

THEY TRY TO TAKE HER HOME AGAIN

The only thing Sofia thought about was that she was scared. Her mother continued screaming at her. Sofia lay in bed and couldn't move all night.

My sister came to me and told me to be careful when I came home, for my father had a knife. She hugged me and I didn't want to think that he would hurt me. My mother said that my father wouldn't hurt me as she had talked to him, but she warned me about my brother. "Be careful when you sleep." Who can survive this? I thought.

My sister told me that the first period at home would be difficult, for they would control me completely, but that was the price I would have to pay. I was informed that a new suitor was waiting at home for me.

Everything was chaos in my sister's flat. I had promised my mother not to leave there and the only way out I could see was to take a load of pills. My sister was going to work that evening and my mother was at a neighbour's. I couldn't talk on the phone when they were there. The only way was to say that I was going to sleep. "Lie down there and I will come later," said my mother. "Then we can book tickets home."

Sofia had to pay for the tickets and her mother wanted to get home as soon as possible so her father wouldn't be scared and worried. When the mother and sister were out, Sofia rang her contact person and said that she felt terrible. The contact person insisted that she must get out of there but Sofia couldn't.

It was as though there were two different forces within me and I didn't know what to do. I rang the school nurse, who was also very worried about me. I told her that I didn't have the strength to go on anymore, that I didn't want to go on living and I didn't know what to do.

The nurse understood that I had done something and later the contact person rang me again. I told her about the pills. I had tried to commit suicide several other times with medicine earlier. I began to plan it when I was at home. I took blood-thinning medicine, heart medicine, masses of different pills. It felt as though I was paralysed, it took a great effort just to get up. Earlier they hadn't been able to wake me at home. I believe it was that I couldn't make the effort to listen to them. Quite simply I couldn't manage any more.

The contact person once again wanted me to leave and finally she got the address out of me. It was in the nick of time for my sister finished work at 9 o'clock and she was going to fetch my mother from the neighbour on her way home. My sister's husband and children were also in the flat. I said that I was going home the next day at 10.00 and she and the others could contact me at 6 in the morning. But they didn't give me that chance, as she and the social secretary had already spoken together. They would fetch me with the support of the law concerning the care of young people.

At 9 o'clock the contact person sent a text message that I should come down to the street. First I put my mobile on silent, but then I changed my mind and put on my jacket and took my bag. I thought about leaving, but then my mother came, walking up the stairs.

Then I went in again and took off my jacket as though nothing had happened, and no one noticed anything. I told my mother that I felt terrible, I started to cry and wanted them to ring for an ambulance.

Then there was a ring at the door. In came the contact person with two or three burly policemen, who were going to fetch me. The children cried and my mother told the police that they couldn't take me. They showed my mother a paper as proof that they could take me and they talked. I just lay in my mother's lap, cried and felt terrible. "You can't take her from here, she is not a minor," said my mother. I thought: Am I no longer a minor? The contact person told my mother that they would look after me now.

Sofia remembers that everything was chaotic, her mother and the police were pulling at her in two different directions. They carried her out of there and it was really difficult. The contact person talked to her, but Sofia just cried and couldn't talk. Her mother ran after her crying, barefoot.

SECOND STAY AT THE SAFE HOUSE

Sofia doesn't remember much more after the time she was fetched from her sister other than that she went to hospital. She waited there three days for someone to talk to her. The doctor who met her considered her to be in a deep depression. It was decided that she would be admitted to the psychiatric ward. It was the only place they had. Once she was placed there, she was alone all day and night. Before that, staff from the home where she was going to live had visited. They had come to her that very day, but they thought that it could take a week or month before she would come to them. Sofia told them that she could only stand to wait a week at the most.

Those who were on the ward were really sick; they walked around talking to themselves. The staff who worked nights came and asked if I worked there. "Goodness me," I thought, "what am I doing here?"

I didn't think that I was so depressed that I needed to be admitted to such a place and wondered what I was doing there. My contact person came and fetched me the following day after I had complained.

They were tough days, five weeks with a lot of hassle. It didn't feel too bad, though, because I had Leo. I asked if he could come and visit me. It was OK if we met in another town, but then they changed their minds and said no. I was really sad because I wanted him near me and I hadn't seen him for several weeks. After what had happened I really needed someone who knew the whole story.

She was allowed to see him one night and then they didn't see each other for five months. Basically they had contact every day but it was a difficult time for both of them. Even for Leo who was having problems with his ex-girlfriend, his daughter and his sick father abroad.

LEO PROPOSES

It felt as though time was passing slowly. Leo interpreted for the father from time to time. He met Sofia's siblings who told him that her father was feeling terrible. But when Leo was with them, he realised that the father was not really so depressed. That calmed her down.

Then Leo began to meet her parents regularly. One day when he was walking past, the father asked him to come in and they began to talk to each other. The next time he visited them they had began to talk about marriage.

My father asked Leo if he shouldn't get married. That is what he used to say to boys who had divorced. Leo answered that my father could help him for there was a girl he wanted. He was surprised and asked if he knew her, but naturally he would help. "I want your daughter," said Leo. My father became disconcerted and wondered which daughter he meant. "The only one you have left, Sofia," answered Leo. Then my father became a little shocked. For I had contact with them then.

But in some way it made my father happy. It made him drop the thought that he had "made a mistake with me" as in that case Leo would not have proposed.

The father accepted Leo, but not the mother as she had lined up other suitors. The mother asked Sofia if she wanted Leo and she answered that she did. It was perfect that time, everything went so well.

Sofia says that no one knew that they knew each other well, not before Leo's ex-girlfriend came into the picture. She told them how Leo had helped her, and this cemented the contact between Sofia and her parents again.

LIFE TODAY

Today Sofia and Leo live with protected identities in another place. They have got married and have work and a home. They are trying to build up an existence together. A couple of Sofia's siblings are on her side and support her life choice, and now they see each other. Sofia feels she has learnt a lot, but has paid a very high price.

She feels that in the future she would like two children, at the most. When they grow up, she will give them everything she never had, she will listen to them, guide them without forcing them and give them love in both word and deed. And both she and Leo want to involve themselves in voluntary work with young people who have had similar experiences to theirs and who want to move on in life.

Ida was born in 1981 and comes from the Balkans. Her parents moved with their daughters to Sweden at the beginning of the nineties because of ethnic discrimination. Her relatives remain in their former homeland.

THE MOVE TO SWEDEN

When Ida's family, who are Albanian, moved to Sweden, it was more because of the antagonism between Serbs and Albanians in the Balkans than because of war. Her father was the only person in the family who had a job while her mother was a housewife and looked after the daughters. When her father lost his job because of his background, the parents decided to leave Kosovo.

I think that the people who decided where I lived were Serbs. That's what I think, but I was so small and I didn't like politics. The Serbs were in the majority and had great control over the Albanians.

The fact that we moved to Sweden was because my father's closest childhood friend lived here. We really didn't want to move here. We were really sorry over having to leave the Balkans.

First we came to a town in southern Sweden. The language was difficult, it sounded so complicated. I thought I would never be able to learn this language. At first we lived with my father's friend and then moved to a refugee camp at a hotel and lived there for eight months. I remember that as a fun time. Other foreign children lived there and we all went together to a type of preschool. We played a great deal.

Then the municipality placed the family in another part of the country. Ida went to the second class and her little sister was born. The municipality revoked the contract with the landlord and the family had to move again to a smaller place. Then after a few months, they had to move again.

After five years in Sweden, the family got their residence permits. They were pleased for this meant that they could go and visit relatives and friends. They hadn't been able to do that before, they didn't even have passports. But in 1997 they went on a visit to Kosovo, for the first time in a very long time.

When we got our residency permits we could choose what municipality we wanted to live in and my father chose a small place in southern Sweden. I started at the intermediate stage of basic schooling and had missed a lot of schooling before this. When we got there we were asked if I wanted to begin in the sixth or seventh class (that was the right one for my age) but I chose the sixth for I thought it would be much too hard to start senior level straightaway. Even though I was the oldest in my class, I didn't regret making that decision.

Both my parents began to study Swedish once we arrived and had got our residence permits. Then we had been in Sweden for five years without them having had any language lessons. My mother and father are middle-aged and they thought that school was difficult. My mother forgot her homework, because when she came home she had to clean and cook food. They started to work instead as they thought that was better. My father worked at a home for young people. It was a difficult job for him so he stopped and started at a factory instead. This led to a permanent position after a while. He has worked there for many years now. My mother did something similar, started at a factory as an apprentice and she also has had a permanent job for some years now.

Once the family had settled down permanently, Ida played with her sister, because it took her a while to make friends. Later she had a girl friend who she is still close to. Even when she moved they have always stayed in touch with each other and now they have been friends for 13 years. She is Ida's best friend.

CHILDHOOD IN THE BALKANS

In the Balkans her mother was a housewife and her father worked as a driver. He drove goods all over Europe. During their time in the Balkans Ida could not see her father very much because he was abroad for much of the time.

I am the first child and had a great childhood. I remember one evening when I was at my sister's with my parents and we discussed our childhood. Our parents were surprised that we remembered so much, particularly the details. I was always the awkward, clumsy girl, and I still am today. As I was always mischievous, my mother used to hit me, so one ear never had an earring because of that. It flew off all the time and I was always hunting for it. My father never said no to either me or my sister. I am the first child. That is celebrated especially, I was always the apple of their eye and I still am today.

She remembers other things from her childhood in Kosovo. Every autumn the family went camping. It was something they really wanted to do. They have a large family, but in spite of that, they went on holiday more with her father's friends and their families.

When we camped, we were at least 10 families together. If we went to a small camping site, we filled the place. Then we lived there for several days, up to a week. It was a fun time. My sister and I miss those days. It is very beautiful and mountainous in the Balkans. We went skiing in the winters. My family were out a lot in nature. I did all those things with the family. The first time we returned to the Balkans my mother and we children stayed a whole month. We visit every year.

TRADITION AND RELIGION

What is good about family traditions is that you are always together, whether it is a wedding or a sorrowful occasion. But sometimes it can be demanding and hard.

If I want to get engaged, then everyone gets involved: cousins, the family, everyone. Everyone has their idea and plans about how it should be accomplished, and finally you go crazy and say that: "But I'm the one getting engaged, now that's enough!" If I am allowed to decide, then I won't follow traditions, well to a certain extent, but not so much. If I find the right person some day then I want us to do something small.

What is important about traditions is trust, respect and communication. Respect and trust are the most important things.

My family aren't particularly religious but we are Muslims. I am a Muslim, I believe in God, I don't eat pork, I fast, believe in my religion and am proud of who I am. I carry my religion in my heart. When I was small, in the Balkans, I went to the mosque, but not here. Lately in my home country I have only been to funerals, but not to the mosque. Most of my family are like me when it comes to practicing our religion. But some, like the cousin who fetched me, can think: "The woman shouldn't say so much." He is extremely domineering. I met him again in the Balkans last year and it was difficult. This summer his brother is going to get married and there will be a party so you can't sulk about that. Over the years it will get easier for me. I have been brave about this, but also had support from my mother and father.

When it comes to honour-related violence, including the right to kill your own daughter, it can be explained that one is weak and ignorant and that is also dependent on one's background. It is reactionary, old-fashioned people who commit that violence. It is not honour.

VIEW OF THE FAMILY

All the relatives are part of the family – aunts, uncles and everyone else. This is Ida's family in their former home country, although in Sweden it is just Ida's parents and sisters.

When we are on a visit to Kosovo, many of us get together. There are four siblings on my father's side, three boys and one girl. Just as many siblings on my mother's side though there it is three girls and one boy. In all, there are 20 cousins. Everyone except an uncle and his family who live in Switzerland, live in the Balkans. But now this summer after 15 years, we are all going to meet in the Balkans again. We also have a large wedding to attend, as my cousin is getting married.

VIEW OF CHILD UPBRINGING

Ida's own experiences have characterised her view of child upbringing.

I couldn't talk to my family when I was with my boyfriend. As I knew that they would never accept it, there was no one in the family I could talk to.

The day she becomes a mother herself she wants to be strict. The children should be honest with her. It is extremely important to talk and listen to one's children and they should trust her as she talks to them.

I would rather that they say things to me than that they go round and round and ask for help. I will ask them questions and care about them. "Come and tell your mother!"

That is something I didn't have much of from my parents. I couldn't talk about boys to my mother, it was rather tense. That's because of how we were brought up and raised. I have never been able to talk about boys. If we had brought it up, not so much would have happened, but it was what we thought, our idea that something might happen. We haven't talked about that either. Because I have experienced this I will be able to talk to my children in a completely different way.

Today Ida is 26 and she can still cuddle and kiss her father like a 15-year-old. Everyone in her family show their feelings openly. Once she returned to her family they still see her as their daughter.

I got a smack from time to time from my mother because I was unruly, but never from my father. So unruly. God help us if I have a child who is as I was! I never did my homework, was lousy at school, had detentions and was top of the "bad list"! Then my mother was so angry with me, because I didn't do as I should, but being hit didn't help, because I was the person I was! I hope that I have really good children for my nerves are bad. I am an anxious person. If I get a really unruly son I will probably give up. I think I'll hand him over – the man will have to look after him. I have an excitable temperament but calm down after five minutes.

TEENAGE YEARS

When Ida got to her teenage years, she got to what she herself describes as "a rebellious age."

We were really wild, my sister and I. Then my father had to fetch us from wherever we were, at a disco or wherever. My father did everything we said. He and another parent used to take turns in leaving and fetching us. My mother doesn't have a driving licence. My parents were not strict with us.

Every weekend they had thorough cleaning at home but for most of the time my mother did it all. She spoilt the girls as she was a housewife before they came to Sweden. Now she worked and she had to have two jobs.

SEX AND COHABITATION

They didn't talk very much about sex at home at Ida's. At school she was allowed to take part in all the school subjects. There was nothing forbidden from home, everything was quite natural.

I met guys when I was 18-19 and at that age you are flirty. But no sex! I put limits on myself and when I lost my virginity, I was over 20. I am very careful about certain things. I thought very smartly for my age and didn't have sex if the guy wasn't worth a relationship. I sensed when the relationship wasn't going to continue. No one believed me when I told my friends. I went to sixth form and was still a virgin. I was two years older than my classmates, and they weren't virgins. When we talked about it, I wasn't ashamed but said it straightforwardly and was proud of it. They were totally shocked. I remember when I got my first period, I was about 13 and that was late. I didn't understand what it was, but I talked to my mother.

FRIENDS AND BOYFRIENDS

Ida and her sister brought home friends, but Ida never brought home boyfriends. She has a great deal of respect for her parents. They had an open relationship, but it was a little taboo when it came to boyfriends.

I actually didn't think about boys when I was 17-18. We lived in a small place and the only things that my girlfriends and I thought of was going out and having fun. When I say "going out and having fun" I mean "going out and dancing". I went to sixth form in a larger town so we were attracted to the dance places that were nearby. It was dance and disco that was the central thing, not boys.

CHOICE OF OCCUPATION

Ida has educated herself and works as a hairdresser, and she has always been interested in working with other people's hair.

Always, when we were going out as teenagers, I fixed my friends' hair, and then I got the idea of becoming a hairdresser. It was really difficult to get into the programme and as I didn't have top marks, I had to fight even harder. Then it worked out well and I became a hairdresser. Sometimes I can be stubborn. I am extremely proud of having succeeded at this, and now I even have my own business. Another dream I have is to be an air stewardess, but I doubt if I will be. I shall have to be satisfied with this. But I haven't totally let that dream go, as every time I fly somewhere and look at them, I feel attracted to it. Right now I don't have any dreams for my future as I am concentrating on my own business.

FIRST LOVE

When Ida was 21 she met her first love. She and her sister were at a party arranged by an immigrant organisation.

Then I saw a guy with merry eyes. At first I thought: "God, what a pain" and I thought he was an Arab as he was so dark. I told my sister later that "Oh, what a pain, there's an Arab who's sitting, staring at me." But we started to dance and we exchanged phone numbers.

I worked at a hairdressing salon. He was younger and went to sixth form. We met at lunchtime, or he waited for me after work. It was all top secret but if he had been another type of boy, another nationality, then ... He was a gypsy from the Balkans. It was a relationship that my parents would never have accepted, just because he was a gypsy. So I was together with him without anyone knowing for two years. When I lived with my parents, I had to commute a long way between home and my job every day, it was really tough. I wanted to move to town, but didn't find a flat.

MOVING AWAY FROM HOME

During the summer a former employee came visiting Ida's workplace and said that she wanted to sublet her flat. Ida quickly considered and decided to take the flat.

My parents were in the Balkans just then and I signed the contract without my parents knowing about it. They didn't want me to move for they didn't think I could manage to take responsibility for bills and such like. I felt that they would have stopped me, and I used the situation. Then I rang my parents, pretended that I was in a hurry and said that I was going to move and then hung up.

When her parents returned to Sweden, there wasn't a big fuss, as Ida had thought, but they helped her move. They understood that she wanted to move and that it was difficult for her with her commuting to work.

When I lived by myself I felt a sense of freedom. I could be with my boyfriend without my parents knowing about it. My sister knew about him, because she was there the first evening when I met him. She advised me against him and said that: "There will never be anything between the two of you." But I said it was just for fun and not serious. I didn't realise that my feelings were becoming stronger and stronger for him.

THE BOYFRIEND'S TRUE COLOURS

The sister and the boyfriend were often at Ida's at weekends. At first they were very good friends. Then he began to show his true nature.

He was mean to me and called me masses of stupid things. My sister was there and heard it. Then she started to hate him. He has also beaten me, but not in front of her. My boyfriend said a lot of stupid, insulting things to me. Then they began, he and my sister, to argue all the time. When my sister was at my place he wasn't allowed to come over, for they argued. I was in between them and it was really difficult. I loved them both. But they were like a cat and mouse. If they happened to meet at my place, it was totally silent, for they weren't allowed to quarrel, as I couldn't choose sides. My sister took me out at weekends and my boyfriend got angry. He became jealous and said my sister was a bad girl. It just got worse and worse.

One evening my sister rang and said: "Either the boy or your family." My parents didn't know about him, but she wanted to tell them about him. The hell was that they would never accept him. They would be disappointed in me for being together with a gypsy and because I had kept it a secret from them for two years. I really didn't want to lose the respect we had for each other in our family. What I felt was that I had done something foolish by going behind their backs. I was both sad and happy at the same time. They would never accept him, not just because he was a gypsy but also because of how he treated me (as my sister said).

THE HELL CONTINUES

Ida didn't see the bad sides of her boyfriend. She was in love and didn't want to realise the truth. But somewhere she knew that he wasn't good for her. Her parents' relationship was her model image.

He beat me up, both mentally and physically. I have forgotten the beatings he gave me, but not the words. They come into my memory all the time. My sister, who saw me, felt sorry for me because I became a completely different person. Never the crazy, happy Ida, but a completely different person. I became aggressive every time I went to my parents. My parents noticed it. I really didn't want to avoid my family for my boyfriend's sake, but I loved him.

The boyfriend started to rubbish Ida's sister. He made her hate her own family.

One day when I was at work he rang my mother, without my knowing. He wanted to speak to my father. But as luck would have it, my father was at work and my mother answered the phone. My boyfriend had taken my mobile and found their number. He told her that he was a gypsy, that we had been a couple for two years, that we were happy together and so on. My mother was shocked. He rang because he thought it was time for them to know that we were happy together and said that I hadn't dared tell them so that is why he had taken the initiative to tell them without letting me know first!

My sister rang me at work. She asked me to ring her up as soon as I could. What she said quickly was that he had rung my mother. Everything spun around for me at that moment and I thought she must be teasing me. My mother didn't like me then, as I had lied to them. I couldn't continue working as the shock had made me shake so much. I was prepared to strangle my boyfriend at that moment.

Ida summoned her courage and rang up her mother. Her mother wondered what was going on behind her and the father's backs. Ida told her a bit and then said that she would end it with the boyfriend and she wouldn't have anything to do with him anymore.

"Poor thing, he can say as much as he wants, we are not happy!" I added. "We argue all the time." My mother then said: "You should thank God that your father wasn't at home and I answered the phone. I won't say anything to your father, but try to leave him as soon as you can."

When her parents found out about the boyfriend, Ida was 24 years old. Her fear of her father was founded on the fact that she had lied to him and hadn't shown him respect. She doubts that he would hurt her in any way. Ida has never ever previously lied to her family.

This was such a big thing for me, to lie about me being together with a gypsy and that it had been going on for two years. They wouldn't be able to do anything but they would lose confidence in me and they would never be able to trust me again.

MOVING HOME AGAIN

One day the girl who had the flat rang again and wanted it back. Then Ida had no alternative but to move back home to her parents again. The contact with the boyfriend came to an end for two weeks.

I asked him how he could ring my mother without saying anything to me. He wanted to be the man in our family, he said, and I answered that he wasn't a man if he rang without my knowledge. My boyfriend clearly realised that he was about to lose me. When I told him I didn't want to be with him anymore, that my family meant a great deal to me, then he spread the rumour via my friends that he wanted to commit suicide. He said that he had spoken to a psychologist and could get help. Then he won my heart again by crying and saying that he loved me.

One day he came with a bandage and I felt sorry for him. Then we took the decision that I should run away from home to him. He promised that he loved only me and that he would look after me. He fetched me from work and we went to his flat. I was going to ring home and say that I wasn't coming home anymore, but I didn't dare ring, as I was so scared. Not that my family would hurt me, but I am so emotionally weak for my family. I am very attached to them and would really feel that I had let them down. After a half hour, I picked up the courage and rang my mother. I said: "I'm not coming home now." Then my mother said: "You are to take the next bus!" I answered that: "This is not about the bus but that I want to be with him". My mother was totally silent on the other end of the phone. My sister picked up the phone and told me that I should pull myself together and come home before my father came home. "No" I said. My sister and I started screaming at each other and I slammed the phone down on her.

Late that evening Ida's father rang her and asked her to come home. He pleaded and wanted them to talk things over. She decided to go home and talk to her family. The boyfriend thought she was a wimp and didn't like the situation. He said that one should be firm with one's family.

I went home and my father said that he didn't care that my boyfriend was a gypsy, or whatever, but he would never accept him so long as he was stupid to his daughter. "If he looks after you like a princess then I don't care, but not the way things are now. You have been my daughter for 24 years and I have never touched a hair on your head, so who is this idiot who is hitting you?" said my father. "If I had beaten you, you would have been accustomed to beatings, but I have never hurt you. You do as you want, I have never said no to anything." I felt bad, because I had lied to my father and he had never touched me or my sister, never lifted a hand to us."

The following day Ida was at work and her boyfriend rang all the time and declared his love.

For every day that passed, things got worse and worse as there was no respect in our relationship. We argued and reunited over and over again. He said: "You are the woman in my life," "You will bear my children" etc. I rang home again and said that I wouldn't come back home and they, particularly my father, said that "You promised not to be with this boy, but are you still?" "Yes, I promised but I take it back," I said. My father said that he forbade me to be with idiots and that he did that because he loved his daughter. Nevertheless I moved in with my boyfriend.

TAKEN ABROAD AGAINST HER WILL

Just about a week later a boy came into Ida's work. She knew him from before and thought it was odd as he never used to come in and say hello. He asked for the boyfriend's mobile number. Ida became suspicious, but he was obstinate and said it was about a job so she gave him the number. Later she found out that her father had rung a cousin in the Balkans and asked for help, as he felt so powerless and helpless.

I don't really have a choice. The cousin, who is aggressive, wanted to meet my boyfriend but my sister advised him not to meet him alone. I hated him when I was small, for he beat me all the time. The cousin and the boyfriend had decided to meet one evening, without my knowledge. So I was at home totally unaware. My boyfriend came home and told me to pack my clothes and go home. He had met someone who said he was my brother and that I should go home. "What do you mean, my brother?" I said. "I don't have a brother. What are you talking about? I am 24 and don't know if I have a brother?" He answered: "I don't know, I don't know – you will have to go down and sort out your own problems." "The problem is between you and me," I answered. "I don't want to get involved, you can do what you want," answered my boyfriend, for he was very scared of my cousin. I became so disappointed in him as he abandoned me so easily!

Ida went down and when she saw the cousin she was shocked and thought it was a nightmare. He drove her home. They talked at home and the cousin became aggressive. Her father couldn't argue as he had asked the cousin to come.

The unexpressed meaning was: "Don't you get involved, it is between me (the cousin) and her (me)." The cousin and I sat in the kitchen and talked and he then decided to take me with him to the Balkans. I refused but had no say in the matter. Tried to appeal to him by saying I had a job but he "didn't give a damn" about that. "We leave tomorrow," he said. Words failed me, I was disappointed with my family because they couldn't make any decisions themselves.

That night Ida couldn't sleep at all and missed her boyfriend. At around eight the following morning her sister and cousin started to look for tickets to the Balkans. Ida was in her room, crying. Her mother tried to comfort her by saying that it wasn't for ever.

"It is just so you can get rid of the boy. Have fun. Maybe you will meet someone else when you are there. Just go and forget this idiot," she said to me. "No," I thought. But the next day I was in the Balkans.

HER TIME IN THE BALKANS

In spite of Ida being disappointed with the boyfriend as he had been scared of her cousin, she continued to have contact with him during her time in Kosovo. When she was so far away from him she missed him even more.

Such a relationship is like forbidden fruit. And everything that is forbidden tastes so good. I think that this was so exciting for us. We had contact without any one else knowing, and he reported to the police that my cousin had come and taken me to the Balkans. Zalar fixed the telephone number to the embassy, etc. He helped me to find help. I was helped by the Swedish embassy as I had neither a passport nor money. A female policewoman at the embassy helped me get a passport and money. We planned the escape by deciding a certain place, a certain time, when the police would meet me.

During her time in the Balkans, Ida slept half the days as she was depressed and missed her boyfriend. The day for escaping came and she had to get up early so as not to miss the time.

My aunt was surprised. I had packed the necessary things. She asked why I had woken so early. I said that I was going to our house to pick up clean clothes. She wondered how long that would take, but I calmed her down by saying it would go quickly. Max ten minutes, I said. Then I'll put some coffee on in the meantime, she said. Then I left and never came back.

Two male policemen met her, took her to the capital and gave her a flight ticket and provisional passport and she flew home the very same day. The police had rung two female colleagues in Sweden who met her when she landed. They immediately went with her to another town where the boyfriend was waiting and from there they went together to a safe house.

TODAY

Today Ida has her own flat and her own business. She manages by herself and once again she has a close relationship with her family and meets them often. The relationship with the boyfriend finished some time ago and she has no new relationship.

The fact that I am the person I am is due to my best girlfriend and my sister. They have really been an enormous support for me. Friends and family mean everything to me and I have now understood that. One makes mistakes in life but one learns from them. I have learnt a great deal and not least I have learnt that you should never take anything for granted. Life offers a mass of surprises in both good and bad ways.

STILL UNDER THE SECRECY ACT

Susanne's family came to Sweden from Turkey in the seventies. Susanne was one year old at the time and is now 30. She is second eldest in a family of two brothers and three sisters.

ABOUT THE MOVE TO SWEDEN

The family moved to Sweden at about the time when Sweden was accepting a large influx of foreign labour from countries including Turkey. But that wasn't the only reason for the move. Another reason for Susanne's family who are Christians was the risk of religious persecution in predominantly Islam Turkey.

None of us siblings have visited our former home country, although our parents have. The fact that we haven't visited Turkey depends mainly on the fact that most of our relations live in southern Sweden, and most of them even in the same town. In that way the solidarity in the family is maintained.

INTEGRATION

In Sweden her father started his own company and her mother was in employment. So it would seem as though the family were rather well integrated, but in their free time they just associated with their former fellow-countrymen.

Dad can't be called integrated because he had his own cafe for the men, men from Turkey who sat drinking, eating and playing. They are still there, they have the cafes. Mum had a normal job and could make herself understood in Swedish but she didn't have any deeper understanding of the language. She should have been better at the language after so many years in Sweden.

In principle I went around with anyone. Not always with "negotiations" beforehand, so in some cases there were consequences but sometimes they didn't know about it. I could play truant from school for a whole day, but could still say that I had been in school. On some occasions, I said that I had missed the bus or something similar. They never checked. It was easy to play truant without being discovered.

The school reacted to truancy, but I didn't care about going to the welfare officer and during the sixth form when I began to play truant seriously, there was no contact with my home.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SITUATION

Her parents have had a relatively good economic situation so Susanne was given money whenever she asked, without any problem. She took her final school exam during a recession. For a period of time she had a temporary job and a salary. When she later became unemployed again she started to go on the dole and got money that way.

When it comes to a career and choice of career, my mum was forced to work as they couldn't support themselves on one income. They both had to work. As my mum didn't have any education, she had to take a low-qualified job. I can also take a job, just to support myself, nothing that demands any long education.

CHILDHOOD AND TEENAGE PERIOD

Susanne doesn't remember much about her childhood more than that she and her siblings had a lot of freedom when they were small.

Naturally we had rules, but we could do rather as we pleased. At that time it made no difference which gender one was, or the nationality of our friends.

But when she became a teenager, it got harder.

When I was about 12 or 13, they started to talk about "It's not so good that you go out now," "people can start talking if they see you in town," "if you go around with boys" "just go around with our people" "don't go around with Swedes" "don't have a boyfriend" and so on. I had to be home at a certain time, often by seven o'clock at night.

By the time Susanne was 15-16, the rules were even stricter. Then she wasn't allowed to go to a cafe and drink coffee, not even at weekends.

I still tried to work my way around it in different ways, although it was always conditioned by "If I do this, then they will accept this." I remember how I cleaned so that in exchange I could go out. The same thing applied to my sisters. My brother on the other hand could come and go as he wanted. He wasn't particularly interested in coming home late but no one slandered him with, for example, "we saw your son..."

My sisters and I were more interesting subjects of discussion. But the difference between me and my sisters was that I never gave in. I have always protested and as a teenager I became more aware of my rights. Then I did more than just protest. I lied about certain things so as to be able to do what wasn't permitted.

For example, if we were going on a class trip, then I could take a boat trip with my friends instead. The class trip was OK for my parents if there were adults there. However, going out to pubs and restaurants was forbidden and to go to cafes was out of the question. It was also out of the question to have a boyfriend and to be around boys in general. I had to think of my "reputation". Someone could see me in town, if I had a boyfriend then "I had undoubtedly lost my virginity."

The comparison with her friends was central. They don't do "this sort of thing" for the families would acquire a bad reputation and all the relatives would get a bad reputation. This is what is talked about.

If, for example, I was to go to a wedding, then I should behave in a particular manner. The message was that "if you don't behave well, no one will want to marry you."

Swedes are more restrictive towards their children when they are small. We do the opposite and don't restrain children when they are young but tell them when they are older. We are trapped when we want to test our wings.

During her teenage "revolt period" Susanne wanted to test different things and did it without her parents and relatives knowing about it.

I had both gone on a ferry, drunk alcohol and was away overnight sometimes. How were they going to check? They are not illiterate, but they don't know how the Swedish system works, so they had no way of checking. If I had had children now, then I would have had all opportunities to check with, for example, the teacher, as I have been brought up within the system. My parents were not. Even though it is confusing, they wanted as little contact as possible with the authorities as well because "we don't wash our dirty linen in public." The social services were out of the question, as were the police, and my mum went to school parents' meetings but nothing else.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF CRIMES AGAINST THE NORM AND MORE CONTROL

During the latter part of her schooling, Susanne was rather tired of school. So she played truant even more. The consequence was physical beatings from her father and mental assault from her mother.

Mum used more of the psychological aspect such as "You aren't worth anything," "No one wants you" "No one looks at you ... well, yuk. .. you should lose weight if you want to get married" "so we can get you married off" etc. The beatings consisted of slaps round the ears and beatings with the hand all over the body.

I couldn't work where I wanted, but my parents had to approve first. They checked whether it was a suitable place, for example when I was about to work at a lunch restaurant. Was it a suitable place or was it just rabble who hung out there? I could only work there once my parents had given their permission. They even found out what sort of a company it was. If it was a Swedish company, then it was alright. If it was owned by an immigrant, then they checked it out, for I could get a bad reputation there. It was all to do with reputation and face.

Susanne transgressed her family's rules during her whole senior-level schooling and during the sixth form she continued to do that even more.

The fact that I lived it up more in the sixth form might have had something to do with who I was going around with then. The sixth form school was in another part of town and they couldn't control me so easily.

SEXUALITY

Sexuality is related to girls. If a girl has a bad reputation – here one is referring to sexuality – then you can't be seen with her even if she belongs to the same ethnic group. When it came to people with a different ethnicity, it was forbidden to associate with them.

I had friends that it wasn't OK to be around, but I did it anyway. My parents didn't allow me to be around some people, others they didn't know about. Because if they had a different ethnicity, then it was other people who had control. Everyone controls everyone else. It's true when I said: "I am not an individual, but a member of a group." Everyone has control of each other. "I saw your daughter in the shop, I was out shopping at the time." "They say she is at the beach" and so on. Then everyone knows about it. I knew very well where the limits lay. Once when I was 17-18 I was out during the day and ate with a friend and I told my parents that. To be expected, someone came and said they had seen us and told them. It was a matter of always being one step ahead. They still only know a fraction of what I did. I did most things behind their backs.

I had a close male friend for some years, and there could have been consequences. My parents didn't know about this. I went behind their backs when it came to class trips. They in their turn made up stories for the relatives why I wasn't at home. For if the relatives found out that "their daughter wasn't home" my parents would have had a difficult time.

Susanne received sexual education at school. They didn't talk about sex at home. You just had to learn. However the women talked about it amongst themselves. The constant message was that the woman had to be very careful about how she behaved so as not to acquire a bad reputation.

"Woman's honour" is the honour of the family and the relatives. The man doesn't have any demand to retain his virginity, but the woman's virginity is checked after the wedding night. They place a cloth or something similar in the bed and if she has bled during the night she is a virgin. If she hasn't bled, then she is not a virgin. Then she has had sex before, they claim, and that is very much frowned on.

Contraceptives are not used. Well, they are used, but this is nothing one talks of out loud. Abortion is out of the question for it is considered like murder, but naturally it takes place, but it is still taboo.

HIGHER STUDIES

Susanne's parents didn't mind at all that she wanted to work, but it was not OK if she wanted to educate herself and move to another town in order to take those studies. That was unacceptable.

The view of education was "It's enough with sixth form". That was a clear statement from my family. "Now you don't need any more education. That's enough. Now its time to get married" they could say, so they could be supported.

"ARRANGED" MARRIAGE

Susanne began to get to that age when marriage was the main concern.

Mum asked me to be more attractive. My siblings tried to give in, at least my eldest sister, just so she would be attractive on the marriage market. She tried to influence me by saying: "Try to lose weight", "Be more feminine in yourself and your manner", "So that they want you", "Otherwise no one will propose to you."

Marriage is arranged. It isn't the girl who takes the initiative, but most often the boy or his family who do it.

The proposal takes place so they talk properly first. The boy's parents see the girl at a party or at a wedding. It can also be some relation to the boy who sees the girl in town, perhaps when she is out shopping.

The rumour then goes to the boy's parents that "Here is a girl you could consider." The boy and his parents discuss it. Then they ring the girl's parents and ask if they can come to meet her. But they also come to meet the parents. When they come the girl has to wait on them. Serve, give them coffee and whatever. Then the parents discuss matters between themselves. It can be a bit individual, sometimes the boy and girl talk to each other on their own, but then a sibling is present, as a chaperone, so that "nothing happens." Then they are in another room than the parents. Some families are strict about this, others not. Sometimes they can also bring a present. My eldest sister got married in this way. I remember they came home with a present for her. They came for they had seen her somewhere. They had rung first but I don't know where they had seen her. The boy, his parents and our parents talked in general and my sister had to take care of them and, as I said, show her best side. The boy's parents also try to form an impression of what she is talking about, how she talks, how she behaves and her way of being when she is part of the conversation.

No one said openly that this had anything to do with virginity, it was implied when someone had their wedding night. Then the talk went: "Well, there was blood on the cloth." Not until blood has come on the "cloth" is one considered married. Before that, the marriage has not been "consummated."

The bridegroom's family have paid a large sum of money for the girl's virginity. It can be in the region of 10,000 kronor up to half a million kronor, different amounts depending on the family. It is even more common in the home country. They preferably want the girls to marry as young as possible, 14-15 is not unusual, up to 16-17: that's the span in which they want the girls to marry. The new family, father-in-law and mother-in-law, feel that the girl is easier to form then, so that the girl can be "their own" and adapt herself to them. The older she becomes the more self-confident she is and the greater self-esteem and self-confidence she has. If she is over 18, there is something wrong with her, she isn't a virgin any more and so on.

Body language – everything is observed, to see if the girl is suitable. The boy's family also check that both the family and the girl have a good reputation. The girl is not an individual on her own but a part of a collective.

It is not as in the western world, where it is only me who is influenced if I do something, with us the whole group is influenced. This isn't about the boys but just the girls, and this can influence the whole female side of the family. It can mean that they are not suitable to get married. If, for example, I now start smoking a cigarette in town then it's almost certain that the rest of the women in the family do that, it is catching.

To go to a cafe, that was totally taboo, as was smoking, especially for unmarried women. If you are married, then life is a little freer, but you have certain limitations there too. You have to behave yourself in a certain way so you don't acquire a bad reputation. You can't go out late at night without your husband or go to a wedding without your husband. Then the talk goes: "Why has she come alone?"

TO LEAVE HOME BY GETTING MARRIED

One year after graduating from sixth form, when Susanne was 20, she ran away. The reason was that she had to get married to be able to get away from home.

I had no friends then who had left home before getting married. One girl I remember had got married and moved from home when she was 15. She got married in Sweden while I was at senior school. She did it with the knowledge of the school. It wasn't official, there was no civil marriage, it was only in a church. Another girl was 17 when she got married unofficially. I know that there was a wedding every Saturday in that church and quite a few of the brides were under 18 years of age.

Marriages were carried out within the communities and there it's not so hard to do it unofficially. It is done with the good consent of the religious representatives, regardless of whether it is in a mosque, with an Imam, or some other priest or church, this is what takes place. It is very common.

Many people wondered why I waited to get married. "Is there something wrong with her?" they said or: "She isn't a virgin anymore" or "There's something wrong with her."

If a girl has mental health problems, the parents try to marry her off to a man with the same problems. If she is handicapped they try to marry her off to a handicapped man. Those with a functional disorder have no high value but nor do older women either. The older they are, the less their worth on the marriage market.

My sister was 22 and still unmarried. She felt bad because of this, but also that her freedom was limited considerably compared to the time she went to school. So my sister married and moved over to the man's family. Now she belongs to another family. I know people who have run away to get married when they haven't been allowed to choose themselves, but that is unusual. Marriage of cousins is very common, people would prefer to keep it within a family. Through cousin marriages, it is simpler to keep the possible rumours within the family. Even though my generation feels in general that it is disgusting. It is beginning to become a little more unusual and in some families it is beginning to disappear completely. For example, if someone wants to divorce a cousin, then it is solved within the family, without getting anyone else from outside involved. "You don't wash your dirty linen in public" if you are concerned about your honour.

AFTER RUNNING AWAY

Before Susanne left her parents' home she got help from a woman at the guidance centre for young people. She went there as she knew there were social workers there. To begin with Susanne just talked about general things as she wanted to see if she could trust anyone, and then the conversations became deeper. This was while she was in sixth form and her visits to the guidance centre were her breathing space. Then she got older, finished sixth form and couldn't continue going there.

Nonetheless I continued to keep in contact for a while after I had run away from home. I felt really bad at some periods, as I had to keep it all inside me. I hadn't had anyone to confide in before, neither my family nor friends. For a long time I thought about different alternatives. I couldn't accept the limitations, not to be able to do what I wanted, not to be able to decide when I should come home, not to be able to decide who I could marry, not to be able to decide my education, not to be able to decide where I wanted to live. That is why I began to make plans.

One day Susanne just left home, with minimal packing and she has never returned. It is now more than ten years ago. She was helped to find a roof over her head by various charitable organisations. Then she was also helped to change her name and get a protected identity.

Unfortunately the threatening picture doesn't diminish but still remains today. It doesn't diminish whether five years or six months have passed, but as long as I live and they want their honour back.

I mean that my life is more important than their honour and I know what Dad is capable of. In general, violence can take many different forms, everything from limitations such as coming home directly after school, to boxes on the ear, pure physical beatings, or mental torture, or both, leading to possible murder. It can be very different depending on the individual family. I experience that there is such a strong threat that I risk being murdered – because I have left them.

VIOLENCE AS A METHOD OF UPBRINGING

Even during her early childhood years, violence was a part of life for Susanne. It was supposed to be a lesson, to set an example for the other children in the family. The parents didn't care that there was legislation against beating children in Sweden.

If I had been beaten, then it was a warning to the others that: "If you do something similar then the same thing will happen to you." There has been violence in my family for as long as I can remember and I was beaten when I was three or four years old. I don't remember my siblings being beaten, they adapted well. However, I remember that Mum was beaten. I didn't see it but heard it, and I heard Mum cry.

When it comes to beating children, parents feel they have the right to beat their own children. This isn't a natural part of upbringing, but once when I threatened to report them, which led to more beatings, they just shrugged their shoulders and said that they didn't care. Naturally it could have been different in different families but this is what I have seen and experienced and my siblings just complied.

VIEW OF WOMEN

The woman should take care of the man and Susanne learnt that early on in her family. The boys don't need to learn anything about the household as their role is as the family breadwinners. The woman has the greatest responsibility for the children, especially the girls as they become older and become teenagers. Before this both parents have responsibility.

For example, I had to make my brother's bed. When I get married one day, I will be expected to look after my husband even if we both work. I should clean, make the beds, cook food and look after the children.

HONOUR

Susanne has chosen to use her experience in her career. Today she is a trained social worker and wants to work with honour-related problems. She has previously worked idealistically.

When it comes to religious affiliation and honour-related violence, then this has nothing to do with religious affiliation – I refer to traditions. But unfortunately this takes place, particularly in the Middle East. Or it is noted there more when it happens there. There are all possible religions there. My view of the problem is that it is about fear of losing face because of what other people think and feel. It doesn't matter if I make a person feel bad so long as I retain my honour.

THE THREAT REMAINS

Susanne has dreams for the future like everyone else but she has a strong feeling that the threat from her family still exists. This puts limitations on her that she can accept for her own safety.

I want to get married to a man that I have chosen myself, I want to work, I want to educate myself and I want to live where I personally have decided. I am already a bit on my path. First I had to make up my school marks at adult education. Then I educated myself within the care sector and later I want to a higher-level education within the social sector. Naturally my life experience has affected my choice of career.

I still live with a protected address and identity. Now I have a long-term temporary job within my field and I have a flat of my own.

Susanne thus still needs protected living that society can give and she looks around her today when she is outside, for she feels unsafe wherever she goes. She avoids areas with many immigrants and says that she would never live in such an area. Because she doesn't want to be questioned about where she comes from, about why she isn't married and about her siblings and family. She has even thought about changing her appearance.

I also avoid pizzerias, hairdressing salons and pubs where I know immigrants go. I do that to protect myself, it's a restriction but at the same time it is a safety precaution that I must adopt. Even if it is a restriction, at least I can now choose who I want to live with, where I want to go, how I will dress, how I behave and who I want to marry. If I want to do that at all.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS TO A LIFE OF THEIR OWN

As this is a polemical book based on facts, it doesn't aim to be scientifically exact. My analysis builds on the experiences I have gathered during my working with the complex of problems and some remarkable discoveries that are shown in the interviews. The young women's tales speak for themselves. As long as it has been possible, I have had their participation in revising the interview material and they have been able to remove things they didn't want included.

First I would like to briefly reflect on what transpired from the interviews related to the questionnaires I have used.

Sometimes there are perceptions about honour violence that it is a phenomenon that only certain newly arrived refugees practice. Several of the tales depict a long time living in Sweden and other reasons for fleeing, such as the possibility to work here. The families have all lived in Sweden for up to 20 years and most of the children have grown up, or were born, in Sweden. Forced marriage is still a common occurrence within parts of the Romany group. Segregation within one's group, religious or ethnic, combined with more isolation increases the problem but is not, as some people maintain, the reason for it. It cannot be called an integration problem in a society where honour norms are the generally prevailing ones. What has happened amongst some Romanies is that they have developed their own legal system and sort out irregularities within their own group.

Now voices are being raised from other groups that religious consideration should be taken in administration of justice.

Is this what we want? Or do we want civil legislation that applies to everyone within the borders of the country?

Several of the girls describe their first childhood years as relatively free, or as one girl expresses it:

We do the opposite of what Swedes do, when the children are small they are free and without limits, but when they approach teenage years they are restrained, particularly the girls. We are trapped when we want to test our wings.

After having worked with children and young people all my adult life, I can verify that the families with a strong honour mentality have an extraordinary lack of knowledge about children's development. The fact that the parents come from authoritarian societies conditions them strongly, something that is reflected in an authoritarian upbringing of their own children. They lack the knowledge of how to have a dialogue with a child and demand instead that the children obey utterly, or they beat the children so they yield out of fear. Several of the families come from war-torn countries and have been damaged by their experiences there, and they have not received any treatment in Sweden for their injuries. Many of the parents have themselves been forced into marriages at an early age without knowledge of either sexuality or emotional closeness. All this has been taboo or shameful, *haram*, depending on which religious affiliation one has. What sort of effect on parenthood and the emotional bond to a child, can a marriage have that has begun with a rape at a young age?

Children should subordinate themselves to adults. This applies specially to girls, who should also subordinate themselves to men, even their younger brothers. The sexual division is clear and has both religious and traditional overtones. Child beating as a systematic tool for upbringing permeates most of these tales. The children are brought up early in the stereotypical sexual roles where the man is superior to the woman and is totally exempt from tasks in the home. When asked about this the parents in the Muslim families refer to

the Koran and its description of the woman and man. "According to the Koran, a man is a man and a woman is a woman," says one mother to her daughter who questions why there are different rules for men and women.

The woman is seen as a chattel that can be sold on the marriage market. This is essentially not far removed from the slave trade. She has a distinct role in the family; she is to serve the rest of the family members, particularly the male ones.

The young women relate throughout that children should conform to the norm system that the family have established. Questioning makes things worse for the children and violence and oppression increase if they resist or break the norms.

Violence in those families where the final step for the affected child is to leave her family for an insecure existence is not negligible violence. It can in some forms be described almost as torture. In spite of this, the women say that they do not hate their parents "because it is a matter of ignorance and they don't know any better" and "This is their way of showing love."

The woman has no economy of her own, no room of her own, no time of her own. The mother is primarily responsible for the first years' upbringing. Then the father looks after the boys, or they look after themselves, and the mother looks after the girls. The father and brothers make sure that the girl conducts herself like a "modest girl" outside the home. Gossip is maintained by the women when they meet and they are responsible if their daughters do not behave appropriately. Most young women have related that when they have been chastised, both parents have been active in the assault. The mother is often responsible for insults and mental assault while the father is responsible for the physical punishment. The young women often experience the mental insults worst.

Some quotations illustrate the differences in the families:

My sister and I had to keep order for our brothers. "Girls should learn from an early age that they are not children who play. I don't know any girls who play. (Laura).

I remember how I cleaned so that in exchange I could go out. The same thing applied to my sisters. My brother on the other hand could come and go as he wanted. (Susanne)

I told him that it is the same thing with a guy if he marries several women and leaves them. But then he answered that "a woman is a woman and a man is a man." (Sofia)

For several of the young women, the violence and oppression in the name of honour means that they have had a very limited youth, without any social spirit of community outside the family. Independent contacts with those of the same age are not possible. Small attempts to break out in connection with education are stopped by the parents as far as possible. The only possibility for a life of one's own is to lie to those closest, both family and possibly friends outside. Lies create problems for the girls in the family, with their friends, and the day they need help from the authorities. Then they encounter difficulties in being believed as the stories would appear disconnected and even seem incredible. Several of the girls continue to lie even when they don't need to, as the lies have become a way to survive and something they have learnt. It is deeply disturbing to their confidence and needs a long time to heal: both for themselves to be able to tell the truth without anything dangerous happening and to be able to trust their fellow man.

The girls explain that if they want an income of their own and a longer education they are forced to break with the family system. It is totally inconceivable to go and educate themselves in another place and have a place of their own unless some relative can keep a watching eye over them, or a brother lives with them.

Free time is practically nonexistent, as they should carry out chores in the home in their spare time. On the odd occasion, when they have managed to nag, lie or negotiate themselves into an activity with friends outside the home, this can be abruptly revoked because of the parents' suddenly altered decision. The daughter's break with her family is often blamed on her having become "Swedified" if she has taken part in a camp and similar activities outside the home.

Several of the mothers of the young women have chronic health problems such as mental health problems, diabetes, goitre and heart conditions. These problems are almost without exception used to bring home the young women from their safe houses or to prevent them from moving away from home. The mothers in such cases often threaten to commit suicide or some relative makes contact with the young woman and says that her mother is dying, so the daughter feels compelled to return home. The mother and daughter symbiosis is incredibly strong as they have never liberated themselves from each other.

The young women also tell about the economic responsibility they are forced to have for their parents, which causes many difficult privations for themselves and for their possibilities to live independent lives. They have to hand over their study loans or their income to their parents.

The young women, almost without exception, have practically no knowledge about their physical development and sexuality. Their parents often prevent them from taking part in the school's sex and cohabitation classes, but sometimes the young women have the idea that it is shameful to even listen to the education and refrain of their own accord. In those cases, the parents' indoctrination has succeeded. No one can claim that the girls are prevented when they themselves refrain.

Sex is only allowed within marriage. Often these young women have not been given information that a girl has periods and the first bleeding becomes a traumatic experience. One woman describes how her mother just gave her a sanitary towel and then started to cry. The daughter thought she had been afflicted with a dangerous disease until a friend explained that it was perfectly normal. Another girl thought you got pregnant through kissing and she still believed it when she was over 18. She then got pregnant by accident and had to have an abortion. Her mother had also told her that you become sterile from contraceptives, so at first she didn't dare use them. Tampons are not permitted as then you can lose your hymen and the protective "virginity" is central to the question of "honour" that is found between a woman's legs. The myth of the hymen is maintained to justify control over the woman's sexuality and honour culture.

Several of the young women I met over the years have told me that they do not renounce sex but practice anal sex and such things that are no danger to the hymen. Many young women take risky contacts with men via the Internet as they, similarly to other young people, have a natural curiosity for sexual experimentation. Sexuality is a strong driving force for both boys and girls, particularly in teenage years, even if they risk very hard reprisals, in the worst case murder in a family with an honour culture. In some cases, contacts with unknown men on the Internet have led to sexual exploitation, prostitution and drug abuse. Boys are also subjected to honour violence but are strongly underrepresented over the whole world, as the view of boys as perpetrators lives on, but this is also because they don't look for help. The view of men, and the male role they are indoctrinated into, makes things even more difficult for the boys.

Relationships outside marriage are unthinkable. Extramarital relations are seen in many countries, where religion constitutes the law, as prostitution and the woman is punished with anything from prison and being disowned by her family, to stoning and other forms of honour killing. The attitude is that the woman bears the man's honour between her legs, to express it crudely.

In Sweden this can mean being disowned by the family, forced marriage in or outside the country, violence, murder or "enforced" suicide. Even young men are forced into marriages and subjected to honour oppression and murder.

Divorce is not possible either in Sweden or other countries for the woman who lives under honour oppression. It is inconceivable to live an independent life as a divorced woman with or without children. She is allowed to move back to her parents or to a male relative. The woman is considered a minor without a man. This is inscribed in various religions all over the world.

When it comes to LGBT young people, the taboos regarding sexuality are even stronger. They almost never dare seek help.

LGBT people, regardless of gender are seen as shameful, *haram*, depending on their religious affiliation and they are also persecuted in the name of honour. In many countries where the religious texts constitute the law, there are serious penalties including the death sentence for LGBT people. Hetero norms are necessary to maintain and retain the blood relationship. The notion that one is born into a religion is strong and in the Swedish debate confusion is continually made between religious affiliation and ethnicity. There is no scientific proof that one is born into a religion, that is to say that it is genetic, but it is the perception of faith one is educated in or indoctrinated into.

The family are incredibly important to maintain the culture one comes from and this is characterised by both religion and tradition. For all those working with honour violence, it is a strange argument to defend religious traditions that mean assault and violence, and that obstruct human rights, particularly the rights of women and children. Often opponents claim that it depends on tradition and not religion – but where do many of our traditions come from? I and several others feel that culture contains both religion and tradition. The woman's main task is to take care of the home and children according to traditional ways of thinking. A considerable number of child marriages take place every weekend in Sweden. The legal marriage is performed at the "correct age." Several people who have come as refugees have personal identity numbers that are not correct, so it also happens that a marriage is performed with people who are underage, but the authorities are then unaware of this. Money is often a part of the marriage procedure and the dowry can be compared to the sale of a young woman. "Sale" of the young bride can make a divorce impossible as her family are in debt to the bridegroom and his family for a long or short period of time. The amount for the bride can be anything from a few thousand up to a million kronor. The marriage is often commenced with a rape when the young people don't want to have sex with each other but are forced to by their families. The blood on the sheet, the myth of the broken hymen, can be the only protection from violence and threat in the name of honour.

The young women's dreams for the future are not unrealistic. First they want work or an education that can give them a good job. They want to meet someone they like and have a family. When it comes to children, they want to give them what they themselves lacked: love and trust in their parents. They want to treat boys and girls similarly and they want to listen and discuss things with their children.

Most of the young women are believers but want to interpret the religious texts themselves. One young woman expressed it that the texts are interpreted by men and the man constitutes the norm. "The most important thing is how we behave to each other and that you are a good person," many of them say.

When it comes to honour-related violence and its causes, none of the young women say that it is because of religion but that religion is used to oppress and that it is the interpretation of the religion that is wrong. Several say that it is all about tradition and that the parents are ignorant about other methods of child upbringing. They believe that they are doing the right thing, say the young women.

Honour-related violence is different from partner violence where the violence is often carried out by a man on a woman. Both partner violence and honour-related violence are forms of the patriarchal violence but honour-related violence is much more extensive and complex and is carried out in a different way. Both the man and woman are active perpetrators in the violence. This is apparent from their stories, and through my other experiences in this field. The violence and oppression is carried out collectively, both by the family and by others in the family network. It is carried out and sometimes planned across country borders. The perpetrator or perpetrators are seen as heroes by those close to them which is not the case with partner violence where the perpetrator is seen as just the perpetrator. The possibility of seeking help within the family network is very limited or non-existent for honour-related violence. Work with honour-related violence therefore demands international collaboration.

The consequences of their upbringing has varied for the women interviewed. Some of them have no, or very limited, contact with their families. Some still live under the Secrecy Act and risk the threat of death if they are revealed. Several of them have experienced eating disorders, depressions and suicidal thoughts. One has even had drug abuse problems and become a prostitute. The step from leaving home has delayed their future planning for several years when they have missed out on schooling both because of the assault but also because of the long rehabilitation period. Several of them have problems with self-esteem and self-confidence because of the long-term violence and oppression they have been exposed to. Hardest is the doubt they feel because of the strong indoctrination of guilt and shame that has been going on during their upbringing, which can still give them a strong feeling of anxiety in their daily lives.

The positive consequences are that the young women understand how they want their lives to be and how they themselves want to be as parents. Several of them have become stronger through their crisis but it has been a very high price to pay.

WHAT DOES SOCIETY NEED TO DO?

The Social Services Act

I feel that the Social Services Act should be applied to protect young people under the age of 18. The law on the care of young, LVU, should without exception be applied when it comes to serious violence, serious lack of care and protection, and danger for the young person's life. As there is still insufficient knowledge of how to assess the risks in a case of honour-related violence, that to a certain degree has other problems and complexities, education and value judgements are necessary for staff within the social services, and also other people who encounter the problems. When knowledge is taught in basic education alongside social studies education, legal education, psychology education and equivalent, and when legislation is in phase with development, then there will be other possibilities.

Today parents must be informed if a social investigation is started concerning their child. In normal cases this is no problem. On the suspicion of crime in the name of honour, it can be devastating for the young exposed person if protection has not been established first. Changes in legislation about the obligation to inform parents in the initial stages of the investigation are needed. Where parents or the family network constitute the greatest threat to the young person, the safety of the young person should be given the greatest priority. Social workers are still handling cases of honour-related violence incorrectly because of insufficient knowledge, or prejudices, held by the individual social worker and his or her superiors.

Families who practice oppression and violence in the name of honour should have qualified help to break the honour mentality. They live under sect-like conditions and need to be "deprogrammed" through very well qualified family treatment. This treatment method has not yet been developed. If they don't agree to treatment, the young person must be protected as long as is necessary. Child abuse must be reported to the police and the perpetrators must be brought to trial.

The Official Secrets Act

Today the young person who has secret protection must apply for a renewal of this. Many people with whom I have been in contact, including those contributing to this book, personally feel that they themselves should have the right to state when they want the secret protection to be discontinued, that is to say when the need disappears.

Young people who have been put into debt by their families on forced marriage and who are therefore registered by the tax authorities because of this should have their debts offwritten in order to get a reasonable start in an independent adult life. Parents who place their children in a debt trap should be prosecuted. This should also apply to a husband who, in a forced marriage, puts his ex-wife in a debt trap to make it difficult for her continued life as an independent person.

Interpreters

Interpreting at different stages of the investigation, police interrogation and legal process of crime or suspected crime in the name of honour should take place with authorised interpreters who repudiate the honour culture.

Independent interpreters should, without exception, be used in the investigational processes. When it comes to honour violence, it is totally unsuitable to use family members as interpreters.

Education

Education about honour violence and oppression should be given to everyone who encounters children, young people and adults in their daily work, in basic education as well as further education and for those who finish their qualifications. Voluntary organizations today show the most responsibility in this matter. They also have the greatest knowledge about it as many of them are immigrant organisations, not least women's organisations, the members of which have come from countries with a strong honour culture. They should therefore be given resources, and both personal and long-term economic subsidies. A prerequisite in order to be able to work professionally with this issue is that those involved have knowledge both of honour-related culture and oppression and long experience of equality work. The improvement of qualifications within different authorities is needed.

The criminal code

In several interviews it has transpired that severe child abuse has taken place. This makes one think about how we see honour-related violence. By seeing it as "men's violence against women", it gives the impression that there is no child abuse. In the tales it is also apparent that the parents collaborate in the practice of violence. The myth that the woman is a helpless victim to circumstance is here turned upside down. The violence has a task: to raise children in a gender-segregated manner according to religion and tradition. By denying that honour-related violence occurs and has special characteristics, one also denies the appearance of child abuse. A report from Save the Children recently stated that child abuse is on the rise again in Sweden. Surely we don't want this to be the case because we close our eyes to honour-related violence?

The technical, and other, proof that is carried out at the scene of the crime investigation for violence, murder and "suicide" in the name of honour must be improved on. International collaboration can also be developed here.

Legislation

Sweden has good legislation for the protection of women and against child abuse. We also have an equality law. These laws have mainly been put into effect by the long-term struggle of women's and human rights' organisations and they are based on human rights, the women's convention and the children's convention. They have achieved penetration also due to a long-term political desire, which has been facilitated as we have had peace in Sweden for 200 years. A common battle of women activists and the labour movement has contributed to society taking responsibility for the social security and not built on charity from private individuals or religious movements. We should be proud of this and not lower our standards one millimetre in the name of cultural relativism. Voluntary organizations should complement public institutions – not replace them. We should accept differences but not encroachments.

School

Legislation needs to be changed. If we are serious about children's rights, then religious and independent schools should be forbidden for children and young people under the age of 16, which is the age for compulsory schooling. A ban on the veil should be introduced for children under 15. From the age of 15, a young person has the right to sexual relations and the veil is a religious, sexual and political symbol. We do not allow political symbols in our schools. For a small girl, the veil has a definite negative influence on her life and it encourages a gender-segregated way of thinking in both boys and girls. If children are to form a free and independent perception of the world around them, different influences must come into their lives. They should learn about all religions and also about atheism. Science and the study of evolution are also very important.

The exception in today's school laws that exempts students from being present at teaching in the name of religion or tradition must be removed. All students should have access to a complete education without considering cultural relativism.

Forced marriages and arranged marriages

Forced marriages must be prohibited and argumentation must be strengthened on the suspicion that this is taking place. Increased education and collaboration with countries that have come further than Sweden with legislation and production of evidence of forced marriage and other honour crimes is needed. Money transactions on marriage should be compared to selling the young people and legal proceedings should be taken accordingly. Where marriage was initiated with a rape, legal proceedings should also be taken.

The authorisation to marry people

The experiences I have had through my work and through the interviews have made me very dubious when it comes to the religious authorisation to marry people. In many countries it is the civil marriage, related to civil legislation that applies. Therefore I strongly question that the religious communities – regardless of religion – should have the right to perform marriages. If the couple wants to have a religious ceremony after the civil marriage it must be totally voluntary. It is considerably simpler to counteract those

encroachments that take place in our country today through forced marriage with minors. In the countries where legislation is provided by the religious texts, so-called theocracies, it has devastating consequences for chiefly women's and children's rights.

Control over the woman's sexuality

Obligatory sexual and cohabitation teaching from an early age is necessary. Hymen operations, or control of the hymen, should be seen as quackery and legal proceedings should be brought against it. By allowing these operations, we are maintaining a myth that can be a matter of life or death for young women all over the world. We are also maintaining religious guilt and shame of sexuality, which is actually a natural part of our lives and our human needs. We are contributing to a gender-segregated society and working against equality if we don't put a stop to this myth about the woman and her sexuality. In the UN's women's and children's convention there is a lack of written documentation about the right to one's sexuality.

We need a secular society

Sweden has said that it cares about human rights. Therefore taking cultural consideration in cases of abuse is unacceptable. By closing our eyes to serious problems in society, some people within the media, politics and the authorities play into populist and racist hands. No one benefits from cowardice when looking at the problems that are maintained by religion or tradition in the aim of subjugating people, especially women, because of their gender. By treating people differently before the law depending on ethnic or religious affiliation, we are creating a "we and them" society. Laws for the protection of women, hate-crime legislation and the law against beating children is the result of many years' research and custom within this field. Do we want to throw all this overboard with one fell swoop. There is a great risk that this will happen if the cultural relativistic attitude is allowed to continue to dominate society debates and in decision-making organs.

Sweden is one of the world's most secularised countries. By choosing not to see honour-related violence, we risk losing what we instead should be developing further.

We need a secular society if we want a democracy that includes everyone, with freedom of expression, freedom of the press, women's and children's rights and religious freedom. All religions are best upheld by a society where the state and religion are separated and where there is civil legislation based on human rights and science.

In conclusion

In conclusion I would like to thank the five brave young women who allowed us to hear their life stories and shared their experiences. They give knowledge, hope and strength to those who find themselves in similar situations and who wonder if it is possible to change their lives, to have the right to their own bodies and their sexuality and decide over their own future.

THE DREAM OF A HOME OF HER OWN

Laura came to Sweden in 1990 with her parents, a brother and a sister from war and poverty in Lebanon. Two younger sisters were born in Sweden. Today she is 25 years old.

LEBANON, BEFORE THE ESCAPE

Laura remembers the noise of bombs, fear and chaos from her childhood in Lebanon.

My first memory is of people screaming and running around. We didn't know why, we just did what they did. Many of us lived in the same flat and we moved all the time. They bombed, the ground shook and everyone screamed. I was totally shocked and felt that I had to run away. It was dark and crowded with a lot of noise everywhere. It was war. I knew that bombs and hand grenades were coming from Israel, but I didn't know what Israel was.

Our mother was with us as my father was working abroad. We were ten people in a two-roomed flat and my mother and aunts took care of most things. It didn't feel crowded even though I didn't have my own room or anything that was my own. Everything belonged to everyone.

The air was bad and everything was confusing.

We didn't have any playgrounds. I remember that the only way I played in Lebanon was to cycle up and down the hills. When I wasn't with the women. I hung around near them, as I was curious about what they talked about. Sometimes they were secretive and then I wanted to know why. Then some woman would say that I didn't understand what they were talking about. Of course I did. I was precocious.

I remember once when we were going to visit Lebanon, after we have moved to Sweden. We were going to go to a funfair in Lebanon. We had just been to Liseberg in Gothenburg. "Oh, what fun!" I thought then. But the funfair in Lebanon only had one helter-skelter and a sandpit.

Laura doesn't know exactly how her parents met, more than that they met and fell in love. She thinks that their families liked each other at the start, even though her father was not considered good enough for her mother and her family. Her mother's family were not wealthy but they had more money and possessions than her father's family. Her parents married in spite of this and things worked out well between her mother and mother-in-law. But the families didn't see much of each other. Laura found this really difficult when the family visited their home country. They did this every year, and stayed up to a month every time.

The last time Laura's family visited Lebanon there were many problems. Her mother knows deep down that this is due to her family which have done many wrong things even though she doesn't want to admit it. After all, it is her family, her flesh and blood.

Regardless of how stupid they are, no one should talk badly about them; they should be respected.

Laura has thought about respect a great deal and doesn't agree that people should be respected if they behave badly, and with this she means everyone. She says that in actual fact there are few things she likes about her family. They are quite wrong when it comes to bringing up children.

When her parents had married and her mother was pregnant with Laura's older sister, her father, with a few friends, tried to get out of Lebanon. He landed up in several countries and finally came to Sweden. During this time her mother remained in Lebanon, together with Laura's paternal grandmother and aunt, just as women do in Lebanon when they move into the man's family on marriage.

Her father returned from time to time and "got her pregnant", she gave birth to several children and looked after them. Laura thinks that her father travelled for his own pleasure originally, but then it was so all of them could have a safer life.

Laura was born in the country in southern Lebanon. Everyone knew everyone there. Now she doesn't know anyone, but they all know who she is. She thought that was difficult when the family were there. She had to stop and say hello to someone at every step.

It could take her an hour to get where she was going.

At that time only girls, women and pensioners could go to southern Lebanon. No man could get in there. The Israelis were scared that the Lebanese men would fight. So her father was never there. She can't remember her father from that time, not even when he came to visit. They had contact with her mother's family, but not very much.

When Laura looks back to her childhood and who looked after her, she thinks that she didn't experience her mother as a mother then, although she can do this today. She thinks that she was brought up, not just by her mother, but also by her aunt, though chiefly by her grandmother. They looked after Laura and her siblings, cooked food for them and played with them. Laura was with her grandmother the most, and she helped her.

All I have to do nowadays is just talk to my grandmother and she starts crying. I have always liked her the best. When I was little, I didn't feel that way, for I thought she was too old. I wanted to go out shopping, or go to the playground. But I always had to help my

grandmother with one thing or the other. But I also wanted to go out and have fun! My big sister didn't need to help but went out with the other children. I had to sit at home with my grandmother and that was no fun at all.

Today Laura feels that she was unfair to her grandmother. But these are things one only understands with time, she notes.

LACK OF LOVE

Laura was eight when her family came to Sweden and what she remembers most from her childhood is the lack of love. Other things were more important in her family, such as material things.

Her youngest siblings were born here. She doesn't know if the view of child raising has anything to do with the war, or something else, such as poverty. Or if that was the way one brought up children in Lebanon. When she thinks about the war she can sometimes wonder if that led to child raising being less important in her home country, that quite simply it was forgotten. Laura talks about love to children. When she looks back at her upbringing, she feels that it was as though her parents felt that love wasn't necessary. Still today her parents find it very hard to hug her, and she finds it hard to hug them.

"When you are not used to something, then you have a hard time accepting it," she says and she thinks it is a pity and stresses that it is her personal understanding that there is a lack of love in her family. According to her, none of her siblings has received love.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BOYS AND GIRLS

Laura saw from an early age how her parents treated boys and girls differently. The boys were spoilt. They could do what they wanted. When Laura's brothers woke up, they could go out and have fun straightaway. They didn't have to tidy up after themselves. But even today when Laura brings this up with her mother, her mother doesn't think she treated them differently. She says that Laura is imagining it.

My sister and I, on the other hand, had to keep tidy for our brothers. "Girls have to learn early on that they are not children who play." I don't know any girls who play. We have to cook food, clean and help. My parents used to say, "That is why we give birth to girls." Boys should help with money when they are older and girls should help with cleaning, food, and looking after their parents like small children.

Laura didn't discover until they came to Sweden that her parents and those close to them differentiated between children according to their sex. This wasn't so noticeable in Lebanon. There were so many children there and she was small at the time.

WHEN WE CAME TO SWEDEN

When the family came to Sweden, Laura was shocked initially. All the children she got to know had a room of their own.

My first impression of Sweden was "Wow, how large everything was – how airy!" We came here in July or August and the weather was lovely and it was so calm. I went out and bought sweets, skipped rope and I was so happy. I could never even have dreamt about it; it was like Tivoli. There were playgrounds everywhere.

CONTACT WITH HER FATHER

When they came to Sweden Laura hadn't met her father for three or four years.

I was nervous and wondered what I should do when I met him again. We siblings were so shy that we didn't know whether we should hold out our hands, or what we should do. He thought that we were still small children, so he kissed and hugged us, but then he couldn't ask us to come and sit with him. I have never sat with my father and talked. Not even when I was small.

Laura's relationship with her father has not been good and her parents were strict. Even today she sees the image of her father in front of her when she hears the word strict.

She believes that her father had a tough time when he was growing up. She knows that he didn't have good contact with his father who had three wives and died early, thus disappearing from their lives. Laura's father only has a half picture of him. People didn't have so many photos earlier.

No one could have their own opinion as my father decided everything. I knew that I could never ask him about anything, I was too scared for that. So I talked to my mother first and asked her to talk to him. I didn't want to get into arguments. My father had tried to

stop smoking several times, and hadn't succeeded. So he could smack me or my siblings just because he felt like a smoke. I have never seen him hit my mother, he just slapped us children.

As Laura sees things today, he needed to release his anger in some way, and he couldn't hit a stranger. So it was easier to hit the children.

My mother shouted at us, but didn't hit us, though our father did. I think it's a weakness in a grown-up to blame their behaviour on the children. Both my parents did this. But they also blamed each other. They know what they did was wrong when they went to Lebanon and left me and my sister there. When the subject comes up, my mother blames my father. Sometimes when I have done things that my father didn't like, he explained it in a way he wanted to. If I didn't accept that, he would get irritated, raise his voice and hit me. There was no point in arguing with him, I never got anywhere with that.

FRIENDS

From her first to third year at school Laura brought friends home after school. Then she stopped doing that as she began to be ashamed of her parents in front of her friends who had their own rooms and games.

When friends came home to us they asked why I didn't have my own room and I felt ashamed. Also my mother treated them like small children. She told them to be quiet and asked when they would go home. That was also shameful. When I was at my friends' their mothers were really nice and friendly. I didn't want to bring friends home any more and there was nothing to do at my home. The consequence of this was that my friends didn't want to be with me anymore.

Rumour spreading and jealousy were also part of the picture when Laura was small, but she didn't have any problems at the time as she was with children from the same culture with the same problems, and she didn't need to feel ashamed.

POVERTY

When Laura and her siblings were small, they talked to each other about what they wished if they could have a better life. They had nothing in Lebanon and it was hard at the beginning in Sweden as well. Today when she meets children in her work as a hairdresser, and asks what they want for Christmas, they sometimes answer that they don't want anything. Then she is still shocked. She thinks of her own childhood when she and her siblings had nothing. At the same time she thinks that it's not good to have too much: a balance is the best.

TEENAGE PERIOD AND CONTROL INCREASES

When Laura became a teenager, a much tougher period of her life began. The restrictions, control and violence increased. The term before she was to start sixth form, the fashion was for cut-off or turned-up jeans, and this is what Laura had too.

One morning at home, when I went downstairs, my mother stared at me and shouted: "What are you wearing? Go up and change!" My father got angry too.

"I have had jeans before, and there wasn't a problem then. What the hell has happened overnight?" I asked.

It was only that I was growing up, I understood later. They became aware of it quite suddenly. My mother saw it that particular morning.

When that happened, Laura and her sister were still small. Laura hadn't started her periods, and she didn't shave her legs. Afterwards she can laugh at the event, and not least because she just turned down her jeans until she left home, to placate her parents. But that time Laura didn't understand why they lost their tempers and she thought it was very unpleasant.

The family was large and out of consideration to her father, everything had to run friction-free in the mornings. When he got up, breakfast should be on the table and the children should have gone off to school. Otherwise he became angry and got into a rage. He could also get angry if the place wasn't clean and tidy.

My mother should look after us, in spite of my father not having met us or been with us for years. I thought that he should look after us to get to know us. But their attitude was that our mother should continue with the same role she had in Lebanon.

The control got stronger and stronger. The next decree was that Laura and her sister should be at home by sunset.

My sister was more of a homebody. She never went out and didn't have any friends. I was more of a tomboy. I wanted to play football and be everywhere. But my sister could sit still and just read a book and take it easy on hot days. She thought that this was fine. She didn't want to go out. We are totally different types of people.

It had actually begun to get difficult back when her mother gave birth to her little sister. Laura was ten at the time and it felt as though life began to end for her. She remembers that at the weekends she was only allowed out to play when her little sister was asleep. Laura rocked her. "For God's sake, sleep!" she thought as she wanted to be outside playing, skipping rope and being with her friends. It felt as though she was the mother of her little sister. She was supposed to look after her all the time during the daytime as soon as she wasn't at school. She hated her little sister so much that she wished she didn't exist. Nonetheless she could never have seriously hurt her. Her father sat smoking, watching TV while her mother cleaned, cooked food or talked on the phone. Laura particularly remembers one day when she had decided to meet a friend.

I finally got my little sister to sleep and then I cycled over to my friend, I had prepared everything. We were going riding at a stable next to my friend's home. I cycled so fast that when I arrived, I found it hard to breathe. Then my friend came out and said: "Your mother has rung and your little sister has woken up again." Then I just screamed out loud. All I could do was go back home again.

Today she can imagine that she must have been furious then, both at her little sister and her mother. Laura's breathing hole was that she could train. She thought it was great and really enjoyed it. After a while, she says with bitterness, her parents began to dislike the fact that she went training. They said that the reason was that it was between five and six in the afternoon, and it was beginning to get dark then.

My parents never thought that they could take and fetch me from my training. They had just thought that they should sit comfortably, give birth to masses of children, and receive masses of child benefits. I haven't seen anything of the money and the child benefits. I was given 100 kronor a month, and I hardly received any clothes or anything else. They wanted to save the money. Today it's all gone anyhow.

It became difficult to continue training with her new regulations about times. Then her parents introduced further restrictions. Laura and her sister were not allowed to sleep over at friends' or sleep away at all. If there was a camp with school, some teacher who was going back to school would drive them home, as they were only allowed to be there during the daytime. They were not allowed to sleep over when it was mixed boys and girls, and when there were Swedes involved.

My sister and I asked if we could sleep over and my parents answered: "Our children should also learn from an early age that they can't sleep away from home." We cried and shouted.

What applied was that "Those from our culture do not sleep over at anyone's." We should sleep at home. These rules did not only apply to us in our family, but for all the foreigners we knew. That made it easier for us to know that our friends had the same argument with their parents.

The idea about Swedes was that "they eat pig and so they have boys and girls in the same room." We aren't even allowed when we are small to share a bedroom with the opposite sex. We naturally did what we were told. It was a bit easier for the boys to sleep over at others. Although I don't know any foreign boys of my age who have slept away from home.

Laura means that if the question should come up for a boy, it would be easier for him as boys have more freedom.

When Laura talks about foreigners, she means those from Arab countries, who could come from Lebanon or Iraq, or be Kurds or from Syria.

I say it like this, all Muslims. Christians didn't have the same problem. For them, Muslims, if they talked about women, it was because girls could be raped. Girls shouldn't learn to sleep over, this means that they are beginning to be around Swedes and then the parents lose control. All the time they were thinking about what the girls did, what they got up to, if they ate pig or if they were raped.

THE BODY AND SEXUALITY

Control over sexuality is very important. Laura got her period when she was in the fifth class.

She became increasingly interested in her appearance and herself. She looked at her reflection in the mirror to see if she was fat, etc.

Then her mother came up to her and asked why she was looking at herself.

She wondered why I did it "this way." I got angry and answered that it was none of her business and it was my body. After that I knew that I wouldn't be allowed to look at myself. But I did it anyway as I thought my mother was crazy. I thought to myself: God, if I don't look at myself, who else will look at me? It was exactly as though I didn't own myself. Am I just here for my husband? I have these (points to her breasts), not because I look at them, but is it only to please him? Still today I don't know why one can't look at oneself and I would like to ask my mother why. But I am scared that she will be irritated and angry and start shouting. I looked at myself, even down there, and my mother would have died had she known.

Laura feels sorry for her mother, because if she hadn't looked at herself, she has missed something big.

During this time, Laura was beaten at home all the time. She put on weight, she who had always been trim and well-trained. She became enormous and the only thing she heard was that she was so "bloody fat." When she saw herself in the mirror, she didn't recognise herself. She felt terrible and her image of herself changed.

HONOUR ACCORDING TO LAURA

The control that the girls were subjected to is connected to honour, Laura feels.

This business of honour is different from family to family. But if someone had a boyfriend then they couldn't talk about it for our father would murder her. This point was so very sensitive. You just knew about it. I believe that you learned about it while growing up, what came later. My mother has never said: "You can't have sex, you can't show yourself naked to anyone." She has never said that, but I know myself that I can't do it.

Laura never got near the word sex at home, for there are strong feelings of taboo attached to it. People don't talk about it. She understood that when she got her period.

Honour is about crazy people, says Laura. It isn't an old tradition. Nor does she believe that honour has existed, it is just some "devil" who has invented it. It is invented by men, she believes, so they can get the better of women.

Because if you check all the honour murders, it is not the mother who kills the daughter, but often the brothers and father. If the mother kills her daughter, I believe she has been forced to do it. She doesn't do it just like that without blinking, but a man doesn't care, he can do it. It is all to do with human power, and I have no respect for these people, who carry out honour violence! They are animals, they are worse than animals. They don't eat pigs but they are pigs themselves.

Laura has heard about Fadime. Cases like that don't occur so often in Lebanon, they are mostly amongst Kurds, she thinks. She remembers that they have discussed at home that her father's half-sister had a difficult time. She had to go round, cleaning for other people. What happened to her shows that the idea of honour was still a part of Laura's family.

Her grandfather left her for up to a week with people she didn't know to clean for them; he just took her salary and left. When she was 17, she had had enough. She ran away and some kind people looked after her and gave her food. She was good at dancing and singing and she started to dance. It was taboo to show your body for men and that made you a type of slut. When she ran away, her grandfather and his wives were just worried that they had lost money. They searched for her and became crazy when they found out she was dancing. My father followed her and was going to kill her. He tried several times, but she managed to escape.

SEGREGATION

In compulsory schooling, Laura's parents would not allow her to be around Swedish friends, so she was with them at school, but not outside. Then she had to make up masses of excuses for her Swedish friends when she had to be at home and clean and help her mother. She was so ashamed that she was not allowed to play. Laura learnt to lie very early and lied both to her parents and to her friends.

You lie all the time, you have to in order to survive, otherwise you would go crazy. The only thing I did was cry and pray to God: "Why is it me? Why have you made me? Why do you hate me? Why did you give me my parents?" I might ask. Nor did I believe that my mother and father were my real parents. That helped me. Because if my father beat me or my mother screamed at me or they forbade me certain things, I could imagine that "they are not my real parents anyway, so take it easy, it's OK, you will find your parents and then these devils will get what they deserve!"

That helped Laura to feel better.

When Laura was in the seventh class things began to get much more serious and even stricter. She had to go directly to and from school, she wasn't allowed to associate with her neighbours and not even talk to a boy. She has always been rather shy. At school she was alone.

At secondary school, everything concerning boys and girls, clothes and such things was very important.

Laura was bullied, both for her shoes and her clothes. Her mother bought her clothes and they were ridiculous ones that she was ashamed to wear. So often she went around with almost the same kind of clothes. Things like that were really tough for a teenager.

I was quite alone! My parents made me alone. It was pure hell in the seventh to ninth classes. I did my homework. Sometimes I pretended just to be left alone and not have to help at home.

The children weren't allowed to watch Swedish TV. Their parents' argument was that "someone might come in and see them watching Swedish TV." They told the children that most of the programmes were bad, they were scared that the children would see a sex scene or two people kissing each other. It mainly concerned sex, in principle everything. But it didn't matter that the children saw violence! That is how the parents were educated and they were scared to lose their daughters. It's impossible to even think the thought what would have happened if Laura had met a Swedish boy. You can't even pose the question.

Laura has thought a lot about that and states that violence is OK, but not love.

CATASTROPHE WARNING

An event that provoked continuing problems in her sisters' lives concerned a poem. Laura's older sister was good at writing poetry. She always wrote love poems, probably because she felt she couldn't receive this any other way, Laura thinks. One day her mother took her sister's diary and read all the poems she had written. Her mother thought her sister had a boyfriend and that he had sent the poems to her. That's when the hell began.

My mother shouted and tore up the poems and told my elder sister that she was a whore and called her masses of terrible things. We weren't even allowed to go to school for some time. My elder sister was given strict rules about how she should dress, not least the size of the heels on her shoes, but she should wear ugly shoes. She should be as ugly as possible when she went to school. Sometimes my mother could grab her head and check if she was wearing rouge. Sometimes she wore just a little red rouge and then my mother could fetch water and begin to scrub it away.

For Laura it was as though a devil had entered her parents. They didn't even say goodbye when the sisters went to school.

I remember that they didn't call us by our names but "Idiot – come here." That period was like a black cloud. The problem was that they couldn't hit my sister. Regardless of what happened, they couldn't touch her, so I had to take all the shit instead. They could come into the room where I was reading and pull my hair and then my father could hit me with his belt or with a shoe. During this time my mother could hold me so that I couldn't get away.

This got worse for every year of secondary school. Things got worse at school. Before this, my elder sister had been one of the best in the class but now both sisters failed all their subjects.

The elder sister, who was calm and very sensitive fainted at school one day and had to go to hospital. Laura was just irritated by her and she thought that her parents hadn't even touched her sister but now she was in hospital, where Laura should have been. She thought a good deal about why she hadn't got sick herself and fainted.

BACK TO LEBANON

One summer when the family were going to visit relatives, both sisters had the feeling that they wouldn't be allowed to come back with them to Sweden. They suspected this as their parents were no good at hiding their plans. Laura asked her sister what they should do. At the same time she could feel a certain relief. For safety's sake she packed up all her things because she knew that they wouldn't come back and she suspected that her parents would throw out her things if she didn't pack them away properly.

LEBANON

The same night they arrived in Lebanon the parents told the sisters that they were to stay there and that was because they hadn't behaved themselves in Sweden and things would go badly for them if they didn't. There was nothing to discuss. They would remain while their parents returned with their younger siblings. Laura sat perfectly quietly when her sister began to shout and cry. When the

family arrived, she didn't eat for several weeks. She said that she hated Lebanon and that she wanted to return to Sweden. Laura said nothing.

It was great not to have those idiots. But then I didn't know that it wasn't just my parents who were idiots, but all of my family there were. They were going to decide over me and my sister and they treated us really badly. They thought that because I was fat I didn't need to eat. The fat in my body meant I could do without food for several months - they thought. Moreover, I cost them money if they were forced to give me food. The problem was that my father had money together with my uncle who had promised my father to support us.

Unfortunately, her parents hadn't signed any papers. Apart from supporting them, the uncle was to give them a house in Lebanon. In total this involved a sum of 300,000-400,000 Swedish krona. After a couple of months, the uncle didn't have any money and the "war" began between him and the father. The uncle claimed that he had never received any money and that the father had no right to claim such things. The father became furious at this stage, and the mother even more so, as it was her money too. Then the father stopped paying for the daughters. The result was that they couldn't go to school as that cost money. They couldn't do anything but were forced to live off their aunt who worked in a chocolate factory six days per week for 2,000 krona per month. Laura believes that she and her sister were left in Lebanon because their parents thought it was safer there. They were frightened that their daughters' lives would be like Swedes. They thought that there was no sex, outdoor places and boys in Lebanon. This was incorrect.

We saw that it was worse there. In Sweden Swedes don't hide what they do and they don't consider that they are doing anything wrong. We do things behind people's backs and can seem to be the perfect angel at home. They can get the idea that a girl can have been involved with something, but in actual fact she has been the worst whore, who has been with many guys, lost her virginity etc.

But when there wasn't any money to pay for Laura and her sister, all the cousins came and complained about them. They said that the sisters had returned without any education, in spite of living in Sweden all their lives. They looked down on the sisters and said they should be housewives, or do cleaning somewhere. That was not pleasant for Laura and her sister who didn't feel good to hear that.

OWN PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Laura started to make plans. She wanted to train as a hairdresser. But there wasn't any money for that. Instead she had to work in a factory under the ground folding clothes, cutting threads and checking buttons. She worked there for three-four months from seven in the morning to eleven at night with a quarter of an hour for lunch.

When you work there, you're always on the go. We were like machines: everything should happen fast, fast. You can't be careless for then you would get the sack at once, if you aren't insured. It took about 20 minutes to get to work by bus. The bus cost five krona, that is to say ten krona per day. I decided to walk in order to save money. So I walked one and a half hours a day, and finally I got really thin as I lost weight. Then my family complained about that!

The sisters still lived at their aunt's as she supported them. Her elder sister was considered to be better at school than Laura so it was worthwhile to spend money on her. She was allowed to go to an English school and continued her studies with everything paid. After a while they had to move to their uncle and his wife. The aunt claimed they were badly brought-up and that she would bring them up. They beat the sisters a good deal. Their parents rang from time to time to check that the girls were alright but they only spoke to Laura as her sister refused to speak to them.

How are you? How the hell do you think I am?" I felt terrible. I thought that they could go to hell. Our family thought they were odd parents; everyone talked about them. They said that as we didn't have any education, we would never get a job. The talk was that even the poorest people in Lebanon had an education.

But Laura was pleased anyway, went out sometimes and made friends. But for the smallest thing she should do her relatives rang her father and asked for permission. She remembers once when she was swimming in the summer and wanted to swim in deep water. She wasn't a small child and could swim, but she wasn't allowed to.

She had learnt to swim at school in Sweden, where she even competed. Not even in Sweden would her parents let her wear a swimsuit, but she was forced to have clothes on when she swam. Shorts that reached her knees and a short-sleeved sweater. Later at

school she didn't want to swim for she thought that everyone was looking at her. One day at the swimming pool they said that she couldn't swim with clothes on. It was unhygienic. So that was the end of her swimming.

One day Laura came home from her work in Lebanon and was really pleased as she had earned so much money. That same day her mother was coming on a visit from Sweden. But she didn't come particularly to meet the girls but to get money from the uncle. When Laura came home, she was met by her mother.

Come my daughter, so I can hug you she said. I answered that she shouldn't touch me and then I went in to my room. The others shouted at my mother: "How have you educated this girl? She is badly educated, she needs to be beaten, she is a disgrace! We have never seen a girl like her!" I still laugh at this, for I was proud of myself, I thought I was doing the right thing and don't regret anything. I just regret what I haven't done. But anyway our mother and our uncle started to argue. He said he didn't have any money for her. My mother started to shout and scream. I, on the other hand, was really pleased for I thought it was dirty money. They had offered my love for money. And now our money was all gone. My mother told me that my uncle was a pig.

"Yes, and I didn't bring any money with me" continued my mother. Then I wondered if she needed money and my mother said that she wanted to borrow some from me. "I'm sorry, you can't." I went to my room and my mother thought I was mean and selfish, and I had to hear that. I who knew what I had been exposed to became furious, shouted and cried. "Do you want my money? Are you crazy or what? What the hell are you thinking?"

Laura became quite desperate and didn't know what she was doing. She was furious and went to the fridge, took out her grandmother's medicine and locked herself into the toilet. They knocked and shouted that she needed to go to hospital. She had taken pills surreptitiously without anything happening, so she knew it wasn't dangerous. Her mother went to the airport crying and took the plane back home. Laura didn't understand why her mother cried. Was it because the money was gone? Laura thinks it was perhaps for the money, their lives and their dreams. Everything was over for them.

Her mother still has a dream about an enormous house with a garden. The problem is that her father has never bought her jewellery. It is common in Arab countries that people buy gold. Her mother has never received that, as they were supposed to save their money. Now she had nothing.

HAIRDRESSING SCHOOL AFTER ALL

When Laura had worked at the factory and saved money, she could go to a hairdressing school in Lebanon. But one month before the end of the school, her father came from Sweden to Lebanon as her elder sister was getting married.

During this time in Lebanon her sister had become another person. She went around with her cousins who were very religious. She began to wear a veil and take lessons in the Koran and felt it was all right. Then she met a religious man. Laura didn't like him at the beginning but changed her mind gradually.

I hated him to start with and threw water on him every time he came, and then threw him out. But my sister started to like him and today he is the sweetest person I have ever met. He treats my sister so well; he is a great guy and we are almost best friends. He was religious but became a bit more modern when they got married and he came to Sweden.

Her sister now lives with her husband and children in Lebanon but the man sometimes comes as a foreign worker to building sites in Sweden. He thinks Laura's parents are strange and does not have a good relationship with them.

For a long time in Lebanon Laura thought that everyone was equally love-deprived as she and her siblings were, but not even her cousins experienced that. She remembers that she was amazed when she saw her cousins' mother cuddle them. She thought: "Does that exist here? Love!"

THE SISTER MARRIES

Her mother was against her elder sister's marriage as she thought it was too early. The man's financial situation was not good and the mother thought she should marry a rich man. Even today Laura thinks her elder sister is not happy. Her upbringing has given her scars and she can't let go of what happened and still cries herself to sleep.

But in spite of both of them being marked by their childhood and upbringing, the sisters have totally different ideas of what took place. The elder sister feels she is now paying "the debt". Laura doesn't understand her but feels that her sister is sorry that she never got an education. She was one of the smartest in the whole school and wanted to be a psychologist or something important.

BACK IN SWEDEN

Once her elder sister got married, the family changed their mind about Laura. She had got herself an education, she was clever and shouldn't stay in Lebanon, they thought. So on the advice of her relations, she returned.

But it was really difficult to get back into Swedish society again. Her family had moved to another town so it felt even better to get away from all her memories. To begin with her parents made a fuss of her, but then the coercion began again. Laura wanted to go to the ninth class as she wasn't yet 18 and later she wanted to continue with her education from Lebanon and go to hairdressing school. Her father thought that was unnecessary. Instead he opened a salon and forced her to work there one whole summer. The salon was dark and shabby, without any ventilation. But she held onto her dreams, as she wanted to work in a proper salon one day.

Back in Sweden Laura felt as though she had forgotten almost all her Swedish. So she contacted a friend who helped her get in touch with school. The headmaster said that it was good that she came before her 18th birthday, for it would have been hard had she been older. The school started in August that autumn. She made up the ninth class, studied "like hell" and just crammed and crammed. She got into hairdressing school, studied there for three years and then started to work in a well-known salon.

BACK TO SQUARE ONE

At home in her family everything had returned to the old pattern and once again Laura was beaten. She went home straightaway after school where friends could come to her if they wanted to meet her. She wasn't allowed to go out and even if she did go out, she had to be at home before darkness fell and was forced to help her mother with cleaning.

Back to square one.

She decided to move away from home.

Then her elder sister and husband came to Sweden and now nine people were living in a two-roomed flat. It was not a fun time. A neighbour, an old pensioner, came down every day and cried for their flat was so noisy. When the sister and husband went back home to Lebanon, Laura had decided that she must have her own room. She had dreamt about it since she was 18. But she never got it until she was 23 and had threatened to leave home. Her parents solved it by moving to a larger flat and still today they say that it is her fault that they have such a large, expensive flat. Therefore she should help them financially, maintains her father.

But when she threatened to leave home, she wasn't serious, for she was very scared of leaving home. She can still feel that same fear today. It was because she thought her father would kill her.

He told me that I couldn't move, however old I was. If I lived at home, and wasn't married, then I should obey him. I was his property, "a rag on the floor, something one steps on." Regardless of whether I was 30 or 40, as long as I wasn't married, he could kick me. Once I visited a friend whom the whole family knew. I needed to talk about things to someone; I was on the verge of collapsing. We were really good friends, and could sit in the evenings and talk, cry and laugh over what had happened. I could talk openly to her, about everything. I wanted to continue doing that, for my friend knew so very much about what had happened.

One night we were sitting talking, after midnight. My father rang two or three times. He said that I should come home because "the woman I was with needed to rest." As I was feeling really terrible at this time my friend didn't want me to go home until I had calmed down. She thought I should talk things through first. I did that and then went home. On the way home, my father rang once more. He shouted down the phone: "You bloody whore, come here so I can kill you." I answered that I wasn't scared of him, but then he got even more excited. When I came in through the door he came running towards me, started to scream and spit at me and pushed me. I went into my room and told him to go away from there. He stayed there, babbling, "You weren't at your friend's, you were with a boy, you bloody whore." Even though he knew very well that I was at her place, for she was my mother's friend as well. I asked him why I should lie, he had spoken to her himself.

I think he did it just because I wasn't scared of him. Before I went into my room he tried to hit me but I held onto his hands so he couldn't move. My father is large and strong, but I held his hand so he could have broken it. I said to him again: "I am not scared of you; go away." Then he felt small. He hit me and then ran to the kitchen and fetched a knife. "I'll kill you, you bloody whore," he shouted. I just thought: "What the hell's going on? He knows I haven't been with a boy." My small siblings were at home when this happened, my mother was asleep but woke up and came running. My father held the knife towards me, but I stood there, without protecting myself. I told him to kill me so I wouldn't have to see him and not have to live with him. Then my brother came and grabbed my father from behind and my mother took the knife from him. My father stood totally red in the face, stammering and screamed and screamed.

That happened late one night. The neighbours had rung the police many times before and they had come a few times but not done anything. It wasn't the same police who came on these different occasions. The parents just denied the noise and there was between four up to six months between reports.

During this time Laura thought a lot about this event, about how she could leave home. Her father wanted to have control over her and he would never let her move.

When she said several times that she would move, her brother laughed at her. He wondered sarcastically if she wanted the flat to sublet. She just looked at him and answered that she would live there herself. Her brother laughed and said: "If you get permission, that is."

My father said that naturally we lived in Sweden, but we were not Swedes. We should follow our culture and our other traditions, and I shouldn't leave home until I got married. Then I told him that I would never get married. Of course you will, he said. I explained to him that I had to find myself after all I had gone through and that I really didn't want to get married to a man like him.

In July Laura got her flat and began to gradually remove her things from home. She even borrowed her father's car to move her things. The car was fully packed and she drove two or three times. They didn't notice anything. Then she became restless, she wanted them to notice what she was doing, but she didn't know how to tell them. She didn't just want to say goodbye and leave. So she thought she would do it when the time was right, but one Saturday morning when she was on her way to work they discovered what she was up to. They had become angry, but when she came home in the evening they had calmed down.

THE WOMAN

In Laura's family no one has ever talked about the woman or the view of sexuality, as it was forbidden. Sex was only allowed to take place within marriage. Although she understood that this just applied to women.

I became rather shocked when my brother was away in the summer, one whole month. He can travel as much as he wants and he doesn't have so much money. I do have money and I have tried to travel, for example to Egypt, and still want to travel now I have left home. I want to travel, have fun, sunbathe and swim. But still, even though I don't live at home, I have to find some hairdressing course there. It was no problem for my brother to travel, but girls can't do that. My brother had been away two weeks and returned when my father said, in front of my brother and some of his friends: "Do you think we should take you to hospital and have you examined?"

I heard that in my room and thought: "What is he saying? He doesn't mean it! He can't mean it!" They just laughed and I wanted to go out and say: "Bloody pig" to them or expose my father and ask him what he meant.

The problem with the hymen is that the woman should be like a goddess and the man shouldn't even talk loudly in front of her. Half of the Koran describes a woman's heart, that women have children, why God has given this to women and that a mother can never hate her children. No, this doesn't equate with reality. It says that women are more sensitive and there is a lot about that. According to men, this is what the Koran says. It is very unusual for a woman to interpret the Koran. Generally it is men with large, long beards.

Laura is proud to be Muslim, she likes her religion, but she doesn't understand it. She doesn't agree with the interpretation of the Koran and wants to read it herself to understand it better. She wants to have her own values and opinions about what is right and wrong. She doesn't want anyone to tell her what she should or shouldn't do.

WHEN SHE BECOMES A PARENT

When Laura has children some time in the future, she knows exactly how she will bring them up. Most of all they will have love. She doesn't want to give them everything they point at, for she believes that they should strive and that way they will become good people. They should strive, not as she has had to, but in a completely different way. Naturally they will have much better lives. The children will learn to share things and like other people. She will show her children love all the time, hug and kiss them and tell them she loves them. She really wants to sit and listen to them and talk to them. Just as her parents didn't do.

LAURA'S LIFE TODAY

Laura feels much better today. In spite of, or perhaps because of, everything that has happened, she is strong, proud and likes herself. She didn't do that previously. Now she feels that she can live out her dreams. Nothing is impossible and what happened has turned her into the person she is today. She likes everyone, she is not a bad person and likes sharing. The disadvantage is that she is too kind, she can still be exploited and has bad self-esteem. So she will continue to work on this. She lives by herself in a pleasantly furnished flat and runs her own business. She has contact with her family and still has to fight for her independence from them. She has other dreams now, she wants to do other things. She would like to travel but also something more.

Now she has her flat, she feels lonely sometimes, which she didn't feel before. But she is beginning to get used to it and it is gradually beginning to feel better. She works hard and now she can finally feel that: "Oh, she wants to be at home" She longs for her free time when she can be at home and just enjoy what she has fought so hard for, to have been able to come so far.

To have her freedom and realize her dreams.

Sometimes she thinks about boys. Should he be an Arab and Muslim, or not? She hasn't decided yet. Sometimes she thinks that what will come will come. Of all the girls she knows, who have dreamt about moving away from home, she is the only one who has done it. She is really proud about that and knows that many people are envious.

It is easier for me who has had to fight for my freedom. Should I go to war for something else now? My father finally said to me that I could move away from home but that I had to look after myself and preserve what I am, the culture, the traditions and the religion. I also want to show them that they can trust me. Some of their words haunt me and I don't want to disappoint them. Now I am grateful that they let me do this, even if I know that it is wrong to feel this. I don't want them to be disappointed and feel that they must check up on me, but they should see another side and say: "How proud we are over you. You can look after yourself." This means something else for me than for a Swedish girl. It means not to have boyfriends, to live restricted. That is still a part of me.

LIVING IN TWO WORLDS

Maryam's family escaped from Beirut in Lebanon to Sweden from war and poverty. Maryam was two years old at the time. Her younger sister and two brothers were all born in Sweden. All her relatives still live in Lebanon.

Maryam remembers her childhood quite well, at least from the ages of five to nine. The family lived in a house in the centre of town and she had masses of Swedish friends. She remembers the parties the families had together and that the children played until late at night.

It was rather a good childhood and I think my parents had a good check on us when we were small. They knew how to handle us children, but then things got out of hand. When we were small our parents studied Swedish and got jobs. They really wanted to be Swedish and at the time didn't differentiate much between boys and girls. I was allowed to be out as long as my little brother and I could play with both boys and girls. It was no problem at all and we were probably overall rather well-behaved children. But it was also because our parents were rather kind to us when we were small.

PRESCHOOL YEARS

First she attended a six-year-old group and then went to a recreation centre. She didn't have a special friend there but played with everyone. But Maryam also enjoys being by herself.

I remember when an Iraqi family moved into our neighbourhood. They had a boy and a girl. The girl was my age and I remember that she couldn't say corridor but said: "Curidur". We went to junior level school and she wore a veil. It was very strange for us, as she was the first one at school to wear a veil. They were stupid to her and I had to protect her quite a lot. This was nothing to do with language but you shouldn't behave like that just because someone looks strange.

When the Iraqi family moved in Maryam's parents decided not to forget their roots. At about the same time, many Albanians and Serbs began to come to Sweden. Maryam's parents started to associate with them instead of with Swedes. Maryam's mother worked fulltime at a preschool centre and her father worked fulltime as an interpreter, and extra as a chef.

BEHIND LOWERED BLINDS

When Maryam was 11 years old, her parents had begun to distance themselves from all their Swedish friends.

I usually describe this period as the one when they pulled down the blinds and put on Arab TV channels. They didn't want us children to adopt the Swedish culture. We should know about our roots. Then we moved as my father thought that all the neighbours were alcoholics, even though a few years previously he had been one of them.

It was pitch black in the flat, the family no longer saw anyone and the only time they did anything was when they went shopping. The parents began to differentiate between the boys and girls.

I was absolutely not allowed to go around with boys. So when my friends went off to swim and such things, I wasn't allowed to go with them. They were often at home at one boy's place, who came from Sri Lanka, and watch films but I wasn't allowed. His family had become quite Swedish and his parents had well-paid jobs and were well-educated.

Maryam was allowed to be with them out in the yard if her parents could see her from the kitchen window.

There was a cycle shed on the yard. I wasn't allowed to go behind that because then they couldn't see me. If I did that, they brought me inside.

Nor was I allowed out at the weekends if I hadn't cleaned the whole flat. Cleaning meant vacuuming, washing the floors, washing up and keeping the whole flat tidy. Once I came out after doing that, about 12 or 1 o'clock everyone had already found something to do and I had to wait until they came home again.

This led automatically to isolation. She was both with them and not with them.

I was mad and angry. But the more I fought the longer time it took me before I came out. So I learned that however angry I was, it was easier to swallow my anger and clean.

CHILDBEATING

Punishments started shortly after the family moved to the new neighbourhood. Maryam was 12 at the time.

I remember how I was really in love with a boy called Svante, I was in the seventh or eighth class and had started to smoke. He smoked as well and I pinched packets from my parents and gave them to him as I was so in love. We had also swapped school photos, those small cards, and I had a little love letter or card in my wallet. I had forgotten it at home in my drawer amongst my underwear and my little sister had found it when I was at school.

Maryam's little sister, who wasn't so old then, had spread out the pictures and card and played with them. She didn't understand any better and her parents had discovered it.

When I came home my parents wanted to talk to me in our bedroom and my father had a belt. He pushed me up into the corner of the room and hit me with the belt. I couldn't get away. He beat me with the buckle, not the leather part, until he got tired. Then they put me on the bed and my mother tied my feet with a rope around my ankles. They held up my feet and my father beat under my soles with a stick so I couldn't go to school for a week. The worst part was that they forced my small siblings to sit on the sofa next to the bed and watch, so they would learn what happens when you do something wrong. This is a particularly strong memory I have.

It wasn't the first time her parents beat them. Sometimes her mother used to beat them with ladles and other kitchen apparatus, as soon as she thought they had done something wrong.

The worst part wasn't when you were beaten, and couldn't breathe but when you were forced to stand in front of your father, stretch out your hands so he could hit you with a flat stick. It left shooting pains in your whole arm and you started to cry. He began that punishment early on, when I was seven or eight. He always wanted me to raise my hands again so he could beat me again. He kept going until I said sorry. Often I didn't even know what I had done wrong.

THE MOTHER'S ROLE

My mother, she was as she was. She has always encouraged our father to beat us, especially me, seldom my siblings. They wanted to use me as an example.

Maryam has never hated her parents. She thought that everyone lived the same way. That what happened in their family was normal and that nothing was wrong. It was just a matter of her not doing anything wrong and then her parents would stop beating her. Some time later she understood that her parents thought they were doing the right thing.

SEXUAL ASSAULT

In the summer, when Maryam was seven, her family went on a trip to the nuns where they had been in hiding for a while when they first came to Sweden. The nuns still hid refugees and immigrants, including a 20-year-old man from Iraq.

He assaulted and raped me. Somehow he managed to let me know that my parents would kill me if they found out that I had lost my virginity. I knew instinctively then and couldn't tell anyone what had happened. And I didn't understand that he had done anything wrong.

I remember from the nunnery that I fell down the stairs when I was leaving the man who had washed me and fetched new clothes from my room. Then he thought that we were a couple, so when no one saw I had to kiss him and he called me: "Darling" and so on. He also explained that it was my fault because I was so sexy. So I had encouraged him.

But then at intermediate school when he had lessons in sex and cohabitation, our teacher explained that you cannot have sex with anyone against their will and to have sex with children under the age of 15 was against the law, etc. I explained from the viewpoint of "suppose", that is to say the third person, and she said that is was absolutely forbidden, and that the same applied to parents who beat their children. Then suddenly I realised, that things were not as they should be in my family.

THE PARENTS' VIEW OF CHILDREN AND GENDER ROLES

Maryam thinks that her parents believe one has children only to satisfy their parents' needs. The daughters should clean, the boys should get an education, make money and support their parents. Her brother never had to lift a finger at home. However, her little sister had to start cleaning as soon as she was old enough.

We had to make our brother's bed, fold his clothes and clean his room. We didn't react to that and didn't think it was at all strange. My sister did this until three years ago, made all the beds in the flat. Today when she goes over to my parents, she cleans for them. I don't clean my own home very often.

My brother had met a girl and they had got married so he could take her home. They didn't have a problem that he had a girl, but he wanted to take her home overnight. They couldn't do that, so they rang an Imam who read something over the phone to them, at my parents' home, and then they were married. Then it was OK for my parents, as they had got married over the phone.

NO NETWORK AROUND THE FAMILY

Maryam's family doesn't have any relations in Sweden, as they all live in Lebanon. Her mother had six siblings, four of whom are still alive, and her father has four siblings but he has fallen out with them all. They all live in the same street in Beirut.

VIEW OF WOMEN

Maryam has been brought up knowing that the household is the woman's responsibility: she should ensure that food is cooked, washing done and cleaning taken care of. The woman should not say much unless she is asked. She should sit quietly until someone asks for something. When the women are gathered together on their own, it's totally different. They talk about their men, talk dirty, but mostly about handling situations in the home. Maryam says that it doesn't come up very often, when talking about immigrant families, that the woman often governs the family with an iron hand. She manipulates the whole family.

My mother knew exactly how to behave to get my father into a particular mood. If she wanted him to chastise us, she knew exactly what to say. My mother never gave away secrets for then our father might think she had lied, but she hinted at it instead. Then he would go crazy, then she could press buttons so he became calm again. For example, she would say: "No, sit down, take it easy, I'll sort this out." Among the immigrant girls I know my mother has always known which buttons to press. Always.

Her father was never angry with her mother, they worked together. There was never any violence between the parents.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Maryam developed early and got her periods when she was 11.

One day my knickers were brown – three days in a row. No blood, just brown. I didn't understand anything but I called my mother and showed her. My mother looked at my knickers and smelt them. Then she gave me a sanitary towel and began to cry and left me. I thought there was some awful problem with me when my mother cried. I understood that it was a period as I had been given a sanitary towel.

OUTSIDE

The days were humdrum, with school and cleaning. Maryam was woken up in the mornings, got up and got dressed. She didn't eat any breakfast, she has never done that.

My parents had told the school that we weren't allowed to eat pork. At first I was the only one at school. Just that is an enormous thing at that age. The smallest little deviation you feel there is something wrong with you. I felt so alone.

Her clothing was also regulated, and she couldn't have anything shorter than knee-length and couldn't show her arms, have anything low-cut or a sleeveless top.

BULLYING

Maryam's school time was complicated and full of bullying. She dressed differently and was often harassed in different ways, although at the same time the other students were curious about her. Finally she managed to be friends with a Swedish girl who stole for the immigrant boys at school. Maryam tried to get her to stop but they fell out. The Swedish girl managed to get many of the boys on her side, while those who had previously been against Maryam now were on her side.

The atmosphere and antagonism increased daily and one day the whole school gathered in a ring out on the school yard to fight. There were so many people as brothers and cousins also got involved. The fight never materialised but just a prolonged bickering. The police arrived and the school was shut for the rest of the week: this took place on a Wednesday.

THROWN OUT OF SCHOOL

Maryam was blamed and was thrown out of school. In spite of her Swedish friends strongly supporting her and explaining to the school board that it wasn't her fault. She had to go back to her old school.

Back at the old school Maryam was drawn to a gang of immigrant boys. Her reputation had preceded her. It became them against the rest of the school. She was considered tough by the boys but the school board saw her as a negative leader figure.

When Maryam returned to her old school, she began to drink alcohol. It was home distilled and different mixtures. Instead of going to her lessons, she locked herself in and drank during school hours. At this time she went in the ninth class.

For the first year of sixth form, where she attended the individual programme, Maryam didn't really do anything at school as she had already started to drink alcohol and later in the ninth class had also started to smoke hash. Maryam drugged herself during the day at school as she wasn't allowed out in the evenings.

Then she learnt how to handle her home situation and blamed it on being tired.

I have had many discussions with my father about what religion says about dependency drugs and I have asked how he can smoke, for example. Then he answers that as long as it doesn't affect your psyche, it's OK. When I then say that nicotine is a drug that stimulates the central nervous system and affects the psyche if you don't look after it, then he doesn't listen.

THE LIES

Maryam always had to make up stories until she didn't know what was true and what wasn't. Finally she made up stories for everyone – not just for her parents. At school, to her friends, about everything, even about insignificant things.

A girl who went around with the kids by the lake, where everyone was at the weekend, asked me why I wasn't with them. I told her that I was with another gang at another place at the weekends and I then had to live with that lie. Every week she asked me what I had done at the weekend. I made up a story even though I had only been at home at the weekend. I wanted to seem interesting and just told her lies. Goodness, how much I lied. Sometimes it turned out wrong and I had to cover it with another lie. I am still good at lying.

To lie was one of Maryam's strategies. She was already different. If she had told the truth about her life, she would have been considered even more strange. She had never had the same starting point as her classmates to become something, to get boyfriends.

I haven't been able to talk about what happened at home for then people would think I was disgusting. If I had told them I was beaten every day I would have appeared as a victim.

Nor did I tell them at home about anything that happened during the day, it was as though they were two separate lives. I lied about my home life at school and I lied about my school life at home. That's how it was. I couldn't mix the two worlds. During the weekends I sat reading or thought about what my friends were doing.

MARYAM FINDS HER VOICE

When Maryam started sixth form, antagonism intensified between her and her parents but she was no longer afraid of getting beaten.

All the time I had heard from my parents that I was dirty, and still hear it today, what a whore I am, how filthy I am and that they wish I had never been born. They say that as soon as I don't do what they want, for example, if my father wants a glass of water. If I don't fetch it then I am dirty for I am not respecting my father.

Once it went so far that I went to the kitchen and fetched the largest kitchen knife I could find, put it in front of my father and said: "Do it now!" at the same time as I cried. "You tell me so often that you wish me dead, so either do it or don't let me hear it any longer!"

He just looked at me and threw a fork he was holding into me. It attached itself to my thigh. Then he sent me into my room. I shut the door and pulled out the fork.

FIRST ESCAPE

Maryam ran away the first time when she was 16 and got on the bus to Gothenburg. She didn't know where she was going to go but took the first bus she saw.

It was a long bus journey. When it stopped at a pull-up, Maryam remained on the bus, as she didn't have any money. But someone had let it be known that she had gone on the bus so when Maryam got to Gothenburg, and sat on a bench, wondering where she would go, someone knocked on her back.

A daughter of friends of my parents knew I was there. She was going to fetch me, so all I could do was go with her. I stayed with them for two weeks and then they put me on the train home. When I got home, I wasn't beaten but they attempted mental terror on me.

Her parents had continued to keep a tight rein on Maryam. Her father had taken her and fetched her from school. When her mother took away her mobile phone, Maryam got herself an old one, that she used outside her home. She had enough and ran away again.

SECOND ESCAPE

Once again Maryam came to Gothenburg and lived with a Lebanese friend who lived with her parents. She slept there for three days. Then she moved on to Malmö to a boy she had met over the Internet. She started to take more drugs and now with heavier drugs involved. Payment was in kind, that is to say prostitution, or through her getting credit.

On one occasion, she contacted the social services and explained her situation and why she had left home. That was the only time she told the authorities everything.

The reaction to my story was: "You are 17 and if you have run away from home, then you have only yourself to blame." So I didn't get any help, either economical support or advice from the social services.

I ended up on the streets in Malmö, as homeless, and crept into stairways before they locked the doors. I was down-and-out for just over two months. I was on speed and prostituted myself to earn money to be able to buy drugs and pay for trips to the public baths from time to time, or they wouldn't want to pay me. If I didn't have any money I got speed on credit to be able to have sex with as many paying men as possible so as to be able to pay later. A sleeping place was less important for I hardly knew whether it was day or night.

SOCIAL SERVICES IN HER HOME DISTRICT MAKE CONTACT

After a few months a social secretary rang from Maryam's home district. He rang to hear how she was and he heard immediately that something was wrong. After a while he managed to ferret out of her where she was.

After a couple of hours a person came and picked me up and took me to Stockholm. Then another person in Stockholm came and took me to a drug rehab centre.

PARENTS' SOLUTION

When Maryam had been away for four months, her parents got hold of her number and started to ring her. Her mother promised that they would respect her and let her do what she wanted.

I gave in finally, they managed to talk me home during the month I was at the drug centre. I really wanted to believe they had changed. I went back home and was really pleased – five days later I sat on a plane going to Lebanon.

When I was in Lebanon, two days after I arrived, suitors began to drop in on me. They were rich Assyrians, someone from Morocco. I didn't even understand what some of them said and my mother said "You choose yourself." Although it felt as though they wanted to

get rid of me at any cost. After a week and six-seven suitors they told me that we were going to a party that evening. All my cousins were going and it was going to be amazingly good.

ENGAGEMENT PARTY AND WEDDING

Maryam got dressed up and went to the party at her paternal grandparents. It turned out that it was her own engagement party. One of her suitors was her mother's friend's nephew. Her mother's friend lived in Sweden where they had arranged it all.

I was to get engaged to him. When I came in everyone lowered their heads and started to read from the Koran. An Imam sat there to bless everything. When everyone had finished reading and shouted and made a general noise, as they do, they took me into the room next door.

He took me into another room and my mother came, he gave me 5,000 dollars as a payment in some way. My mother grabbed the money from my hand. Then we were engaged.

The man then visited Maryam every day for two weeks, took her to restaurants and such like. She wasn't particularly happy but would rather have been at home with a book.

Two weeks later I was woken up with the words: "Now you have to go to the Imam, you are going to get married today, get up and get dressed."

I just went crazy. It ended with two guys who had to drag me down to the car. They explained to me very objectively that if I created any problems at the Imam, my blood would flow outside. "There's no one who's going to give a damn, as this is how things are in Lebanon. We don't care how things are in Sweden." There was nothing I could do. We met his family there and then we went to the Imam. He babbled a few words in Arabic that I didn't even understand and then someone told me what I should say. Two witnesses and me and the guy signed the marriage document. But I refused to write in Arabic, as I am not an Arab. I wrote in Swedish. Then there was a party in the evening. After the party he tried to have sex with me but I think he was as vulnerable as I was. Quite simply, that was what one did. One had sex.

Maryam had to go back to Sweden with her parents to organise all the paperwork so the man could follow. Her mother immediately put her in the housing queue and they took her to the tax authorities so she was registered as married in Sweden too.

MARYAM COMES OF AGE

In March that year Maryam was 18. The man started to put demands on her from Lebanon. From there with consultations with her mother, he decided what Maryam could and couldn't do. Maryam revolted.

As I was married, my parents had no say. They rang to Lebanon and told tales about me to my husband. Then he rang me and was quite hysterical. At new year, he decided that I should come to Lebanon instead, for he refused to have the situation as it was. I refused. In February my parents talked about sending me there anyway.

THIRD ESCAPE

I had a boyfriend in Sweden then. He was a Kurd, very Swedish in his manner. He knew that I was married, but he wasn't allowed to have a girlfriend either. It was the greatest Romeo and Juliet drama. We had met over the Internet and had fallen in love after our first date, so in love that one can be at that age.

One day the boyfriend fetched Maryam from the youth recreation centre where she worked. Her husband didn't allow her to work there actually, as she was a woman. He thought she should be at home with her parents until he could come over and support her.

I smuggled clothes into work. On Valentine's day, my boss drove me and my boyfriend to the train. He let us off a bit away from there and didn't want to know where we were going. My boyfriend stayed in this place so they wouldn't suspect anything.

On the train I got in touch with the women's crisis centre in another place. They fetched me at the station and I changed my mobile number. I lived in their flat for seven months. During my time there, I started to take drugs again. It became intolerable so I had to move out.

Now there followed a long period of staying with different acquaintances which gradually ended up with her moving to a safe house in the Stockholm area.

TIME AS AN AU PAIR

Maryam got work as an au pair through the support association of the safe house. The mother of the children was recently divorced.

I felt like I was there more as a contact person for her than I was there for her children. Then she began to need more and more help. She asked if I wanted to move in as she had a room that no one used. It was rather a large flat. I moved in.

At the beginning it went well, but after a while Maryam was unhappy and she moved from there to her then boyfriend. This lasted for a short while until the mother of her friend's family managed to find her and convinced her to return home again. During the time in Stockholm Maryam was seeking a divorce from her forced marriage.

Maryam got help from the friend's family and started at a folk high-school to make up for what she had missed during her school time. The studies went well up until the summer when the family went to Lebanon.

Once there they found a new guy for me. They wanted us to get engaged, so we did. During our walks it turned out that he wanted our future daughters to go there and marry, exactly as we had, so that they wouldn't be characterised by Swedish society and become Swedes. That was enough for me and when I came back to Sweden I distanced myself from him and finally broke our engagement. My father was very ashamed and said that he never more would be able to go to Lebanon but it really wasn't such a big deal.

Maryam moved back home to the friend's family again and things worked relatively well with her parents.

THE DISCUSSION ABOUT PELA

After the murder of Pela in 1999 they had had a discussion in the family that Maryam had reacted to.

My parents felt so sorry for her parents because they had had to suffer this shame, because Pela was as she was. She must have had a boyfriend, they said. I asked what they would have done if I or my sister had done something like that? They answered that Pela's parents had done the only right thing. Pela had degraded and dishonoured the family so she deserved nothing else than death, said my parents.

The view of honour violence depends on ignorance, says Maryam. Parents think they are doing the right thing because they themselves were brought up that way.

They are brought up with girls being married off and boys being "real men". Girls should clean, cook food and keep quiet. The boys were given a free rein and should be bossy. That is what they think is right. It is also about group pressure although on a much higher level. If you were to place a totally normal child in a village full of stupid people, that child would grow up into a stupid person. In Sweden it is about integration to a great extent and how one has totally failed, quite catastrophically. That it occurs all over the world is because people believe it is right. There are many ways of interpreting the Koran. Yes, I know that it isn't only Islam but I do believe that religion IS culture. Many of the honour words come from the Middle East and around there. They are people with a similar culture but with different religions.

ABOUT RELIGION AND TRADITIONS

Maryam is not a believer today. She says that if there is a God, such misery wouldn't be allowed. As an example, she uses her own life up to today.

I am totally aware that I am only 25 and have gone through more than most people go through in their entire lives. It shouldn't have to be like this. I haven't done anything to deserve this and had there been a God it wouldn't have allowed so much shit to be in this world. I am very tolerant of religious people as long as they don't try to force their religion on their children or people close to them. To be really honest, I think that the truly religious people are the weakest in society. When I feel weak or have difficult processes to work through, then I turn to my own strength. Look into myself and say: "OK, Maryam, now you have this problem – how will you solve it?"

People who don't have this strength must have something else, like an invented God, Allah or Buddha or whatever you want to call it.

NEVER WANTS TO GO BACK

Maryam has now lived drug-free for three years, through her own strength. Her only problem is recurring depressions for which she takes medicine.

I think that all I have gone through from the tiniest thing, to the greatest has made me the person I am today, and I am really pleased with myself today. So I will never go back. The negative aspect of my experiences are my bad days when I get depressed. When I feel persecuted and paranoid and can't even go out shopping. When I prefer to take three sedatives and sleep the day away. I have had these problems for several years now.

FUTURE WITH CHILDREN

Maryam doesn't have any particular dreams for the future but wants a normal job and a family with children. She would like between two and four children. She has very decided views on child upbringing.

You have to be very attentive to what the child needs and not. There is no one model of bringing up children but it varies from person to person. But primarily I will never baptise my children, nor try to force my views on them. When they are old enough and can decide themselves, then they can get baptised, confirmed and convert to whatever they want.

Child upbringing is all about being consistent and about love. You show love to a child by showing appreciation, listening, caring and trying to understand what the child wants. This is what I personally have lacked.