



“Preventing Honour Related Violence by education and dialogue through Immigrant NGOs”

REF: JUST/2013/DAP/AG/5823

NAME OF METHODOLOGICAL TOOL

Case study on honour related killing

NAME OF PARTNER ORGANISATION: The Angelou Centre

COUNTRY: The UK

LANGUAGE: EN



This publication has been produced with the financial support of the DAPHNE Programme of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of “author/contractor/implementing Beneficiary” and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.

MARKETING TEXT

This case study highlights the extreme end of honour related violence resulting in an honour killing. It also examines ways of preventing such tragedies.

DESCRIPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Main aim

The aim is to provide a case study highlighting an extreme consequence of honour related violence, and how honour killings can be prevented.

Expected results

The expected results are:

- 1) Increased understanding of the extreme nature and impact of honour related violence.
- 2) Increased understanding of what is best practice in preventing honour killings.

Implementation steps

[Please write clear step-by-step implementation strategy for NGOs to be able to use the tool in practice)

The case study can be provided to small groups of participants, who should discuss the following questions:

- 1) What are the issues relevant to the case?
- 2) How could have the honour killing be prevented?

The participants should make note of their answers and report back the discussion to a wider group.

The wider group should discuss all their answers and the best practice points learnt from the exercise.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

This case study is based on media and internet reports on the high profile case of Shafilea Ahmed which involved a so called 'honour' killing in the UK.

The Case Study

Shafilea Ahmed died in 2003, aged 17, in the UK. She had lived in North of England. Her parents had migrated from Pakistan.

Shafilea had gone missing for some time before a body was found in a river in 2004. Due to decomposition and dismemberment of the body, it was at first difficult to know if this was Shafilea and how she had died. It is suspected that Shafilea had been killed after she refused an arranged marriage with a cousin in Pakistan, and tensions created by her behavior such as having male friends and wearing western clothes.

According to friends, prior to her death, Shafilea had once attempted suicide by drinking bleach on a visit to Pakistan. Her parents claimed that it was an accident as Shafilea had mistaken bleach for mouthwash. As a result of becoming ill, Shafilea went to hospital when she returned to the UK. She told another patient that she had drunk bleach due to pressure to marry her cousin. Shafilea had also written poems in which she said she felt 'trapped.'

Shafilea had also ran away from home several times. According to a homelessness officer, Shafilea had said that she was had been subjected to domestic violence and feared that she would be taken to Pakistan, married and abandoned there. She also told a teacher about the abuse, and a social worker had visited Shafilea at school, who, it is claimed, downplayed the violence, although she did discuss the pressures to marry, but did not want social services to be involved.

When Shafilea went missing, her parents did not report it. A teacher reported her missing when she heard her sibling talking about the disappearance. The police launched a media campaign with the help of a famous Asian actress appealing for information. The police placed a covert listening device at her parent's house. It is alleged that the parents warned their children 'not to say anything at school,' and there were discussions about how the police could not act unless they had proof, and what would happen if the police found DNA evidence in the car.

When Shafilea Ahmed was identified by dental records and clothing, the parents were arrested, but then later released. Other members of the extended family were also charged at various stages with connected crimes such as conspiracy to prevent the course of justice, but they too were released without charge or had proceedings against them dropped.

In 2008, the Coroner’s Court returned a verdict of unlawful killing, and said that Shafilea had been a victim of ‘a very vile murder’. The coroner said that Shafilea had been denied her ambitions to do what she wanted, to study and pursue a career in law. That she would have been torn between her wish for her own freedom and love for her family, particularly her siblings- and frightened of the consequences of an arranged marriage.

In 2010, Shafilea’s younger sister eventually confessed to the police that she had witnessed her parents suffocate Shafilea to death with a plastic bag. They had done this as they were fearful of bringing shame onto the family as a result of Shafilea’s refusal to marry, although the final assault appear to have been precipitated by an argument over her western clothing. At trial the mother changed her testimony from denial to blaming the father for assaulting Shafilea, but had assumed, until much later, that her daughter was safe. However, Shafilea’s sister claimed that the mother had commanded the murder by saying ‘let’s finish it here.’

In 2012, Shafilea’s parents were convicted of her murder in what is come to be known as another tragic case of a so called ‘honour’ killing.

The Exercise Questions

1. What are the issues relevant to the case?
2. What could have been done to prevent the honour killing?

Some Answers

1. The relevant issues are:
 - Shafilea seems to be subjected to violent and controlling behaviour by her family before her death, which may have caused her to run away and attempt suicide
 - Shafilea seems to have been facing a forced marriage, and her refusal may have led to her parents to killing her due to the shame and dishonour this brought onto the family.
2. The death could have been prevented if it had been possible for:
 - Shafilea’s plight to be picked up and acted upon earlier and more robustly by agencies such social services and the hospital.
 - Shafilea had support from a group like a minority women’s NGO to seek help from agencies and leave home to escape home more permanently.

- Her friends or sympathetic family or community members had reported Shefilea's problems to agencies more regularly or encouraged and supported Shefilea to seek help.