

SUNDAY FEATURES

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Zena had been following a murder trial in London with an interest verging on obsession. "I really wanted to go to court myself but I can never risk going to the city and being seen by someone," she said.

"But I feel such a bond with other women who may have been through what I went through, even though you never meet these girls; you just hear about them when these 'honor killing' trials come up. I wish I could get involved with the support groups and help but you know, I'm just a coward."

Having first walked out of an abusive marriage at the age of 17 and then from a hostile family who had had a meeting to discuss whether or not she should die, Zena does not lack courage but she is still very scared.

She has every reason to be. Her Bangladeshi-born mother had suggested that Zena might be allowed to poison herself rather than be murdered for bringing shame on the family. Zena, born in England, is second-generation British Asian and her accent betrays where she was brought up although it is far from where she lives now.

"I'm sorry to be so cloak-and-dagger but you never know what they might be capable of. I know there are plenty of young men who would love to play bounty hunter just for a bit of kudos in the community."

Another court case six years ago had shocked Zena into climbing out of the window of her locked bedroom and leaving home with \$46 (roughly US\$76) and a change of clothes, an impulsive act she believes saved her life.

It was the story of Heshu Yones, 16, from Acton, west London, who was stabbed 11 times and then had her throat cut by her father who said he had to kill her because other men in his circle of Kurdish friends thought she had a boyfriend and his honor was shamed. Abdalla Yones was convicted of murder and jailed for life in 2003.

"A family member told me that there had been a meeting about killing me but it was seeing that case in the paper that made it real," said Zena. The threat to women in the UK from such violence is very real and the list of names of girls and women killed in the name of "honor" is growing.

Police estimate at least 12 are dying each year in the UK but others will be hidden — forced suicides and murders made to look like suicide are widely believed to take place undetected. Women aged 16 to 24 from Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi backgrounds are three times more likely to kill themselves than the national average for that age and it is impossible to tell what pressures some must have been under. And for every woman who dies, it seems certain that there are many, many more living with honor-based abuse and hidden away in shuttered communities.

Support groups are springing up. The Henna Foundation is based in Cardiff and Jasvinder Sanghera, who fled a forced marriage and made a new life for herself, set up a charity called Karma Nirvana in Derby, central England, after her sister Robina killed herself to escape the misery of her loveless marriage.

When it opened its help line in April 2008, Karma Nirvana received 4,000 calls in the first year and is now taking 300 calls a month from people under threat of honor-based violence, often linked to forced marriage.

After the UK government's forced marriage unit was set up in April last year, it received 5,000 calls and rescued 400 victims in the first six months.

Sanghera believes about 3 percent of women manage to escape forced marriage in the UK and when they leave they have to live with fear and rejection of not only their families but also their communities and sometimes their friends.

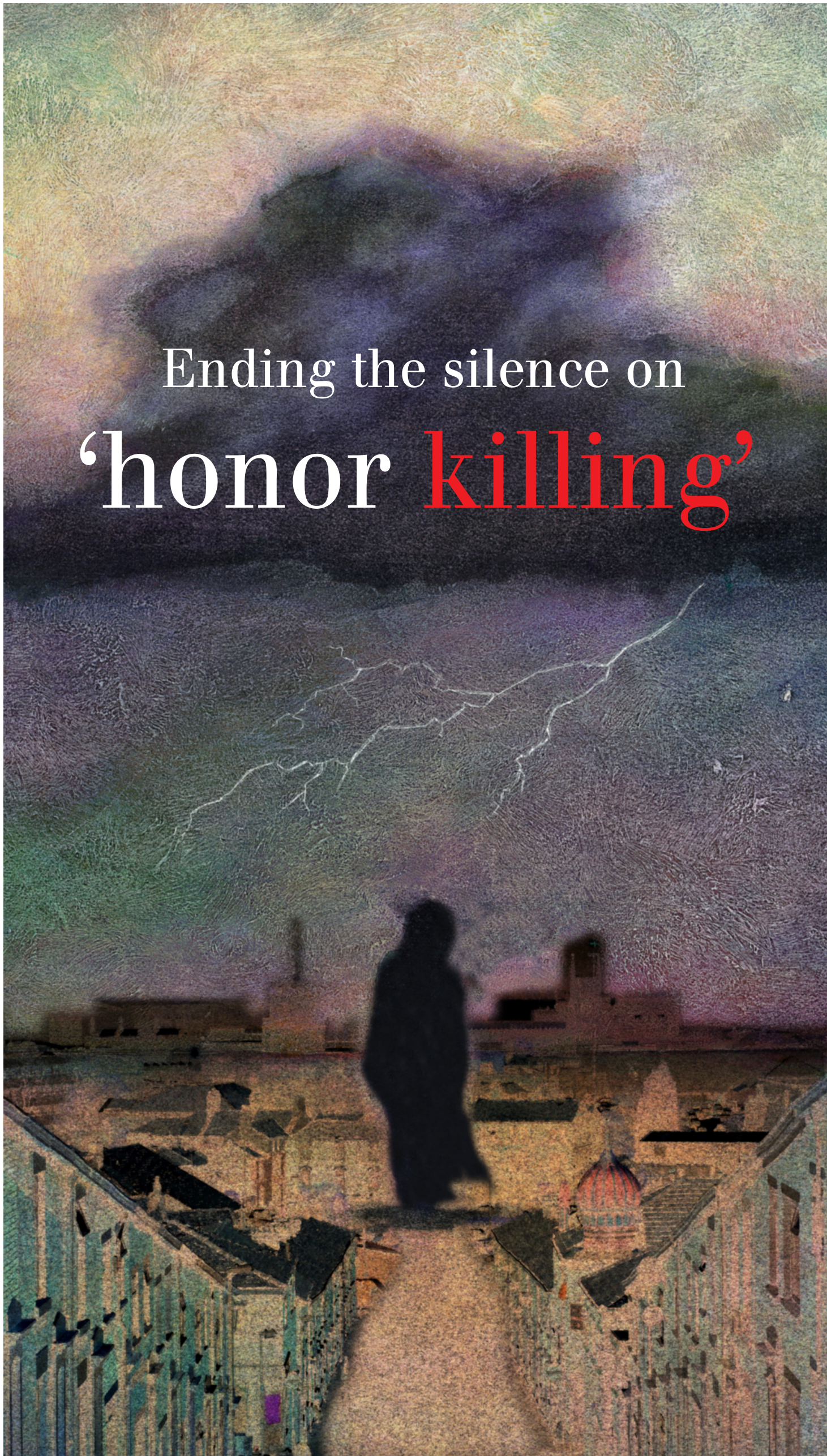
They also face being hunted down, said Detective Chief Inspector Gerry Campbell of London's Metropolitan Police. "It's not uncommon to have bounty hunters out hunting down young people who have left forced marriages or fled from a family where they are at risk. It's rare for [one person] to take unilateral action, it's all done in consultation and there is logistical support and collusion in the extended community," he said.

Campbell, head of the Metropolitan Police's violent crime directorate, has led a number of investigations into honor-based violence and hate crimes. He believes the Metropolitan Police has learned some tough lessons from tragedies such as that of Banaz Mahmood, who made contact with police five times to say she thought her life was in danger but always drew back from pressing charges. Banaz, 19, a Kurd, was murdered by family members at her home in Mitcham, southeast England, in 2006.

She had been raped and beaten by the older man she had been forced to marry, and had left him. Her elder sister, Bekhal, had also left home to escape their father's violence and the extended family was beginning to regard Mahmood Mahmood as a man who had lost control of his daughters. The shame became so unbearable that he held a meeting to discuss killing his daughter and her new boyfriend.

"We have had previous investigations where mistakes have been made but we at the Metropolitan Police have improved the frontline training for our officers and been quite clear around the issues with community groups that we're working with too," said Campbell. "I'm confident that no victim will ever be turned away in London and that officers know that to do nothing is not an option.

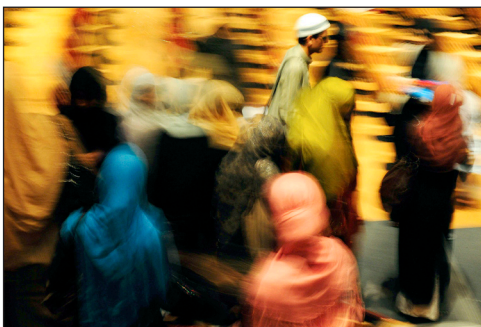
"Honor is about a collection of practices used by the family to control behavior, to prevent perceived shame, but there's no honor in murder, rape, or kidnapping and with 25



GRAPHICIT

The number of young women and men being killed or assaulted in Britain after supposedly bringing shame on their families keeps on rising. But more than ever before, those who have escaped violence are speaking out to break the code of silence

BY TRACY MCVEIGH
THE OBSERVER, LONDON



Muslims arrive at Al Hidayah, a spiritual camp at Warwick University in Coventry, England, on Aug. 9 for an address by renowned Sufi scholar Muhammad Tahir ul-Qadri, who preaches a message of moderation, peace, inclusion and understanding.

PHOTO: REUTERS

over the past four years so while we are not complacent we have come on leaps and bounds.

"This crime genre transcends every nationality, religious faith or group, nor is it unique to the UK, every country in the world has honor-based violence. But we want to make it clear that people can come forward to us; they will be believed."

Things have undoubtedly improved since the cases that campaigners see as the low points in the fight against honor killings,

such as the sentence of six-and-a-half years handed down to Shabir Hussain who in 1995 deliberately drove over and crushed to death his cousin and sister-in-law, Tasleem Begum, 20. The acceptance of a plea of manslaughter through "provocation" by the court was widely attacked by women's groups. Tasleem was killed because she had fallen in love with a married man she worked with.

Roger Keene, prosecuting barrister, told the court: "The family as a whole, including the defendant, had been distressed for some time about the behavior of the deceased."

The behavior of women seen to have dishonored their families can be as harmless as wearing makeup or talking to boys. One suspected murder is believed to have been caused by a girl having a love song dedicated to her on a community radio show.

Diana Nammi, who runs the Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organization in London, has been working to encourage more women to seek help when they are in danger. "The number of women that we know of and hear about and the cases dealt with in court is really just a handful of the full picture," she said. "But even one case is too many. For someone to be killed for their makeup or clothes or having a boyfriend or for refusing to accept a forced

marriage is so brutal and unacceptable.

"A few years ago when Heshu Yones was killed it was silent, but her sister gave evidence against her father and that was a turning point. Those same communities who were silent seven years ago when Banaz was killed, when people were aware she was in danger and did nothing, they are not happy to stay quiet any more, this silence is being broken.

"It is not a problem of culture or religion or education — it is happening in educated families. It's not one person but several who are dangerous for that woman; so sometimes even the woman might underestimate the danger she is in.

"Here in the UK younger people are at risk because they have grown up in this country and they want to adapt and live in the modern world, they don't want barriers to who they can be in love with or not be in love with, whether they wear traditional clothes or not, basic freedoms that many traditional families don't like.

"Honor is a very old tradition but it cannot operate in this country. The children do not even understand it. It's two lives for these children and the differences put huge emotional pressures and guilt on them and leave them very vulnerable," she said.

"Before Heshu, honor killing was not a serious crime and perpetrators were treated leniently under the name of cultural sensitivity. Now there are no reductions in sentence. In the case of Banaz, the judge said that if this is the culture then the culture needs to be changed, not the women sacrificed for the culture." Nammi believes that patriarchal religious leaders are failing women.

"Those who are lagging behind now are the religious leaders. They may pay lip service to change but they have networks and contacts and they are not trying to change anything. Sharia courts are letting Muslim women down and I am sorry to say that the British government is turning a blind eye to these courts. We have civil laws that cover every individual; none of these religious courts provide the same rights and protections for women."

Irfan Chishti, a leading imam in Manchester,

‘This crime genre transcends every nationality, religious faith or group, nor is it unique to the UK, every country in the world has honor-based violence.’

— Gerry Campbell, detective chief inspector, Metropolitan Police

northwest England, said the phenomenon was so secretive that it could be hard to identify who was at risk: "It is not an Islamic issue, it's more of a tribal tradition that cuts across several faiths, but I can say categorically that it is not acceptable.

"It's difficult to ascertain the extent of this problem but I like to think that faith leaders are speaking out against it. Honor is a way of measuring dignity and respect and it is a very individualistic thing. Dishonor to one person is not the same as to another but we have to be very clear that there is never any justification for such horrific crimes."

Honor-based violence can be a socioeconomic issue. Experts say there is a strong correlation between violence against women and issues such as inequality between men. In deprived communities where men are struggling to earn a living they can feel subordinated and lacking in respect, and so try to get their authority back by dominating anyone below them, usually women.

In Pakistan the practice of honor killing — called *karo-kari* — sees more than 10,000 women die each year. In Syria, men can kill female relatives in a crime of passion as long as it is not premeditated. It is legal for a husband to kill his wife in Jordan if he catches her committing adultery. Crime of passion can be a full or partial defense in a number of countries including Argentina, Iran, Guatemala, Egypt, Israel and Peru.

Confusion in immigrant communities where people feel adrift in a new culture and try to anchor themselves to the past is a key factor, says Haras Rafiq, a former government adviser on faith issues and the co-founder of the Sufi Muslim Council. "Religion becomes infused with cultural practices and honor takes on an over-inflated importance," he said.

He agreed with anti-forced marriage campaigners that women were being let down by their religious and community leaders.

"The Sharia courts are not doing anything about the forced marriage or honor killing issue as a whole," he said. "Other countries, the places many immigrants have come from, have moved on, but the immigrant doesn't know that and he needs to be told."

For Zena, she has her life but does not have her freedom. "When I first ran away I would go to the library and read loads of spy books to pick up tips. You have to teach yourself how to best keep hidden," she said. "My life is about keeping a very low profile now and about looking over my shoulder, but at least I know I am alive and I grieve for those poor girls who are not."