



MWIA CASE STUDIES

VIOLENCE CAUSING DEATH & CULTURAL VIOLENCE

Case 3: Murder Due to Arranged Marriage in Belgium

Objective

- To show how cultural isolation of a migrant community can result in an escalation of violence due to “honour loss” by the husband-to-be.
- To show how family hierarchy can allow the father absolute control over his daughter in terms of whom she can marry.

Narrative Case

** At the end of the case study you can find “Learning points” related to information presented in the narrative case, denoted by numbers in square brackets.*

A 26-year old Moroccan woman named Fatima is told by her father that he has invited a 35-year old man from Morocco to marry her. [1] When the man arrives illegally in Belgium, the father tries to get his daughter to become reconciled with her faith and marry the young man. In the meantime, they are kept away from each other but the young woman strongly objects to the obligations of marriage that faith puts upon her to the extent that she gets her mother on her side. [2] Whilst trying to get legal permission to stay in Belgium, the man does not work and his permit is rejected. [3] It looks like the only way he will be able to marry Fatima is

to take her back to Morocco. She resists his attempts. One day, he comes to the house before Fatima has left for work. [4] He stabs and fatally injures her. He also stabs her mother several times when she came out of the house upon hearing the commotion. The mother survives the stabbing. The man is imprisoned and convicted and the mother ends up divorcing her husband as a result of the loss of their daughter. The rest of the family was subsequently supportive of the mother but due to divorce she has lost support from the local community and mainly stays indoors. [5]

Learning Points

- [1] Girls in Morocco are subjected to early arranged marriage resulting in early childbearing and no education.
- [2] She has according to her faith no empowerment to do what she wants. In this situation, young women lose the support network of their own family and find they are fighting for their rights all by themselves, although in this case with some support from her mother.
- [3] Entry into Belgium without visa is not possible for Moroccans. Therefore many arrive in Belgium illegally and try to get legal working permission.
- [4] Fatima is well integrated in the Belgian society, works and is a modern woman who wants to live her own life. This leads to a conflict with the expected role of women in the Moroccan society.
- [5] Moroccans are not integrated well within the Belgian society and they are often discriminated against. Therefore they form isolated communities within Belgium with strong religious beliefs. Tradition is very important to them. Fatima’s refusal to marry the man her father had found for her violates the honour of the husband-to-be. The only way to restore his honour is an “honour killing”. As a consequence, the mother after divorcing the husband despite support from the rest of her family is without support from the Moroccan community.

Background information

- 530,000 Moroccans from North Africa live in Belgium where they form the largest group of non-western immigrants.¹ Most of them are Muslims and speak Berber or Arabic. Until the start of the 1970s, many left for Belgium and other European countries to work.² Most of them were men from the rural countryside with little education and no professional qualifications.² Starting in 1996 entering Belgium without a visa was no longer possible for Moroccans.³ Therefore illegal immigration became and still is a problem.
- Moroccans and other North Africans are among the most problematic groups of immigrants in Europe.
 - 53% of the Moroccan community in Belgium lives below the poverty threshold, usually in big cities.⁴
 - 80% of the women do not work.⁴
 - 36% of Moroccans do not speak Belgian well and 25% are unable to speak to their Belgian neighbours.⁴
 - They do not integrate well within Belgian society and have great difficulty in finding a job compared to the native population. Second generation immigrants say they feel more discrimination against in the job market than their first generation elders.⁵
 - Many of these immigrants are young Muslim males who are frustrated and angry as they cannot find a job because they dropped out of school.
 - There is also a great risk of radicalization within the Muslim community and fathers especially want their daughters to live according to their religious beliefs.

References

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