

‘Honour’ Crime and the Need for Differentiation from Domestic Violence in UK Law

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Abstract : ‘Honour’ crime has commonly been perceived in the UK as being a ‘domestic violence’ related issue due to incidents perceived to take place within a domestic context, and commonly by familial perpetrators. The lack of differentiation between domestic violence and ‘honour’ related incidents has several negative implications. Firstly, the prevalence and extent of ‘honour’ related crime within the UK cannot be accurately quantified due to ‘honour’ incidents being classed statistically as domestic violence incidents. Secondly, lack of differentiation means that the negative stereotypical attitudes ascribed to domestic violence which has resulted in lower criminal conviction rates that are also impacting the conviction of perpetrators of ‘honour’ crime. Thirdly, ‘honour’ related crime is innately distinct from domestic violence due to the perpetrator’s resolute intent of cleansing perceived ‘shame’ in any way possible, often with the involvement and collusion of multiple perpetrators from within the family and/or community. Domestic violence is typically restricted to the ‘home’, but ‘honour’ crime can operate between national and international boundaries. This paper critically examines the current academic literature and concludes that the few similarities between domestic violence and ‘honour’ related crime are not sufficient to warrant identical treatment under UK criminal law. ‘Honour’ related crime is a distinct and stand-alone offence which should be recognised as such. The appropriate identification and treatment of ‘honour’ crime are crucial, particularly in light of the UK’s first ‘white’ honour killing which saw a young English woman murdered after being deemed to have brought ‘shame’ on her ex-boyfriend’s family. This incident highlights the possibility of ‘honour’ crime extending beyond its perceived ‘ethnic minority’ roots and becoming more of a ‘mainstream’ issue for the multi-cultural and multi-racial UK.

Keywords : differentiation, domestic violence, honour crime, United Kingdom

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