

Oppression in the Name of Honour

# It's about Disobedience



*Report from a series of seminars involving the Turkish women's organisation KA-MER and the Centre for Children and Adolescents in Crisis at Save the Children Sweden.*



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# Foreword

“It’s two years since I left home, and I think about my family every single day”, says a girl who comes to our Girls’ Clinic. She is one of the girls who are forced to move away from their home because of the threats, oppression and violence they have been subjected to by their family and relatives.

We work at the Centre for Girls in Conflict Between Two Cultures (the “Girls’ Clinic”), which is a unit within the Centre for Children and Adolescents in Crisis at Save the Children Sweden. It is two-and-a-half years since we opened the Girls’ Clinic, which we set up as a means of using our professional knowledge as psychotherapists to help girls who have suffered as a result of honour-related oppression. We have learnt a lot from the girls - and we still have a lot left to learn.

In May 2003 we had our first workshop/seminar for professionals and volunteers who work directly with girls. The aim was to create a forum for an exchange of knowledge and experience between the social services, school, youth welfare services, the police and women’s volunteer organisations. This seminar/workshop resulted in the report: ‘Oppression in the Name of Honour’.

In autumn 2003 two conferences were held in Turkey on the theme of ‘Violence in the Name of Honour’ - the venues were Diyarbakir and Istanbul. Among those taking part was Nebahat Akkoc, the chairwoman of the women’s organisation KA-MER, which works to combat violence against women. Discussions with representatives of KA-MER led to us agreeing that we needed to extend our knowledge of the work that can be done relating to women\* and girls who are threatened by violence within the family, including honour-related violence and honour killing. Those of us who work in direct contact with the victims wanted to establish a joint space, a meeting place where professionals could exchange experiences and discuss their concerns on the basis of the practical work they do with girls/women and their families, and we wanted to work together to identify methods for providing support to those who seek our help.

For three days in May 2004, Stockholm and Save the Children Sweden played host to six representatives of KA-MER for a series of seminars and workshops. The delegation from Turkey also included the senior lecturer and suicidologist Aytekin Sir, from the University of Dicle in Diyarbakir, and the journalist and author Zeynep Oral, from Istanbul. The purpose of this visit was to enable an exchange of knowledge and experience between professionals and volunteer workers from the two

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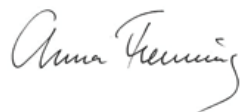
\* *Save the Children Sweden prefer to use the word girls and KA-MER prefers the word women. Girls is used in order to mark that Save the Children Sweden’s target group consists of children below the age of 18 and should be considered as such. KA-MER uses the word women in order to show that they are women foremost and housewife, married, virgin etc secondly. Even so, they have among their visitors 13-year old girls that are married and have children.*

countries. During the week there were four seminars, and a meeting with officials of Swedish Government Offices. One of the seminars was arranged by the urban district authority of Rinkeby (Rinkeby is an urban district in Greater Stockholm with a very high proportion of immigrants in its population), and three were arranged by Save the Children Sweden in Stockholm. The first of these three seminars was an open lecture by Aytekin Sir and Nebahat Akkoc, the chairwoman of KA-MER, entitled 'Death in Honour's Name'. The second was a day-long study day on the theme: 'Oppression in the Name of Honour', with workshops and seminars bringing together KA-MER, Save the Children Sweden and about forty professionals and active volunteers who work directly with girls facing these types of problem. The third Save the Children Sweden seminar was addressed to journalists; it dealt with (and was entitled) 'Honour and distortion in the reporting of honour crimes' but is not included in this report.

The present report was written in order to document the content of these days, which were full of new and interesting aspects of the whole problematic area of girls who live in conflict between two cultures. It is our hope that the experiences and insights gained will also prove fruitful for people who were not able to attend the seminars.

Throughout the duration of the visit from Turkey, several presentations were given of the work of KA-MER and Aytekin Sir. An attempt to provide a comprehensive record of the week must of necessity include excerpts from all the lectures given; where material was originally presented in Turkish, we have in the following text adapted and to a certain extent summarised the interpreters' translations of the lectures. This method inevitably means that we have lost a part of the speakers' stylistic expressiveness, but it was the only approach feasibly open to us in the circumstances.

We wish to record our heartfelt gratitude to all those who, as lecturers and participants, contributed their experience and commitment to the seminars. Special thanks to Annika Svanström, Sweden's consul at the Consulate General in Istanbul, who with her commitment and support made it possible for such a large delegation to make the journey. Our thanks, too, to the interpreters, who accompanied us throughout the whole of KA-MER's visit: Gülnur Müren, Nilgün Öktem and Ayse Güler.



Anna Frenning



Sevil Bremer



Monica Brendler-Lindqvist

# *Résumé of Lectures*

Over a period of three days in May 2004, Stockholm and Save the Children Sweden played host to Nebahat Akkoc, chairwoman of the Turkish women's organisation KA-MER, and five of her colleagues. The delegation from Turkey also included the senior lecturer and suicidologist Aytekin Sir from the University of Dicle, and the journalist and author Zeynep Oral from Istanbul. The purpose of the visit was to create an exchange of knowledge and experience relating to how one can work to provide support for women and girls who are threatened by violence in their family, including 'honour-related violence' and 'honour killings'. This report is a documentation of the lectures and discussions held in the course of the three days, at Save the Children Sweden's offices in Stockholm and also, for one seminar, in the suburb of Rinkeby as guests of the Rinkeby Urban District Authority.

The report is also a follow-up of the report Save the Children Sweden published after last year's workshop and seminar entitled 'Oppression in the Name of Honour'. As was the case last year, this year's all-day workshop with seminars also saw the participation of about forty professionals and volunteers who actively work with girls who are subjected to honour-related violence. The seminars were led by psychotherapists from KA-MER and Save the Children Sweden, and were followed by group discussions. Separate chapters present summaries of the lectures given by Aytekin Sir and the psychologist Jülide Aral from Istanbul.

KA-MER are based in the town of Diyarbakir in southern Turkey. This is an area where Kurds are in the majority. The organisation works to support women and girls who are exposed to oppression, threats and violence. There is a group within KA-MER which has special responsibility for combating honour killings.

Save the Children Sweden's Crisis Centre for Children and Young People has, since January 2002, housed a unit (the Centre for Girls in Conflict Between Two Cultures, often referred to simply as the 'Girls' Clinic') that provides psychotherapeutic treatment for girls who are caught in conflict between two cultures. These girls have developed psychiatric symptoms through having been, or through still being, threatened or oppressed by their family/relations. Approximately twenty girls, in some cases together with their families and extended families, have received treatment at the Girls' Clinic since it opened.

One important conclusion reached at the end of the 2003 seminar was that every individual girl's life-story is unique; consequently, one of the decisive factors in determining how well we can provide support is if we listen to the girl herself, and see her own ability to assess her situation and take her own decisions. This conclusion still holds true, and indeed we have become even more firmly convinced of its importance during the visit of the KA-MER delegation.

When KA-MER was preparing to start their work, they began by finding out as much as possible about women's attitudes and

experiences with regard to violence. They found that most of the women they talked to regarded being subjected to violence as part of being a woman. There is a long distance separating this standpoint from an understanding of women's rights: the possibilities for feminism are therefore extremely limited - at least, that is the way the women themselves saw it.

In their work, KA-MER come across various groups who say that KA-MER's approach is wrong, that women's issues are of secondary importance, or that they should be dealt with in a different way. KA-MER has developed different "languages" for answering different groups. On the basis of analyses of the similarities between the patriarchal system and imperialism, they have found a 'language' for countering the arguments of the left-wing movement and the Kurdish liberation movement, who have said that the liberation of women should be accorded secondary importance. Another 'language' concerns the veil issue: here, too, it is the individual woman who should be allowed to adopt her own attitude; no-one should be forced to wear a veil, and similarly no-one should be forced not to wear a veil, in order for example to gain entrance to a university.

KA-MER's stance is that true feminism is something that is for everybody. The region in which they work contains many different cultures, and KA-MER wish to deny no-one the right to their own cultural identity. That being said, the women themselves have, together with KA-MER, drawn up a list of cultural phenomena which are not acceptable.

KA-MER is prepared to work together with everyone who is against violence, including men. In specific, concrete situations where women have been sentenced to death by a family council, KA-MER often carries out successful negotiations with men. During the seminars a number of people asked, from varying angles, whether KA-MER attempts to influence or pressure those who defend violence - men, public opinion, local communities. KA-MER's answer was that the organisation only acts in cases when women ask them to. On the other hand, they do of course have an influence at the level of public opinion, through giving lectures on their work, seeking dialogue with those in political power, and speaking in the media.

KA-MER's work embraces acting in emergency cases, and running support groups to help women become stronger, both psychologically and in terms of knowledge. The subjects covered range from human rights to starting your own business. KA-MER also run nursery schools where the children learn what gender equality means in practice - which is unusual in Turkey.

When the organisation had been going for five years, KA-MER had accumulated enough knowledge to be able to set up an operation dealing specifically with honour killings; this has enabled them to go a step further in the definition of their work. Previously, their stance was 'We refuse violence'; now, their position is 'We will combat the parts of the culture that is harmful to women'.



The general assumption is that honour killings are a reaction to a situation where a woman or girl has had a sexual relationship, but KA-MER explained that this is not always necessarily the case. Different regions and different families have differing norms, but the common characteristic where honour killings are concerned is that the woman has transgressed a limit established by men. The reason why the woman or girl is being punished is that she has been disobedient, and the aim is to perpetuate women's subordinate position.

Other representatives from KA-MER also described the organisation's work on honour killings, its groups to help women start their own businesses, and its emergency centre.

Save the Children Sweden's psychotherapists from the Centre for Children and Adolescents in Crisis used a seminar as an opportunity to reflect on the choice of words when talking to girls and their families. They described the thinking that led them to choose the name of what became the Centre for Girls in Conflict Between Two Cultures (the 'Girls' Clinic'); they wanted to make sure that they chose a name which would not turn the girls away. Words and expressions such as 'chastity culture', 'honour-related violence' or 'patriarchal structures' are the kinds of terms that few people would want to use about themselves, and that could easily be interpreted as being offensive. These are, however, terms that are used when talking about the girls and their families. This is one of the potentially tricky areas where we have to make a distinction between the way we express ourselves in our practical work and in theoretical contexts.

When working with families and extended families it is important to adapt the way one expresses oneself to the family's own language usage. Examining and talking about the implications of the words used by the members of the family is one of the central elements of the treatment. Save the Children Sweden's therapists apply a cross-cultural approach: a native Swedish and a Turkish-Swedish psychotherapist bring their differing cultural experiences to the work, and this adds a very valuable dimension.

Save the Children Sweden also described a specific practical case where they worked with a family. Most of the girls who come to the Girls' Clinic come by themselves, but in cases where the girls so wish and where it is possible without exposing the girls to danger, the psychotherapists also work with networks, boyfriends and families. Family work is something that has to be built up very gradually and carefully. In the case described, one of the therapists first had meetings over a lengthy period of time with a girl who had broken off contact with her family. At an early stage, the girl said that she wished to be able to re-establish contact with her parents. When the girl herself was sure that she was ready, the therapists contacted the parents, and also met them without the girl being present. After this a meeting was arranged at which both the girl and her parents were present. The meeting was surrounded by a series of precautions, including a number of practical ways of guaranteeing the girl's safety. Following the first meeting, both the girl and her mother were angry and disappointed, each feeling that the other had not shown enough how much they

missed and loved each other. Over time this obstacle could be overcome - among the measures taken to achieve this, the girl and her mother wrote letters to each other, which the therapists handed to the respective recipient.

Aytekin Sir, senior lecturer in Psychiatry at the University of Dicle, has carried out research into suicide. The suicide rate varies from country to country, but remains relatively stable within any given country; it is therefore of interest to note that it has suddenly risen in Diyarbakir and the surrounding region. The region is known - not least as a result of KA-MER's work - for being an area where honour killings are committed. Aytekin Sir also pointed to the fact that just about everywhere in the world there is a clear preponderance of men among suicide cases - while in the part of Turkey which he has studied, the opposite is the case: the figures show twice as many suicides among women as among men.

There are many stories of how 'suicides' are arranged: for example, women are forced to consume rat poison, or they suddenly and inexplicably fall out of a high window when they are alone in a room with a male relative. It is very difficult in individual cases to prove in a court of law what actually happened, but the statistics nevertheless speak for themselves. The evidence suggests that femicide camouflaged as suicide is much more prevalent in south-eastern Turkey than in other parts of Turkey or elsewhere in the world. And the figures are rising. The women who die in this way are usually housewives or 'house-daughters' - in other words, women without economic freedom. Aytekin Sir believes that the increase is connected to the increasing urbanisation. Agrarian families with little or no education are being forced into the towns and cities in order to find work; suddenly, the deeply rooted patriarchal cultural patterns find themselves face to face with modern global society. The result is a problematic integration process which in many ways is similar to the problems visible in Sweden or other areas of Europe.

The psychologist Jülide Aral presented the work she and KA-MER do with support groups for psychological help. This work has made use of a five-stage model, including formulation of objectives, trauma management using psychodrama, and assessment using Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) evaluation scales. Roughly half of the participants in the support group improved their values (in other words, showed that they were coming to grips with their traumas) by at least one level on the stress diagnosis scale.

# *Save the Children Sweden's Statements*

The debate relating to girls from foreign backgrounds who are subjected to or threatened with violence by members of their family has at times been rather heated. One aspect of the discussions where clarity has been difficult to achieve has been the question of terminology; debaters have not always made it clear what exact meaning they intend certain words and terms to have, and what assumptions and values underlie the words and expressions they choose. Having worked with this complex of issues for three years, Save the Children Sweden has formulated the following precepts, or 'statements' as we also call them, which we have made the foundation for our work:

**Honour killings have a cultural background, but not an ethnic or religious background.**

By this we mean that honour killings are not to do with ethnicity, for example whether a person is a Swede or a Kurd; rather, the practice is rooted in cultures with feudal patterns of thought which have been in existence for thousands of years, and which still exist in certain families/networks/tribes throughout the world. It is not possible to tie these patterns of thought to any particular religion even of religious explanations are sometimes used. Any given ethnic group may contain many different cultures, and there are cultures which transcend ethnic boundaries. Cultures undergo constant change from the people who compose them; and a culture consists of many elements, of which individuals may embrace some and reject others.

**Honour killings are a specific kind of homicide which follows a fixed pattern.**

An honour murder is often sanctioned by a family council which, historically, has filled the function of dispensing justice and punishment in societies with feudal structures. The family council is a decision-making forum for a whole clan or extended family, and the decision to carry out an honour killing has the support or acceptance of more than just the person(s) who commit the murder.

**Honour killings are the supreme punishment for breaking the rules.**

Strict hierarchies are a part of feudal patriarchal norms. Transgressions of the norms are punished. Transgressions do not necessarily have to do with sexuality, although women's sexuality is rigidly controlled and hedged in by multiple rules in cultures where honour is a central tenet. Boys and men can also be subjected to violence, threats, abuse and oppression if they do not follow the rules.

**‘Honour-related violence’ or ‘honour crimes’ are the terms we use for violence that is connected to honour or chastity ethics in feudal patterns.**

Violence within the family may be connected with traditional gender roles which have a greater or lesser degree of support from the local community. If a family has a cultural proximity to feudal structures and the concept of honour, then we can speak of ‘honour-related violence’ or ‘honour crimes’; if not then we cannot speak in such terms, irrespective of where the family has its origins.

# Seminars and Presentations

## **Presentation of KA-MER's work**

(Summary of a public lecture given on Monday, 17 May at the Save the Children Sweden offices)

Nebahat Akkoc is an educationalist, and is chairwoman of the women's organisation KA-MER. 'KA-MER' in fact means 'women's organisation': 'KA' is short for KADIN, which means woman, and 'MER' is short for MERKEZ, which means centre. Nebahat Akkoc used to be a teacher; the retirement age for teachers is low in Turkey, and after retiring she got involved in human rights issues - and as a result of this involvement she herself was made to experience the violence to which the regime subjected its critics. The base for Nebahat Akkoc's and KA-MER's work is the town of Diyarbakir, in south-eastern Turkey. The majority of the population of Diyarbakir are Kurds, as is Nebahat Akkoc.

Nebahat Akkoc welcomed everyone, and started by describing how KA-MER started its work, in 1997, in a Turkey which at the time was torn by violence arising from conflicts between the Kurdish and Turkish populations. KA-MER was founded by a small number of women, all of whom had experienced the violence rife in society - violence which was not only to do with the struggle for liberation, but which also stemmed from a lack of equality. Today, the organisation has grown, and its representatives give talks in numerous locations, both within and outside Turkey - although there is still a lot of truth in the comparison Nebahat often uses to explain what kind of organisation KA-MER is:

### **Working for and with women**

Nebahat Akkoc:

"We are defined as a 'civil organisation', but when people ask me who we are I usually explain by telling a Nasreddin Hodja story" (Nasreddin Hodja is a well-known figure in the Turkish story-telling tradition, who embodies whimsical philosophy on the side of the little man). "Hodja fell down from a high roof. Somebody called for a doctor. But you know how Hodja is, so he called out, while he was still falling, 'No, no, I don't want a doctor. Fetch someone who's fallen off a roof instead'."

Ever since the organisation started, KA-MER's motto has been 'Working for and with women'. This does not mean that they do not want to work with men; what the motto does is underline the fact that the starting point and focus is always women. This is the 'style' they have chosen for the organisation.

### **Violence part of being a woman**

Before KA-MER started its activities the women planned and thought things through for eighteen months. To find out what women wanted and needed they talked to 590 women from nineteen different towns, and drew up a needs analysis. After eighteen months' work they realised

they knew two things: one was that the women perceived the violence to which they were subjected as part of being a woman: “If you are a woman, that’s how it is”. The second thing was that they had identified a small category of women who were conscious of the fact that they were being subjected to mistreatment, but who did not know where they could go to find shelter.

These two conclusions were central to KA-MER’s understanding of its mission when the organisation was founded.

KA-MER developed a programme, the central tenets of which were that women are people too, they have human rights, and they must not be subjected to violence. They developed a method for raising women’s awareness of their rights, and also opened an emergency centre, to which women could turn in crisis situations.

“It has been extremely hard work, because we’re working in a very difficult area. But now, we are no longer only in Diyarbakir, we also work in eight other towns and before the end of the year we will officially become a national federation.”

### **Culture that harms women**

Since it is such a difficult area, it took a while before they were ready to deal with the hardest task of all - the issue of honour killings.

Nebahat Akkoc:

“To be able to describe what you see here on this picture (a photo from a funeral: a woman in a coffin having been murdered in an honour killing) we needed the experience gained from five years’ work. Before we started our section for honour killings, we had not really looked at the problem specifically. One thing we were absolutely clear and explicit on was that we refused violence. That was how we defined ourselves up to 2002. Since then, we’ve had a clearer definition - we will fight against culture that harms women. We started our work in 1997, and in that way are more fortunate than many other organisations for women. We have learnt a great deal from the women’s rights movement both in Turkey and in the rest of the world, and we try to have a style that is suited to our culture.”

### **The limitations of feminism**

One discovery that the women who founded KA-MER made at an early stage was that the basic feminist outlook which they all shared did not take them very far in the practicalities of their work with women.

“... feminism is really rather limited” |

Nebahat Akkoc:

“The most important realisation we came to was that feminism is really rather limited, it is marginal. We did not want to limit ourselves - on the contrary, we wanted our operations to expand, we wanted to be able to work with even more women in the area. We have put a lot of effort into dealing with this marginality, this limitation. We came to two fundamental assessments: firstly, that the patriarchal system is not all that different from the imperialistic system. It is the same mentality

when the USA invades Iraq and starts torturing people there. Since men have the power over all the newspapers and mass media, they do everything they can to restrict the women's movement. But what part have we played in this marginalisation - what did we do? Our second analysis was that there were very large numbers of women who were subjected to terrible violence, and that these women were a long way away from the women's movement. To be able to reach these analyses and assessments of the situation, we needed to have worked with hundreds of women.

Nebahat went on to describe a test they carried out in the early days of the organisation. It was carried out in the form of a group exercise involving approximately twenty women.

Nebahat Akkoc:

"We put up a piece of card on the wall, and asked all the women to mark out on the card where they saw themselves and where they saw feminism. Out of the twenty, only one woman got up. She put a mark for herself at one end of the card, and a mark for feminism at the other end. The other women did not even get up. So we asked them why, and we collected all their answers. 'Feminism is for women who are well-educated and rich, women who speak Turkish or English, and are from Istanbul or Europe. It's for women like that, not for us', they said."

### **Milking and human rights**

This was an important experience. KA-MER told women from their own culture that feminism is for everyone - that there is not only one definition of feminism, and that feminism is about defending women's rights in society. There was quite a lot of resistance which it was necessary to overcome. This is how Nebahat expresses it:

**"...we as feminists often thought that the choices  
we had made should apply to all women –  
and that was a mistake"**

Nebahat Akkoc:

"You are probably aware that before, in the left-wing movement, you were supposed to have a certain type of hair-style and eat a certain kind of food. Well, the same thing happens in feminism as used to happen in the left-wing movement; and there were women who turned their back on feminism because of these demands that they should behave in a certain way, use make-up and that kind of thing. Finally, we came along and said: 'Of course you can speak Zazaki, you can speak Kurmandji (Kurdish dialects), or Arabic, you can wear your shalwar (trousers), you can carry on milking your cow - but you can defend human rights at the same time.' To be honest, we have learnt a lot from all those women, and it was a good thing for us that we didn't lay down all our principles right from the start. One reason for the marginalisation I mentioned was that we as feminists often thought that the choices we had made should apply to all women - and that was a mistake."

### **The women define the rules**

Nebahat tells us about KA-MER's 'assessments' or 'assumptions' when referring to the formulation of premises or standpoints which were necessary to make it possible to deal with different situations and kinds of discussion.

Nebahat Akkoc:

"We could spend hours talking about all the standpoints we laid down, but I can give you just a few examples. What is important is to see the dynamics of the culture we live in. There is a Kurdish liberation movement which we have to accept, there is a left-wing movement which we have to accept, there is a 'veil and turban' movement which we have to see, and so our job is to find a technique that can apply to all women in Turkey."

KA-MER works together with anyone who is opposed to violence, but the organisation is a target for criticism from those who hold their own struggle to be more important.

Nebahat Akkoc:

"The Kurdish movement claimed in the beginning that we were just not needed. They said that the struggle for women's liberation would get in the way of their fight for Kurdish liberation. We do not distance ourselves from any culture, but we do oppose those rules in our culture which harm women."

What those harmful rules are: a question for the women themselves to define. KA-MER has helped women to list the occurrences and traditions they wish to oppose. An example of such a rule is what is called 'an exchange of people' - marriages where girls are given away to a member of a tribe with whom their own tribe has been in conflict; in other words, she is married into that family in order to resolve the conflict. A further example of a cultural custom which the women found unacceptable is that if a family can afford to send its five children to school, then they will give their four sons an education but when it comes to the fifth child, a girl, they suddenly say they cannot afford it. The illiteracy rate among women in the region where KA-MER is based is 60 per cent.

### **One system for every question**

There are other groups in society whose views KA-MER needs to be able to respond to in debate; so the organisation needs to have formulated the right kind of arguments and methods.



Nebahat explains:

“The left-wing movement tried to stop us. They said, ‘But we are going to have a revolution, and then we’ll save you as well.’ To which we replied, ‘Well, we aren’t in your way, we can give you workers, we have working women for you.’”

Nebahat Akkoc:

“The ‘veil and turban’ issue is another movement which we have developed a system for dealing with. Firstly, we are a women’s organisation, we defend women’s human rights. As a women’s rights movement we were against a woman being forced to cover herself up; but then we had to modify our stance, on the basis of what the women wanted of us. We support equally the woman who was suspended from university because she wore a veil, and the woman who they forced to wear a veil. For us, the woman is at the centre of all we do; our task is always to be at the woman’s side and to do all we can for her when she needs help and support.”

### **Attitudes towards men**

KA-MER started its work in Diyarbakir in 1997; the organisation has grown, there are tens of thousands of women who support it and it is now active in eight towns. The fact that they have been so successful shows that they have chosen the right methods and made the right assessments, says Nebahat. This also applies to their attitude towards men.

Nebahat Akkoc:

“At our centre in Diyarbakir we work with activities for women in four different areas, each with their own offices, and there’s only one of the areas where men are not allowed, the emergency refuge. And this is an approach which we also followed when we worked together with the human rights federation; a person who has been subjected to violence must be able to feel sure that the person who has committed the violence cannot get into the place where she has sought shelter.”

Nebahat Akkoc:

“So what I am saying is that very often, when women come to register with us, their husbands accompany them, just so that the women feel safe. And in the world outside the centre we obviously have to work together with men - although it is we women who are in charge.”

### **Emergency centre, support groups, start your own business, nursery schools**

KA-MER has now established operations in a number of different locations in Turkey - Batman, Bingöl, Kiziltepe, Mardin, Van, Hakkari, Siverek and Urfa. The latter three centres have not opened yet, but will start operations during 2004; the other five have been running for several years. The organisation runs an emergency refuge and support groups at all its centres. To raise the women’s awareness and status they also run an activity based on starting a business, which provides the women with support and guidance in earning money of their own by starting a business; to date fifteen different workplaces have been set up. KA-MER also runs nursery groups for children in the 0 - 6 age range, and has four day-care centres, with two more in the pipeline. All

this is of course in addition to their work to combat honour killings, which they launched in 2003.

### **Honour killings - punishment for disobedience**

Nebahat concludes by talking about some of the findings and conclusions KA-MER has reached with regard to honour killings.

Nebahat Akkoc:

“When we talked about honour killings we thought that these murders were generally committed because the woman had had an extra-marital relationship or because her virginity was in question - in other words, because there was the suspicion of a sexual relationship. However, our work has shown us new facts. We are dealing with cultures and customs, and for example the Kurdish culture, it's not unified, it is not the same everywhere. Any one culture contains many different nuances.”

**“The reason for her being punished is disobedience, and the aim is to preserve women's subordinate position...”**

Nebahat Akkoc:

”Perhaps I can explain it like this: imagine we were to knock on the doors of four flats in a building. Four people come to their doors, four kinds of women. Every different nuance of a culture has different norms for women. What they all have is a limit which women are not allowed to go beyond. Sometimes the limit is set at a higher threshold, sometimes a lower one, but if the woman tries to overstep the boundary, or if she actually does overstep it, or if there is a suspicion that she has overstepped it, then she must be punished. The reason for her being punished is disobedience, and the aim is to preserve women's subordinate position, that's all.”

### ***KA-MER's Work to Combat Honour Killings***

Naime Kardas works in the section of the organisation whose task is to combat honour killings. The following text is a summary of the two talks Naime Kardas gave during the visit: the lecture she held for the Social Services Office in Rinkeby, and the introductory address she gave at a workshop at Save the Children Sweden's offices.

In 2002 the Turkish Bar Association received a telephone call: a woman was to be murdered in the name of honour. They did not know who the call was from, could not trace the number, and were unable to do anything. At a later date, KA-MER found out that the woman had been killed. They looked through their papers again, to see exactly what kind of women had been coming to them, and found seventy women whom somebody had threatened to kill. This discovery triggered the launch of a project aimed at preventing the occurrence of honour killings. These women needed as much support as other women, but it was necessary for KA-MER to work in a more specific manner.

Naime Kardas:

"We set ourselves the objective of working with three women during the first year. In fact, we ended up working with twenty-three! This shows the magnitude of the problem we have with honour killings. Our work has shown us that every individual case is unique. We have tried to provide support tailored to each woman's individual wishes. On certain occasions we have had to talk to the family council; they are the ones who sit in judgement."

### **First safety - and an ID card**

The women are often in need of immediate accommodation in a safe house. The technique KA-MER has developed with experience begins at square one, and then takes each step one at a time.

Naime Kardas:

"The first thing we see is fear. We try to get them to relax, to understand that they are in a safe place, that they have no need to be afraid."

Naime Kardas:

"Most of the women who come to us are not in the national population register, and they have no identity documents. First of all, KA-MER makes sure they get an ID card. We have developed an agreement with the authority in question so that it only takes an hour, though it normally would take a week. Sometimes the women need medical attention, so we have an agreement with the national health service and the university hospital."

When there is a need to provide a woman with protection and accommodation in a safe house, KA-MER also receives support and assistance from the police, the regional civil administration, the regional health authority and the social services.

### **Influencing public opinion**

Collaboration with other authorities was something that began in Diyarbakir, but KA-MER now also works together with the UN Women's Commission and the Turkish Bar Association. One of KA-MER's objectives from the outset was to generate debate and influence public opinion, so the organisation has contacts with the media, in the form of regional and national press and radio.

Naime Kardas:

"We have said throughout that this is not our problem, it's the whole of Diyarbakir's, and the whole of Turkey's and the whole world's problem."

### **Pregnant when she married**

Naime told the story of the woman whose fate led KA-MER to open their special department to deal with the subject of honour killings:

Naime Kardas:

"She was thirty-five years old when she fell in love with a man, and became pregnant. She married the man in a religious ceremony, but her family did not accept the marriage, because she was pregnant when she

married. Her cousins and brothers - a total of eight people - decided to stone her to death. Her husband died trying to save her. The woman herself was left lying at the place, her relatives believing she was dead, and the gendarmes found her there.”

The woman survived, and was taken to the university hospital in Dicle. One month later, she lost her child, a five-month-old foetus, and after seven months she herself died. No-one from her family visited her in hospital. KA-MER started visiting her having found out about the assault in the newspaper.

Naime continues:

“What can you say to society after such a case that will really help other women in the same kinds of situations? That a pregnant woman ought to have the right to have a religious wedding?”

### **Telephone harassment**

Naime goes on to recount another case; this time it's the story of a married woman with three children, who lives near Diyarbakir. She has been subjected to telephone harassment by a male relative. The family gets to hear his version of the story, and decide they want to kill her. Another male relative of the woman came to see KA-MER to ask for help.

Naime Kardas:

“We tried to do everything according to the woman's wishes. After the woman heard she was to be killed, it could take a few months before the murder would be carried out. When she found out on which day the killing was to take place she went to the house of a relative living in a different village, where we met her. She told us that she did not want to leave her husband and three children.”

KA-MER started meeting the family, in the aim of finding out who had influence in this particular family. “Some people have more influence than others. We might be looking at certain individuals - a politician, an imam, the village elder. Looking at a family's structure can tell you who that person is”, says Naime.

KA-MER contacted a politician, a member of the Turkish Bar Association and an imam, and they arranged a meeting with the family council.

Naime Kardas:

“The kind of language we used was very important at this meeting. At a meeting like this we can't say to the woman, in front of the others, ‘your body is yours and yours alone’, or ‘this is an invalid execution that has not been decided in a court of law’. Instead, we take the line of saying that the accusations against the woman are no more than gossip, and try to steer the discussion in that direction.”

The woman in question was a strong person, and she had recorded the threats the man had made to her over the phone. He had, for example, said that if she did not agree to have sex with him, he would spread the

rumour that she had been unfaithful to her husband. The family council listened to this.

Naime Kardas:

”The most important thing was that her husband believed in her innocence. After one-and-a-half months he took her back home. The family was convinced that she was innocent. But then, group pressure started to exert itself in the community, where a lot of people felt that the family had taken the side of a guilty woman.”

The family was ostracised, and the children could no longer be sent to school. The family was forced to move away from the village. KA-MER helped them get identity papers for the children. The husband and wife were not officially married, so they were not in the national population register. KA-MER helped them to move and find new accommodation, and the regional governor also gave support, by helping the husband to find work. The couple’s daughter now attends a nursery school.

Naime Kardas:

”Things are tense between them, but they are not giving up. They attend meetings at our centre. The woman continues to live in her own culture. Sometimes they have to go into temporary hiding.”

### **Lost her virginity**

The next case concerns a twenty-year-old girl, who had a boyfriend for two years and lost her virginity. The family did a virginity test and so they found out she was no longer a virgin. They locked her up for three months, during which they tried to pressure the boy into marrying her. However, he refused, saying that it was another boy who had slept with her. Her family tried to force her to commit suicide, but instead she escaped, and went to two friends, who are journalists, to ask for help.

Naime Kardas:

“The journalists knew about KA-MER, so they came to see us. We observed straight away that the woman was extremely frightened; she kept trying to hide in dark corners, saying that she had to get away or else she’d be killed. We contacted the social services and she was given a place in a safe house the same day. For the journey to the safe house we had to work out different strategies to ensure her safety. Should she go by bus? Her family would of course have gone to the bus station to look for her. We thought through various alternatives, and eventually decided on a plan where we got her to a neighbouring town, from where she could take the bus. After a month she had found a job and was renting a flat in another town in turkey. She feels secure now, though soon she will start to feel longing. We keep in touch. She wants to see a psychologist.”

### **Reported her father for incest**

Naime Kardas:

“One month ago, we came into contact with a girl in an incest case. Her father had abused her, and he had been doing so for a number of years. She reported her father a year ago. He was placed under arrest for ten days, then he was set free again. This left the girl more exposed

than ever, and the violence and abuse were intensified. The girl had to break off her university studies. When the violence and abuse kept increasing she reported her father again. She does not want to live in the same house as her father - she wanted a place in a women's refuge."

There are not any women's refuges in Diyarbakir, or indeed in the whole of eastern Turkey, so instead she turned to KA-MER. She arrived on a Saturday.

Naime Kardas:

"On the Monday we went to the social services, but they work slowly, we'd have to wait a year for help. There was another emergency centre for women in another town, and the police helped us to get her there. Her father had spent some of the time in prison, and his party colleagues had gone there to try and get him out. The whole of the family was against the woman. Incest happens a lot, but it is usually kept a secret."

The woman's brother was a university student, but he broke off his studies in order to kill his sister. The family had hired a lawyer, who was using the authority of his position to try to track the girl down. They came to KA-MER's premises and searched them. Eventually, the lawyer succeeded in locating her at the women's refuge.

Naime Kardas:

"Another women's organisation moved her. She tried to change her identity, but it proved impossible: changing her name was not a problem, but it was not possible to change her details in the population register, so every time she registers as living somewhere, which she needs to do in order to study, they can find her. She can live in a safe house for three to six months, but after that the women have to find a solution. Right now, we're trying to arrange for her to move to another country."

### ***Shemse - the first case***

(Summary of presentations given at the workshop held on 18 May at Save the Children Sweden's offices).

Sacide Akkoc first came to KA-MER when she needed help herself, and has now worked for the organisation for five years, as a member of the team running the emergency centre's honour killings project. Here, she talks about the first case of honour killing that KA-MER worked with, a woman called Shemse Allac:

Sacide Akkoc:

"She had been admitted to Dicle hospital, badly injured after being stoned. I wanted to do what I could for her, and I followed her for the seven months she was in hospital."

Sacide Akkoc:

"For at least half an hour every day I sat by her bedside, and talked to her, gave her news. I told her, 'We at KA-MER are behind you, feel our

support'. Sometimes I took her out for a couple of hours, I pushed her in a wheelchair so that she could have a change of environment. She was in very bad shape, she was showing hardly any signs of life. But after a while I noticed that her eyes started following me around when I was with her. I started doing other things for her, washing her, bathing her, cutting her nails. I did physiotherapy exercises with her. After a month I whispered in her ear, 'If you recognise me, give me a sign', and she pressed my hand and tears came to her eyes. Later, the staff at the hospital told me that the colour of her face changed when I came, she looked better."

(This is the same woman as Naime Kardas talked about).

Nebahat Akkoc:

"Shemse was more or less dead when the gendarmes found her and took her to the hospital. At first she gradually got better, she got strength from Sacide and from her baby - she was pregnant and the baby was still alive. But when the foetus was five months she lost it, and then Shemse contracted an infection, and she died."

The funeral was very unusual. For the first time, women arranged everything to do with the funeral. Usually it is men who bear the coffin, say the prayers and so on, but in this case, the women themselves, with KA-MER, did everything.

Nebahat Akkoc:

"If we hadn't done that, then she would have been buried as an 'Unknown person' in a separate cemetery. The people who are buried there do not get a ceremony, they don't even wash the body. No prayers - nothing. And they make a sign on the gravestone to show that she is unclean."

### ***Start-Your-Own Groups to improve financial strength***

Nilüfer Yilmaz first came to KA-MER as a participant in a trauma management group, and now she leads 'Start-your-own-business' groups.

"I had been working in the civil service, then I was pensioned off. At that time I had been experiencing violence for twenty years. I have changed a lot since I first came to KA-MER. I started off by taking part in a trauma management group, there have been a lot of traumas in my life."

Jülide, the psychologist, came from Istanbul, and led the support group in which Nilüfer was a participant. Nilüfer started working for KA-MER as part of a wish to find ways of putting words to what she herself had experienced, and to help other women see that it is possible to find a way out. Nilüfer found that she benefited directly from having attended support groups at KA-MER when she came to start her own business.

Nilufer Yilmaz:

“Women need support in their aim of improving their economic strength. We make sure we have a carefully thought-through plan for the work. We wondered if there was a course the women could go on, to learn more about building up a company from scratch. We located a trust that worked to support economic development. After the course we decided how to construct an application form for other women who wanted to apply for help to start their own business. It’s important not to use over-complicated language, as the women might lose heart. There are now seventeen companies located around the region that have been started by women in this way, and new applications are being submitted all the time. Women of all ages start these projects, and the scheme is proving really successful.”

**“It’s important not to use over-complicated language, as the women might lose heart”**

### *Reception Step by Step*

Mehtap Kizilkan is a member of the emergency team at KA-MER, and she talked about what the process is when a woman comes to KA-MER for the first time

Mehtap Kizilkan:

“The first thing that happens is that someone welcomes the woman, and shows her into the room where the first conversation is to be held. The woman chooses where she wants to sit, and we sit down opposite her. It’s important that your body language is right, and that you sit neither too close nor too far away. We make sure we talk in a certain order. A woman who has been subjected to violence can be pretty confused. For example, we don’t ask why, we don’t seek to condemn anyone or call anything into question; what we do is ask questions which help her to describe what has happened in her own words, to find her own solution. Our key words are immunity, strength and self-confidence.”

**“We don’t ask why, we don’t seek to condemn; what we do is ask questions which help her to describe what has happened in her own words”**

Women receive different kinds of support - psychological, legal, professional. The emergency team meet a newcomer between one and four times. If the team judge that the woman needs medical attention they will arrange for it.

Mehtap Kizilkan:

“We are at her side, we do everything we can for her - those things we have resources for, of course. We will be moving on to a discussion of language, of which words to use, later. ‘I’ and ‘Me’ are important words - though you have to be careful with them, too, so you don’t get selfish. We view all the people who come to us as women; we make no



distinction between ‘girl’, ‘lady’, ‘housewife’, or ‘whore/prostitute’. And another detail is, that we don’t say to the women that we are there to ‘help’ them. We have removed that word from our work with women. Why? Because if you keep hearing the word ‘help’, if you have the feeling that it is something you are being given all the time, then it can make you passive. So we use the word ‘support’ instead.”

**‘I’ and ‘Me’ are important words –  
though you have to be careful with them, too,  
so you don’t get selfish.**

## **Save the Children Sweden: Which words should we use?**

The question of language use in conversations with girls and their families.

Sevil Bremer and Monica Brendler-Lindqvist are psychotherapists, and both work at Save the Children Sweden's Centre for Children and Adolescents in Crisis. They have several years' experience of working with refugee children suffering from trauma.

Sevil Bremer:

"Save the Children Sweden's Girls' Clinic was opened on 23 January 2002 by the 'Children in War' team at the Save the Children Sweden Crisis Centre. The Girls' Clinic is intended to meet the needs of girls who are subjected to threat, oppression and violence by their families or extended families, and who need to be able to talk to a psychotherapist."

Sevil Bremer:

"When we started the our clinic, we thought carefully about the name; we wanted an appropriate name that described what it was about and in which the girls could recognise themselves when they came to us looking for help. We came up with various different possible names and tried to choose between them: 'Clinic for girls from a multi-cultural background', or 'Clinic for girls living between two cultures', or 'girls living in conflict between two cultures'. It was hard to come up with something we were really satisfied with, and we began wondering if the problem we had finding the right name was due to the area of problems we were working with."

**"who wants to be a girl living in something called a 'chastity culture'? Who can identify themselves with such a category? The result is that you make a person into an object, in a way which could easily be perceived as an insult."**

Sevil Bremer:

"We also had other names or descriptions which we used as a basis for discussion: 'girls who've been subjected to honour-related violence', or 'girls who've been subjected to domestic violence', or 'girls living in patriarchal structures', or 'girls living in chastity cultures'. As we listened to these labels it became clear that we could never use these descriptions of our work while talking to the girls. Why not? Well, who wants to be a girl living in something called a 'chastity culture'? Who can identify themselves with such a category? The result is that you make a person into an object, in a way which could easily be perceived as an insult."

### **Different language use for different target groups**

Sevil Bremer:

“After a while we began to understand that we needed to use a language that is suited to the target group we are working with, with whom we are carrying on a dialogue - in other words, girls and their families/extended families. People who work with advocacy or public opinion uses a different kind of language when talking about girls and their families/networks and naming/describing their problems. Words take on different implications, depending on whether the context is theoretical or practical.”

Sevil Bremer:

“This explains the kinds of dilemma we often find ourselves in; those of us who meet the girls on a daily basis are beginning to understand the difference between the appropriate language for theoretical and for practical situations, and are increasingly aware of how best to adapt our language to the different contexts.”

### **Do not want to be labelled**

Sevil Bremer:

“We have learnt from the girls who are receiving psychotherapeutic treatment and who live under honour-related oppression, violence and threat of murder, that they do not want to be labelled or categorised as for example, ‘girls living under honour-related oppression’. Even if that is the nature of their problems, the girls want to be helped with their situation without being pigeon-holed, without being labelled in a way that echoes of prejudice. This is comparable to children and young people who have been subjected to sexual abuse by members of their family: they do not want to be categorised as ‘children from an incest family’.”

### **Amina is not allowed to meet her friends**

Sevil Bremer:

“One of the girls I meet is eighteen, and lives at home. She and her family have previously been registered with the social services, and she saw a psychologist over a period of three years, sometimes by herself and sometimes together with her family and extended family. Let’s say her name is Amina. Amina is not allowed to go out when she wants and she is not allowed to have friends. Amina’s father is very strict, and the whole family does as he tells them. He has assaulted his wife on a number of occasions, although he has stopped doing it since the social services were called in. However, everyone in the family is still afraid of him.”

Sevil Bremer:

“I started seeing Amina six months ago. She wants to continue studying, and that is the only thing she is allowed to do, the only time she is allowed out. Amina is afraid that her father is going to arrange a marriage for her. She does not want to move out of the family home, but she has decided that she will run away if her father arranges a marriage. The reason why Amina does not want to leave home yet is that she does not want to cut herself off from the family network. She is fed up with the way her father interferes in everything she does and is always trying to keep a check on her. Amina has talked to her teachers about her problems.”

### **Angry with her teachers**

Sevil Bremer:

“One day she came to see me and said that she was very angry with her teachers. ‘They don’t understand me. They call my problem, you know, ‘honour-related oppression’, and that upset me. It’s easy to call me that, but it’s me who has to live with my problems. It’s not easy to just keep fighting like I am, and at the same time I don’t want to leave home and be called a ‘victim of honour-related oppression.’ I’ve got one thing I have to fight against at home, and then there’s another thing, being called that. They think that all I have to do is leave home, but that’s not all there is to it. If I do, I’ll never get to see my mother, my father, my brothers and sisters, my grandparents, my aunts and uncles and all the others. That’s not easy, and it’s a big step to take.’”

### **Two cultures inside her**

Sevil Bremer:

“Amina has had very angry feelings towards her father, and we talk about her anger. She’s also angry with the society she originally comes from, for ‘having those rules’. Amina is torn between following the rules of her cultural community, and the desire to live as she herself chooses. It’s a choice she faces every day, and she’s not yet ready to give up. This is something we talk about a great deal. My job, in treating her, is to give her opportunities to reflect, to think things through together with me; I give her space for inner dialogue, and in our conversations I try to help her structure her own thoughts, wishes and questions. One of Amina’s struggles is with the question of belonging and identity; she has two cultures inside her - her own culture, and the culture of the majority society (in other words, Swedish culture).”

Sevil Bremer:

“Who wants to be a girl living in something called a ‘chastity culture’? Who can identify themselves with such a category? The result is that you make a person into an object, in a way which could easily be perceived as an insult.”

### ***Not always possible to work with parents***

Monica Brendler-Lindqvist:

“When we work with girls it is important to be able to work with all the family around her, if that is what the girl wants. We understand that that is the ideal situation: it is not always possible or practicable to work with the parents in every case, but from our point of view it is desirable if we are to be able to contribute to bringing about change. That being said, it must not be at the girl’s expense; there are families where the girl’s life is in real danger, and all avenues for dialogue have been exhausted. In such cases, we have to leave that strategy aside. It is a fact, and one that it’s important to understand, that therapeutic conversation has its limitations. But, where it is possible, we work together with the family, or other people in the extended family who the girl chooses. It’s also quite a common occurrence that the girls want us to work with their boyfriends.”

### **Language that is close to the family**

Monica Brendler-Lindqvist:

“When we work with girls from other cultures, the girls have cross-cultural ways of thinking and acting. We also know that every society, every culture and every family has its own way of thinking and acting. The members of the group in question use certain words and concepts which have a certain meaning in that specific culture, family or context. For us as therapists it is important to use a language which is close to the girl and her family; investigating the concepts which are the framework that the family lives in, and talking about the meaning and implication of the different words the family members use, is the most important task of the treatment.”

### **A cross-cultural approach**

Monica Brendler-Lindqvist:

“We have chosen to adopt a cross-cultural approach in our work. We are two psychotherapists, one of us Turkish and the other Swedish, and we have developed ideas and working methods which use our cultural experience in psychotherapeutical contexts.”

Monica Brendler-Lindqvist:

“Since together we represent both the majority and the minority culture, we are a multicultural team where our perceptions and preconceptions of each other’s cultures, and myths relating to our own respective culture, can be made visible. This enables us to show the girl and her family a model for collaboration and dialogue and at the same time give them the possibility to take a critical look at themselves and each other, and the values that govern our lives.”

Monica Brendler-Lindqvist:

“Our dialogue has been seasoned with both Eastern and Western thinking, as well as containing elements from various scientific disciplines such as anthropology, philosophy, linguistics, sociology and psychology. After several years of practising this cross-cultural approach when treating people, we have experience of how previous traumas, the migration process, refugee crises, living in exile, asymmetrical acculturation, encounters with racism, post-traumatic family dynamics and marginalisation affect girls and their families/extended family.”

### **Bakhtin as a source of inspiration**

Monica Brendler-Lindqvist:

“One thinker who has inspired us in our psychotherapeutical work, and who himself comes from the world of literary theory, is the Russian philologist Michail Bakhtin, one of the foremost interpreters of Fyodor Dostoyevsky. According to Bakhtin, language is always dependent on its context; the context gives the words their meaning.”

Monica Brendler-Lindqvist:

“In the language of dialogue the world is open, it is not finished, and one never reaches a definitive answer or unanimity. In a dialogue it is possible to produce completely new and previously unforeseen alternatives and perspectives. In dialogic conversation language is constructed between the speaker and the listener.”

### **The aim is not to find a winner**

Monica Brendler-Lindqvist:

“This is something we can translate to our psychotherapeutical work. In psychotherapeutical conversations, the aim is not primarily to find one voice, the right voice; the aim is not to find a winner or any absolute solutions: instead, the aim is to open up new perspectives, give expression to opposing standpoints, and discuss what has not yet been said, thus producing new stories that are open to different alternatives. One and the same word may contain more than one voice.”

Monica Brendler-Lindqvist:

“That is how we work with the girls’ inner voices when providing individual therapy, and with the voices of members of the girls’ families in family therapy.”

### ***Opportunities and Problems when working with boyfriends, family and extended family***

Monica Brendler-Lindqvist:

“We have had about twenty girls in psychotherapy at our Girls’ Clinic during the two years it has been open. What we’re looking at here is long-term treatment of traumatised girls. We have had contact with a much larger number of girls via our website, with girls writing e-mails to us.”

Monica Brendler-Lindqvist:

“The girls have taught us a lot. They write to us anonymously, and talk very openly about their feelings and thoughts, and after long periods of e-mail contact, where we really are extremely careful in what we say and how, we are usually able to help them move forward. We have had contact with girls from all corners of the world, and every religious belief.”

Monica Brendler-Lindqvist:

“But back to our work here at Save the Children Sweden: we have worked individually with all the girls who have received treatment, but in different phases of the treatment we have, where the girl has requested and wanted it, asked different people from her network to come in. This might be boyfriends, sisters, mothers, and even, very occasionally, both parents. It is this aspect of our work that we want to talk about today.”

### **Annie has left home**

Sevil Bremer:

“I have been meeting a girl who we can call Annie. Annie is the youngest of seven children; she comes from North Africa and is a Christian. She was born in Sweden, and is a little under eighteen years old. I had a phone-call one day from a social worker, we can call her Karin. It was in December, two years ago. Karin told me that she had come into contact with a girl who had left home. She had met the girl, and found her a place with a care family. The girl has now been living there for five months. The reason she left her home was that she had

been mistreated by both her father and her mother, and so she was immediately given a place with a care family. Having spoken to Annie, Karin thought that she needed to see a psychologist, so she phoned me to see if I could take her on. I answered what I always answer: 'Come together, and we'll see'."

### **Opposed to marriage**

Sevil Bremer:

"So they came to see me for the first time. Annie was unsure if she wanted to come and talk to me, but after our first meeting she said, 'Yes, I think I would like to come and see you.' So we followed our usual procedure, which is that we arrange to meet three times to talk things through, and after that we decide if we are to go on to what can be called psychotherapy proper."

Sevil Bremer:

"Annie started to tell me her background, about her childhood and about her relationship with her parents. She said that she had always had a good relationship with them - 'but in the last few years they have changed in how they are towards me', she said. They have become much stricter, they keep a close control over her at home, and her father has decided that she is to marry one of her cousins. Annie is against this, and it is this conflict that led to him assaulting her."

### **Misses her parents**

Sevil Bremer:

"This is how Annie described leaving home, in her own words: 'One morning after I'd been beaten I just took my bag and my things and left.' Five months have now passed since she walked out, since she saw her mother and her friends - any of her friends, because at present she is living under a protected identity in a safe house, so she cannot phone her friends for a chat. Annie told me that she felt very lonely. She missed her parents, and wondered why they had treated her in the way they had. On the one hand she is angry, and on the other hand she misses her family and is loyal towards them. When she said, 'Actually I'd really like to see my parents again', I said, very cautiously, 'There may be a possibility that you can meet them here, if you want to.' I said this with the idea of planting a seed, and then leaving it to grow, so that was all I said."

### **'Do you really think it's possible?'**

Sevil Bremer:

"Annie's first reaction to my suggestion was, 'No, it's not possible.' The next time we met, she came to me and said: 'Do you really think it's possible for me to talk to my parents?', but then she said that she didn't think it was feasible. This was repeated over the next few times we met, until finally one day she said, 'Now I'm pretty sure I want to, do you think it's possible?' I then told her about how Monica and I work together. She then said: 'This doesn't mean that I move back home again, does it?' 'No, not at all', I replied. I wanted her to think it through for herself."

Sevil Bremer:

“When she was absolutely sure that she wanted to go through with it, I got in touch with Monica and let her know that I had another case for us to work together on, as we have done before.”

### **The phone ringing in their home**

Monica Brendler-Lindqvist:

“It was my job to phone this girl’s parents and ask them if they were prepared to come here and talk to us. I thought to myself: now the phone’s ringing in their home, the home from which their daughter has been missing for several months. How are they going to react to my phone call? Will they be angry, will they be pleased? What is going to happen?”

Monica Brendler-Lindqvist:

“I told them that I work for Save the Children Sweden, and that a colleague of mine had been meeting with their daughter. The mother was very happy; she wanted to come over right away, she thought the girl was sitting next to me. I explained that first I and my colleague wanted to meet her and the girl’s father myself, that we had decided we would take things very gradually, in the aim of avoiding any setbacks.”

Monica Brendler-Lindqvist:

“When the parents came, Sevil and I met them together. We listened to them, we heard their story too. This was a family who had lived in very simple circumstances in their country of origin. They came to Sweden twenty years ago, and were well settled both socially and financially. In many ways they were people to be admired. We noted that there were differences between the parents: the mother came from a ‘better’ family than the father, and it was the mother’s family that had decided the girl should marry a cousin.”

### **‘What did they say?’**

Sevil Bremer:

“During our conversation with the parents we also talked about bringing up children, and what they thought a nice girl should be like, and we talked about what had happened. We had also agreed that what we said in our conversation would remain between us. Meanwhile I was continuing to see Annie. We do not tell the parents what we say in these meetings.”

Sevil Bremer:

“The first thing that happened when I met Annie after we had met her parents was that Annie asked, ‘What did they say?’ We had decided that if the parents wanted to pass on a greeting to Annie via me, they could, and Annie’s mother said that she wanted to say to Annie that she was very, very sorry. When I passed on her mother’s message to Annie, Annie’s first reaction was to explode with anger: ‘Is that all she can say?’ But then she started to ask questions, saying, ‘Did she really mean it?’ I said I thought she should ask her parents that question when she met them. She also gave me a question to put to her parents the next time I met them. I became a kind of messenger. After we had met the parents three times, the time came for all of us to meet and talk.”



### **Everyone was there**

Monica Brendler-Lindqvist:

“We decided on two rules for the meeting: firstly, that everyone must be allowed to speak without interruption; and secondly, that no-one would leave the room - we would have a conversation for the full hour we had agreed on. The parents came, and then the girl came, we had her come in from a different direction. We had a conversation which was relatively calm and restrained. At the end, we agreed that we would all meet again for a further conversation.”

Sevil Bremer:

“That went well, it wasn’t bad at all’, Monica and I thought afterwards. We had decided that the social worker would wait outside, and when the conversation with the parents was finished Annie and I would talk through what had been said. I went into the room where Annie was waiting, and Annie was really upset. She started crying her eyes out, I felt a bit at a loss and asked her, ‘what is it, what are you thinking?’ Annie told me she was really angry: ‘didn’t you see how terrible it was? My Mum didn’t even say hello to me, she didn’t hug me or say, How are you my little girl? or anything.’ They hadn’t seen each other for nine months. Annie was deeply offended. We talked about this for a long time.”

### **The mother was furious**

Monica Brendler-Lindqvist:

“When I went into my office there was a phone call for me. It was the mother, and she was furious. She said to me: ‘I haven’t seen my daughter for nine months, and she didn’t even come and hug me.’ She said she would not come to any more meetings, and would never again recognise Annie as her daughter.”

Sevil Bremer:

“Annie did not want to have anything to do with her parents either. And Monica and I wondered, what have we done? The best way we know of solving conflicts is to talk, so I asked Annie if there was anything in what had been said that she was disappointed with. She couldn’t think of anything. What she mostly felt offended by was the non-verbal part. We had decided that we would meet the parents again two months later; Annie would not be involved in that conversation.”

### **Write a letter? The stupidest idea**

Monica Brendler-Lindqvist:

“What happened was that the mother kept ringing me, and I talked to her over the phone. On one occasion I talked to the father as well. He was angry, too. I said to him, ‘What I think you should do is, take the things you’re saying to me, and put them in a letter to Annie.’ That just made him even angrier; it was the stupidest idea he’d ever heard in all his life. Should a father have to write a letter to his own daughter?”

### **A big girl now**

Sevil Bremer:

“I continued my individual meetings with Annie. I did the same as Monica had recommended to the father, and suggested to Annie that she could write to her parents about her feelings. She did: she wrote a

long letter, explaining how she felt towards her parents. A couple of days later the mother phoned. Monica wasn't in the office, so I answered the call. The mother was absolutely furious; she threatened to report me to the police, for taking her daughter away. I replied, 'It's not me who's taken your daughter away. She has gone of her own accord, she's a big girl now. And how should I be able to persuade her to go back to her family when not even you, who are her mother, is able to?' I was pretty angry myself at that moment. But the mother listened, this became a turning-point. She asked me, 'Well, what should I do then?' I answered, 'Well, I know that your daughter has written you a letter. Aren't you going to answer it? You've said so much to me, so why not write her a letter? Because it's not me who needs to know what you think, it's Annie.'"

Sevil Bremer:

"She thought that was a good idea. A couple of days later the letter arrived at Save the Children Sweden. I phoned Annie, and she came over and read the letter from her mother. This time she cried for happiness, she was so happy. She said: 'Do you know what my mother has written? She says, My daughter, I know that you are a big girl now, and you are responsible for your own life.' And she had written about her own feelings, and said that she respected Annie."

Sevil Bremer:

"This was the beginning of communication between mother and daughter, the beginning of a very long process."

Monica Brendler-Lindqvist:

"One important step I found out about was that the mother and the family have broken off contact with the uncle who had been making so many demands. The mother has taken sides with her daughter."

Sevil Bremer:

"This was an example of us working with the girl, the girl's family, but also the 'system'."

### ***KA-MER's work with the 'system'***

Nebahat Akkoc:

"To begin with, I want to emphasise that we are not at all obliged to get in touch with the family when the girl is under the age of majority. Whether the woman comes to us because she has been threatened or has actually been assaulted, we do not contact her family if she does not want us to. With regard to our honour killings project, we hope to be able to solve the problem by means of the woman keeping in touch with her family. Once the woman has got over the initial panic after coming to us, we talk in detail about what we can do together and how. The way we work in the honour killings department is different from the rest of our work. It's important that we start by making clear what the absolutely most important thing is: we at KA-MER take on the responsibility. Naime mentioned the problem that people often don't

have ID, and that means they can't even go out on the street. So of course we need the help of a lawyer, or a legal expert, because obviously, at any moment a woman might want or need to move to another town in Turkey."

### **The woman herself is in command**

Nebahat Akkoc:

"Even if a woman wants to continue living in her native region, we always ask how she wants to live. Our experience clearly shows that most women would prefer to stay in their home area; they do not want to flee, although if there is no other option they are prepared to move. If there's going to be a meeting with her family, it's the woman herself who's in command and makes the decisions. My experiences have shown that women think for a while about their past, and then say something like 'Yes, you can contact my uncle, he likes me'."

### **What does the family structure look like?**

Nebahat Akkoc:

"But before you can arrange this kind of contact, you have to have long conversations to find out what this particular family's structure looks like, how it is constructed. Here, too, the woman is in command; we as a women's organisation have certain criteria, and the rest, we learn from the women. It is the woman who makes the decisions, and we make our criteria and resources available to the women to help her make those decisions. When we are preparing to meet a woman's family we have to think through how we are dressed, and where we will sit once the family has gathered. These things are enormously important. What I personally do is move into the middle of the family after a while."

### **Aishe was condemned to death**

Nebahat Akkoc:

"This story is Aishe's story. It was a cold winter's day, and Aishe was all but barefoot, she had nothing but a pair of plastic sandals on her feet as she walked five miles in the snow from one village to the next. She had been told that the family council had decided that she was to be murdered, and the sentence was to be carried out that evening. She found out from a woman who broke the family rules to tell her because she could not bear what was to happen. Jülide was in Diyarbakir, and we were in a meeting when the phone rang. It was a man, who said: 'There's a woman here who's been sentenced to death by the family council.' He wanted us to meet the family council. We gave them a time for after the end of the meeting. When we met I could tell which man it was who wanted to save her, but in order not to be cast off by the family he wanted us to mediate, he did not want to do it himself."

### **The meeting with the family council**

Nebahat Akkoc:

"The chairman of the family council came from Izmir to meet us. The chairman of the family council is not necessarily the oldest man, and this man was fairly young, and fairly well-off. He was furious, and said, 'She will die sooner or later', and 'Do you know, she had a man with her when she ran away'. After an hour of talking we managed to persuade him to do the following: we said: 'Let us talk to the woman,

we can question her and we promise we'll tell you what she says.' He wrote down two questions for us to ask her. 'This was a method that would enable us to see the woman, which the chairman of the family council would not otherwise have let us do. The man who'd phoned us said he'd find out where the woman was and then phone us that evening.'

### **Do we belong to the same culture?**

Nebahat Akkoc:

"Towards evening we received a phone call and set off. There were five of us in all. The address we'd been given was to her aunt's house. They met us in the doorway, and she ran out to greet us. She had been freezing cold, and was half-naked. We thought that she was not safe there, but should be moved immediately. We also told her what we were going to do to help her."

Nebahat Akkoc:

"Her friends did not tell us the name of the house she was going to; instead, they gave us the name of a shop, and said that when we came to see her, we were to park our car outside the shop, leaving the headlights on, and a boy would come and check the registration number and then we were to drive after him. That's exactly what happened. The boy was her brother. We were shown up to a flat. We couldn't see the woman - there was an old imam in the flat, with his wife and children. He needed to talk to us to see if we were from the same culture. This was in Diyarbakir, and Jülide, who is from Istanbul, had not come with us."

### **A very beautiful woman**

Nebahat Akkoc:

"We were pretty reserved towards each other, asking questions. But after a while we realised that we trusted each other, and eventually he said, 'Call her in', and at last we were able to meet her properly. She was slim and delicate, a very beautiful woman. She had been given away in marriage at the age of ten, and now she was twenty-five. She had given birth to five children, two of which had died, which must have been because she was too young when she gave birth to them. We said: 'Actually we came to ask you questions, but we've forgotten what we wanted to ask. We're not going to question you, we're going to protect you.' We didn't ask her that much about the past; instead she told us about what had happened that day. She had found out that she was to be murdered on just that day, that was why she had run away. We asked, 'Is it possible? Would they be able to do such a thing?'"

"I saw them kill my sister-in-law a year or two ago", she answered."

### **Mysterious telephone calls**

Nebahat Akkoc:

"She told us that three years before, her sister-in-law was to be strangled to death, in front of the family. She fought against the murderers, so they shot her in the head instead."

"We also found out why the threats against Aishe had started. The family had been receiving mysterious telephone calls; when she answered, there was somebody there, but when anyone else in the family answered there was nobody on the line. The man who was

ringing was a cousin of her husband. He threatened her, saying: 'If you don't sleep with me I'll make sure you get killed, just like your sister-in-law'. And when she refused he started spreading rumours about her. She was going to be killed for nothing!"

### **Overtured the decision**

Nebahat Akkoc:

"The next day we told the chairman of the family council what we had learned. A few days later we heard that the family council was divided, and we assumed it was because of what we had told them. But we were only women, all the same, so they sent five men to see her to find out if it really was true. They overturned the decision to kill her. Aishe is still living in the flat her aunt helped her find. Then other problems turned up: there was a blood-feud and we were forced to get involved in that as well. The imam became a friend of KA-MER. During the negotiations he came to visit us a few times. The language we used with him was, 'The life that God gives; only God may take away.' People do not have the right to take another person's life. That was the basis from which our friendship developed, and I think that if another such situation turned up he would help us."

## ***Questions and exchange of ideas on the subjects raised***

During the three days of seminars, audiences and workshop participants were able to ask questions and talk to KA-MER. As well as direct questions, this also provided a forum for exchanging ideas with KA-MER, Aytekin Sir and Zeynap Oral. The conversations generally followed two main themes: firstly, the 'direct' work of supporting girls, women and their families. This subject area included the question of definitions, and the analyses which form the basis for the practical work of supporting the girls or women. The second thematic area concerned Swedish and Turkish society - similarities and differences, and development tendencies and how people view them. Naturally, considerations of all these aspects were interwoven; the order in which they are described below is an attempt to find a structure.

### ***How does violence arise and how can it be counteracted?***

Nebahat Akkoc, KA-MER:

"Everyone in south-eastern Turkey has lived with violence to some degree. When I decided to join the organisation I was working for a human rights group. I was arrested for some absurd reason, and kept in prison for twelve days. I was tortured. While I was in prison I kept asking myself, what is this violence people are subjected to, and what effect does violence have on people? These torturers from the USA who are now in Iraq, they say, 'We're only obeying orders', but I don't think people would do that, even if they were given orders, if there wasn't a violent tendency within people. They find the right kind of people to do those things, quite simply. So I asked myself, 'Where does this capacity to use violence come from?', and I came to the conclusion that it comes from the family; if a child does not experience torture as an everyday thing, then he or she will not practise violence when they're adults. That was one of the starting points for our work."

### ***Language and Trust***

Nebahat Akkoc:

"The kind of language we use when talking to people is decisive in determining whether or not the women and their families feel trust towards KA-MER. And this linguistic and cultural sensitivity is our best guarantee for safety in our work."

Nebahat Akkoc:

"There are dangers associated with our work. We have asked ourselves what it is that protects us, and the answer is: our working method. We have never pushed for a solution; instead, the woman herself reaches

the decision. What we aim to do is make it possible for a process to occur which raises consciousness. We do the same thing with families; we don't say: 'This is your body, you can do what you like with it.' Why not? - Because people trust us. A family must be able to trust the decisions that are taken when we are present in dialogue or at meetings of the family council. So we must speak in a way they can accept. What happens if you judge a woman? What happens if you overturn that verdict? These are questions that we put to the family and then discuss with them. We seek to inform."

Sevil Bremer, Save the Children Sweden:

"We do the same at Save the Children Sweden. I don't go to the families we are in contact with and say, 'Hello, I've come to see you because you're committing honour-related violence'; and when you're working as a social worker you have to use a different kind of language again, because there are rules to follow when you're acting on behalf of a public authority."

**"I don't go to the families we are in contact with and say, 'Hello, I've come to see you because you're committing honour-related violence'."**

One of the participants in a group discussion commented on the talk on 'Annie' given at the Save the Children Sweden workshop: "It was interesting to hear Sevil talk about what tone to use. It gave me food for thought, because I lose my temper very easily. When you have a family yourself, you can easily find yourself telling a girl who is being given a rough time by her family to get out of there."

Seyran Duran, Chairwoman of the Kurdish Women's Association of Sweden:

"Like KA-MER said: Don't ask questions. We don't ask questions, our job is just to give guidance. The girl must decide for herself. You can help more if you speak their language, literally speaking - I myself am Kurdish. I had a Kurdish girl staying with me who had run away from her family. I phoned her mother; the girl did not want to talk to her family, so I had to talk. And when the mother heard that I could speak Kurdish that calmed her, and in the end we were able to resolve the conflict. I would be glad if you could say a little more about this question of language use: you say that you've stopped using the word 'help' and replaced it with 'support'?"

Nebahat Akkoc:

"It's so easy, in the situation the women find themselves in, to see 'needing help' as their identity. It is the woman herself who has to know what she wants, and then we can provide her with support."

Nebahat Akkoc:

"Whether the women come to us alone, or with a policeman or lawyer, it's noticeable as soon as they set foot inside the door: Fear is walking into the room. Sometimes the women don't know us, they don't know who we are or if they can trust us. The first priority is to make sure the

woman can feel safe and secure; it's when that has been achieved that she can tell us her story. There is no beginning and no end to the story. Who did it? Why has she run away? Who is threatening her? What she says is the true version. We don't try to correct her and we believe what she says. If she wants to disappear we send her to another town. Often they are not married in accordance with civil law, and so they have no ID documents. They can't take their children with them."

Nebahat Akkoc:

"A woman came to us, she had previously gone to the regional civil administration, and they had placed her in a home in another town. However, she felt discriminated against there because of where she came from, so she came back. Now she wanted help to find a new safe house, but not in a different town. This woman's husband had been murdered by the woman's uncle, there was a blood-feud. The woman's sister-in-law wanted to kill the uncle, the brother-in-law wanted to kill the woman, or whatever it was; there was a vendetta, quite simply. The brother-in-law took the woman's children and her pension, he assaulted her badly and threw her out. It was at this stage that she first went to the regional civil administration. The woman wants her house back, and her widow's pension. We have rented a flat for her, and paid the advance; the regional civil administration will have to look after the rest. Although she doesn't have her children with her she is happy and looking to the future. One nasty thing, though, is that the children were repeatedly told that she was bad, and now the boys want to murder their mother. There might be a family council. In that case, we'll have to see if we can mobilise some political party or 'elder'."

Group participant:

"I wonder, do you only work with Kurdish women?"

Naime Kardas:

"Most of them are Kurdish, but we also have Armenians, Christians, Turks. All women are welcome and can receive support from us. We have women with us who speak all the languages of the region."

Mehtap Kizilkan:

"When we started up KA-MER one suggestion was for it to be a Kurdish organisation, but we didn't want that - just as we won't agree to using different names or words for women."

Group participant:

"Syrians and Kurds - am I right that there's not much difference?"

Mehtap Kizilkan:

"Let me answer you like this: at our centre in Mardin there are cultural differences compared to our centre in Diyarbakir, even though the two are so close. It's a different mix of Arabs, Assyrians and Kurds, and we noticed that we needed local activists, we needed people from that particular area to understand the specific situation there."

Naime Kardas:

"Although we have the same culture, we have different customs."



Seyran Duran:

“Oh yes, there can be great differences. We need to collaborate with each other. Use us (the Kurdish Women’s Association) as a resource. This mother I told you about could accept her daughter’s decision because she had support from me - another Kurd. The girl is now living in Stockholm, with a place of her own and a boyfriend.”

**“When you have a family yourself, you  
can easily find yourself telling a girl who  
is being given a rough time by her family  
to get out of there”**

### ***More About Honour Killings***

In her lecture, Nebahat had already touched on honour killings as a phenomenon; she pointed out that ultimately, these acts were not always about a girl’s chastity, but were above all an expression of men’s will to continue oppressing women into a subordinate position. Obedience - whatever the bone of contention. Other aspects of honour killings, KA-MER’s attitude towards family councils and other questions were discussed in groups and plenary discussions.

Question from the auditorium:

“What happens if the family concludes that death is the right punishment?”

Nebahat Akkoc:

“Then we break off the dialogue with the family. We are there on the girl’s account. If the family shows that their intention is to kill the girl, then there is no reason to continue the conversations.”

**“I have never met anyone who has been glad that a  
woman from the family is to be killed –  
they are only doing it to reduce the pressure  
from the community around them”**

Nebahat Akkoc:

“With regard to honour killings we have made an important observation, and that is the oppression exercised by the surrounding community on the families in question. In those cases where we have reached a solution, it is where we have been able to set something in motion among people who are important through their ability to give the family support against the pressure from the community. The community can boycott a family, make it impossible for the children to go to school, and so on. I have never met anyone who has been glad that a woman from the family is to be killed - they are only doing it to reduce the pressure from the community around them.”

Question from the auditorium:

“My question is about the link between honour killings and a cultural identity. If I’ve understood Aytekin and Nebahat correctly, they’re saying that honour killings to a large extent are culturally influenced behaviour. What do you think: does the intensity of honour killings among Kurds have anything to do with the Kurds’ political situation? Are there any other social or economic factors?”

Nebahat Akkoc:

“This question also concerns another struggle... Honour killings are sometimes also called traditional killings. We believe that this expression is used with a purpose, which is to defend honour killings by portraying them as part of Kurdish culture. We have an archive of newspaper articles which prove that this is the case.”

Nebahat Akkoc:

“We can see certain elements in our culture. Once when I was angry, I said to a journalist something like, ‘ninety-five per cent of honour killings are committed by people from here (south-eastern Turkey), and the other five per cent are committed by people who’ve moved away from here.’ But anyway, what is the cause? It’s politics. In other parts of Turkey they talk about the family, in our region they talk about the tribe, the clan. What we’re looking at is feudalism. And it’s been a conscious choice - I mean, how is it possible to achieve cultural change if people do not have work, if they do not have a language? How?”

Nebahat Akkoc:

“If there wasn’t such a big difference between the areas it would quite simply be called femicide, the murder of women. But these killings have a character all of their own. And they’re well planned, too, in that the family council has to be convened to take the decision. They’re extremely well planned.”

## ***Home Visits - Working With Families***

The representatives of KA-MER explained that they quite often meet the families of the women who turn to them.

Question from the auditorium:

“How do you get the families to come?”

Nebahat Akkoc:

“We go to them! Deciding who is to be involved in the conversations depends on the structure of the family. Sometimes it’s just the mother and father, and brothers and sisters. Sometimes there’s grandfather and grandmother, aunts and uncles. The oldest man is always present. We drive over to the house. We’re very careful not to be showing any leg when we’re on this kind of visit. Part of our method is knowing how to behave in the different situations our work involves. If we do things well, we are allowed to come again.”

Question from the auditorium:

“Do you take people with you who the family has respect for - politicians, the police and so on?”

Nebahat Akkoc:

“You have to know how the particular family functions to be able to know who you can ask to take part. You might ask a person’s employer, for example. It’s a question that requires courage, and a careful analysis.”

Nebahat Akkoc:

“For example, should we have a representative from a human rights organisation with us? Everyone claims that they are best at representing human rights, but ultimately it’s always the woman who is able to convince the family. The woman knows exactly who the right people are to have at the meeting.”

### **Family work and safe accommodation**

After a while, girls living in safe accommodation in Sweden generally start longing to see their families, but it might be that moving back home would entail risks, if the family situation has not been improved. The following question deals with this issue.

Question from the auditorium:

“I work as a social worker in a youth team. We have girls who have told us that they have suffered oppression at home, and that they have been living for a while in a safe house. These girls are aged sixteen to seventeen, and now they want to move back home. We don’t know what we should do.”

Nebahat Akkoc:

“When we work with this kind of girl we try to adopt a long-term perspective, by having contact with the women in the family. We are careful with regard to the kind of language we use; we don’t say to the girl, ‘It’s your body’, for example. We try to make the women strong, make them aware, by using a technique that is appropriate for them. We have developed a method, and produced a book about it. Our method is based on ideas relating to the woman’s role, the father’s role, the mother’s role, the role of brothers and sisters.”

Nebahat Akkoc:

“The work you do while the girl is in the safe accommodation is very important. You have to ask yourselves, what is meant by ‘treating the family’? You have to do a specific analysis for every family. Do they know anything about human rights? What does this family look like? Carry out a culture analysis. We can give you the methods we use.”

## **Cross-Cultural Work**

The discussion on the importance of cultural understanding was extended in one of the groups to a consideration of the advantages of working from a cross-cultural perspective.

Group participant:

“When you visited a family council to try and defend a woman, you said that you decided not to take Jülide with you (Jülide Aral, KA-MER’s non-Kurdish psychologist, from Istanbul). What is your thinking here - Jülide was not present at the first meeting, but after that she did take part in the meetings?”

Jülide Aral:

“Nebahat talked earlier about the crucial importance of the first meeting with the family council and the elders. It’s at this meeting that they look to see if we are of the same culture as them, to see if we can understand each other. For that reason it’s important that I am not present at the first meeting. However, many of the people who come to us have been to group sessions at KA-MER, they know us; they know that we are not just two people from Istanbul who think we know everything.”

Sevil Bremer:

“I have the same experience. They test me at the first meeting, to see if I understand their culture. If that goes well, then I can go on with my work. I realise that the family always wonders what kind of person it is who’s coming, they wonder what I want and what my aims are. Once we’ve passed that stage there’s no problem.”

Nebahat Akkoc:

“In a meeting we had with the Regional Governor, the National Police Commissioner and the woman I talked about earlier, it was important for us to show our strength. At meetings like that it’s good for Jülide to be present, because she’s tough. These high-up people trust her more than they trust me - I’m a Kurd and therefore a potential criminal in their eyes. If it’s just me there with them, they’ll say something like, ‘What do you mean, family problems? It’s probably just a village guard you want to get rid of.’ If it was just me, they’d run a check first, to see if I’d ever been convicted of any crime.”

Sevil Bremer:

“That’s why I find it good to work with Monica: she’s Swedish, I’m foreign, so we make a good team together.”

## ***Society, the Future - and what we can do about it***

### **Turkey and Sweden: Similarities and Differences**

The really major differences are of course to do with people’s conditions of life: there is the poverty and illiteracy of rural Turkey, compared to the well-organised and literate society of Sweden. On this point there are no questions to be asked - it is all too obvious. The differences which were mentioned on several occasions were to do with how the social services work in the two countries, and the extent to which ‘official’ society gets involved. A further difference is that KA-MER works in its own cultural environment, while we in Sweden work with problems among immigrant groups with whom ethnic Swedes do not have generations of familiarity.

Question from the auditorium:

“Your work situation is different from ours; you are in the midst of the culture you’re working with. Here in Sweden, we have to do a safety analysis. We have to ask if we can trust what is being said in the room. When a young girl comes to the social services for help, she is often afraid that she is going to be killed, afraid there will be reprisals. The social services have to contact the family if the girl is under eighteen years of age. And even if the social services can give her protection for a time, after a while the girl starts missing her family. Swedish society can only offer the girl contact with professionals.”

A Swedish social worker:

“Here, we are obliged to inform the parents if a girl contacts us. Which is like saying that the parents even have the right to kill their child.”

Mehtap Kizilkan:

“We don’t see it as our duty to work with families as such. A woman who comes to us, that’s the person we work with. We may then judge it to be best to involve the family. We don’t have an easy collaboration with the social services, because the majority of women and families refuse to use them. Our first priority is to preserve life, health comes after. Sometimes we report the situation to the police as a crime.”

Member of staff at a safe house:

“We only do what the girl herself wants us to. All of us at the safe house where I work have previously worked in the social services, and our experience is that their usual methods don’t work. Now, we want to find new ways of working with these girls.”

## **Integration**

Nebahat Akkoc had the following to say at one point:

“The issues we are working with are very closely related to the problem of integration. We have worked in the Netherlands, and talked to families who have moved there. They say that they are afraid because everyone wants them to be like you Westerners.”

When Aytakin Sir, suicidologist from Dicle, was asked, “What is the reason for the increase in suicides?” he answered:

“There has been an increase in the problem of violence against women - there are very serious problems in south-eastern Turkey. There has been large-scale migration from the countryside to the towns. We have had families who have been trying to adapt to urban life, and girls wanting to live like other girls their age. It’s the same analysis as when problems occur in Sweden: it’s a culture clash.”

## **The future and social responsibility**

Certain questions from the Swedish audience clearly reflected the fact that they come from a country where the welfare state is a central aspect of community life, where people generally assume it to be the responsibility of the state to ensure that all citizens embrace more or less the same basic values, with respect for human rights as an obvious foundation. But the response to certain of these questions suggested that there was either some hidden problem in the interpretation, or that this line of thinking is wholly unfamiliar to KA-MER.

Question from the auditorium:

“What do the authorities do to inform and educate families? How can you work preventively to change families’ attitudes and thus prevent the occurrence of murders and the threat of murder?”

Nebahat Akkoc:

“If a girl has had a boyfriend and the family is angry, we support the girl - but we can’t go to the family and say that they must not interfere. We try to use different kinds of language. When we’ve met the family and found a common language we try to gradually introduce the question of human rights. Instead of causing a break in the contact with the family by using feminist slogans, we work with a long-term perspective which can help them to change their attitude.”

**“Women are not tools to us - it’s their lives  
we’re talking about. We try to find the method  
that is best for the individual woman”**

On another occasion Nebahat said, “The question of women’s liberation is seen to be the responsibility of civil society.” And on another occasion, when she was asked how she uses her knowledge to try to influence society, she said: “Women are not tools to us - it’s their lives we’re talking about. We try to find the method that is best for the individual woman.”

KA-MER do however take part in seminars and debates, and are present in the media. They do influence attitudes in society, simply by doing what they do, and talking about it.

Nebahat Akkoc:

“I would like to believe that attitudes in society will improve. Perhaps I’m naive, but that’s what I want to believe. We must emphasise the importance of education at pre-school age. In our nursery schools we make use of alternative teaching methods. We bring the children up without gender differences - they are brought up as individuals first and foremost. That way, their ‘Yeses’ and ‘Nos’ will be clearer. They are our hope, they are the seeds we sow. We might not be here to experience it, but those who come after us will.”

Society is not only represented by politicians and civil servants but also by religious representatives; and what those with power say does, of course, carry weight:

Nebahat Akkoc:

“When a ‘verdict’ is pronounced it always has to be confirmed by someone who is an authority in the community. For this reason, what happens at the mosque is very important. On 8 March the mosques published a little booklet on human rights. For us, that was an immensely important step. We live in a Moslem country. In Jordan there was an imam who took his Koran and went to meet different families to talk about honour killings.”

Zeynep Oral, journalist and author from Istanbul:

“But our prime minister has not said anything. It would really mean something if he did.”

### **Earning a living**

Another important element in the process of change is education: if women can receive vocational training it can help them break free of their old life, by enabling them in the long term to earn their own living, and giving them the chance to get away from their home region for the duration of their training course.

Aytekin Sir:

“It is hard for women to get out of their environment; it’s scarcely possible without moving to another town. If they could earn a living in another town that would be good - it’s when they can’t that they are forced to obey all the rules put in place to control them. There’s another aspect: the man who kills a woman sometimes doesn’t want to do it. It’s degrading for both of them, the woman and the man. If the women were financially independent they wouldn’t have to remain in such an environment.”

In Turkey as in Sweden, it is a matter of giving the women basic skills and knowledge, so that they can act to protect their own rights in society. Tülin Uygur works for the social services in Rinkeby, and is involved in a women’s project called ‘The Olive’.

Tülin Uygur:

“Rinkeby is a very patriarchal district - there is a very high level of acceptance for patriarchal structures. The open centre where I work tries to provide information, to raise the level of knowledge. For example: we use legal experts, we ask them to come in and talk about, for example, how to get divorced in Sweden. They explain the whole procedure, where to go for help, who can give you the best information and advice, what the legal process is like. We do the same kind of thing with regard to children’s rights and parents’ responsibilities, and about domestic violence. We work in a similar way with ‘The Olive’, a project for women who have been subjected to violence. I say ‘women’, but sometimes they’re no more than twenty-two years old, and have a five-year-old child born in Sweden. A woman might come to us because she’s being subjected to the worst kinds of torture at home. In our first conversation with her we notice straight away if she has no basic knowledge about where she can go, what she can do, how she can acquire basic knowledge to help her in life. So sometimes, when we talk about human rights, I feel, ‘Yes, of course, but they also need basic knowledge, how to use a phone, how to fill in a form, who to see for what, basic things you need from start to finish in life.’ That kind of support contains all kinds of things, and that’s how we work at The Olive. And I should add, that when we meet these women there might be teenagers in the family - teenage girls who are being subjected to just as much violence as their mother. In these cases we have to call in the Youth Section to work with the girl, while at the same time easing the mother’s fear that her daughter will run away, or turn into something other than her own daughter. We have to work on two fronts - we have to help the mother to take her own decisions for herself, we have to

help her start to find her own way; and at the same time we have to try to make it easier for her to make the right decisions for her daughter. We do this by working hard to inform and educate, by showing her the possibilities and sharing her fears.”

### **Men and Power**

Attitudes towards the men were also a subject of discussion. This is what was said in one of the groups:

Question from the auditorium:

“What is your attitude towards the men in the family networks?”

Mehtap Kizilkan:

“We are very careful. In their world women are different, they are not respected. We only meet once - not with the aim of changing them, but because we need to talk to them.”

Group participant:

“How do the men view you?”

Mehtap Kizilkan:

“When it’s to do with honour killings it’s not easy. But we are not women who live without men: we have fathers, husbands and so on.”

Group participant (female):

“I have lifted myself up in these situations, ‘been the boss’. It has worked fairly well in our Swedish context.”

Another participant in the same group:

“Do you also help men with preventive work? I can give you an example: a month ago I received a phone call from a young man from an Iranian background. His marriage had been arranged, and now he had beaten his wife. I had no experience of this situation, but I talked to a psychologist who advised me to meet the man five times. We talked about human rights, I gave him books. The woman did not want to live with him, and eventually he accepted this. He has now become an activist. Our psychologist says, ‘If you help one man you have helped ten women’.”

The possibility of getting help from other men to promote gender equality was a subject that came up on several occasions:

Question from the auditorium:

“In Sweden we tend to assume that any imam or leader of an organisation can be a help, but that’s not the case, is it?”

”Nebahat Akkoc:

“We once took part in a television discussion programme together with an imam. He suddenly started going on about how adultery is a sin. We tried to tell him to be quiet, but he kept going on about adultery, and then he said that it’s often no more than gossip, that four people have to see adultery being committed for it to be a serious crime, and if there are not four witnesses the punishment is only ten lashes, only gentle ones, and on and on...”



Nebahat Akkoc:

“Sometimes we have meetings with men in cafés. There is no fixed formula. We have to find our allies where we can.”

Gunda Sandström, who works on Save the Children Sweden’s local project ‘One Life - Two Cultures’ in Umeå, in northern Sweden:

“We meet mothers and daughters regularly, we usually have between thirty and thirty-eight participants. We go through the social aspects - what kind of help is available and where they can go to get it, what responsibilities school has, what parents’ responsibilities are. We sit around a big table, girls and their mothers together. They can suggest themes and activities: they wanted a gynaecologist to come, they wanted to learn how to ride a bicycle, they wanted to discuss films and theatre. We have done all kinds of different things, and given them the opportunity to see other possibilities available to them in society. Save the Children Sweden is not an authority, but we collaborate with the child psychiatry service and the social services.”

Gunda Sandström:

“We have now come to the conclusion that we will not achieve our aims if we don’t also reach out to boys and fathers, so in the autumn we’re starting a project for boys and dads. The boys will be aged between thirteen and twenty/twenty-one. We’ve found ten men interested in running the project - the chairman of the local Somali Association, Turkish and Kurdish men in respected positions, one Arab and one Jew, and four Swedish men who can be said to have fairly high status. Two of the men are doctors. We talked about possible themes when we had a meeting to prepare for the project, and the doctors said that we had to talk to the boys about sex and relationships.”

Gunda Sandström:

“We have had a number of girls who have been assaulted. One of the girls was being harassed by her cousin, and a librarian saw this and reported the incident. At first the girl was very distressed, she wanted us to retract the accusation. Relatives had been to visit the family, and said that she was a bad girl for having reported the assault. I went to the family home a few times. After a few conversations the mother said to me, ‘I’ve learnt that in Sweden, you treat girls differently.’ And she won the girl’s father over, too, and he supported her in the court case.”

**“When an honour killing is committed, there are at least two victims: the woman who is murdered, and the man who carries out the killing”**

Question to KA-MER:

“Have you ever worked with a woman who has a son, where the son is still living with the father and the father might try to use the son as a tool to murder the woman?”

Nebahat Akkoc:

“When an honour killing is committed, there are at least two victims: the woman who is murdered, and the man who carries out the killing. Often, the murder is committed by a minor. It used to be the case that

the longest sentence that could be given to a minor who committed an honour killing was thirty-four months. The law has now been changed, and now they may get up to twenty-four years. Obviously, a sentence that long is nothing to look forward to. What happens now, though, is that they do things differently, so they can get away with it; they make it look like suicide. It's often younger brothers who murder their sisters, and in fact they do love each other. This love is so great that sometimes the girls actually do commit suicide, to protect their younger brother."

**"It's often younger brothers who murder their sisters, and in fact they do love each other. This love is so great that sometimes the girls actually do commit suicide, to protect their younger brother"**

Nebahat Akkoc:

"We have an arts centre in Diyarbakir, and the artists there asked me for a suggestion - they wanted to create a local concept, and asked me if I had any ideas for what they could do. I suggested they do something that reflected the love between the brother who is forced to become a killer and the girl who is to be murdered. We have seen it so many times, and usually the woman knows that she is to be killed by her younger brother, and she feels sorry for him, too. If he doesn't kill her he will be cast out from the family."

Nebahat Akkoc:

"Such rejection can be devastating: he won't be able to get married, he won't be seen as a man, other people won't say hello to him. When a boy in this situation has carried out the murder he may feel relief at first but then, afterwards, he is overcome by anguish and all the other feelings."

Nebahat went on to talk about a specific case, where a brother eventually felt forced by the community to murder the sister he loved:

Nebahat Akkoc:

"Kardishi is sixteen. Her father is an alcoholic, her mother is a person who is utterly dependent on her husband, and will put up with anything. Kardishi's older brother is a nice, intelligent boy. While the father was in prison, it was his duty as the oldest boy to protect the family. Before he left to do his military service, the brother passed on his responsibility to two younger men in the family, explaining that they now had to look after his sister. One of these two men raped the girl, and when the brother came back home it was clear what had happened, because her tummy had started growing. People had started to gossip. For a whole month, he could not go in through the door of the house, he had to climb over the roof-tops. This was a poor family, without a lot of members. Some of the relatives decided that Kardishi should be killed, and her older brother was made to do it. He said to the girl, 'Come on, let's go out for a walk', and put his arm around her."

Nebahat Akkoc:

“I was in Istanbul, and a journalist phoned me and said that a very badly injured woman had been found outside the mosque. I rang my friends and asked them to go to the hospital. Her baby was still alive. The woman had been attacked with a meat-axe, so hard that her bones were smashed. Sacide was there and said that they had not sown her wounds properly. ‘She’s going to die’, she told me. They showed it on TV when the police took the brother away, and he said, ‘Now I can go in through my front door again.’ He had carried out his duty as a man.”

Nebahat Akkoc:

“After Shemse, for the second time the women themselves took care of the burial ceremony. Roughly 1000 people attended the funeral, 250 of whom were men. We received a lot of expressions of support, which gave us something to be glad about amid all the sorrow. We had a lot of contact with the mother to support her in looking after the funeral, because otherwise the girl would have been buried in the graveyard for ‘unknown’ persons. The two men are accusing each other of having raped the girl. I was on a television programme with the two of them. They are going to be DNA-tested. I believed one of them - but then I heard another story, namely that the father had sold the use of his daughter.”

### **The Law**

Listener who works for a County Administration Board:

“What responsibilities do the authorities have? How is the question linked to public health? And what about the role of the police and your collaboration with them? If you find out that a killing is being planned, is that then a matter for the police? Can the EU be of any help to you in all this? Here in Sweden, the County Administration Boards have been instructed by government to work with this area, while in what you’ve told us, I don’t see the authorities doing very much.”

Aytekin Sir:

“The law is undergoing change right now. There is new harmonisation legislation going through. That’s the easiest part of our work - what is much harder is changing how people think. And no, this is not seen as an area of public health work.”

Nebahat Akkoc:

“You asked about our relationship with the police. Mistreatment of women is seen as a problem that concerns civil organisations, volunteer groups and so on. We say to the police, ‘Do you realise that we’re doing your work for you?’ The police come when we call them, but they think they’re doing us and women a huge favour. We can achieve more by getting the social services behind us - for example, on occasions we’ve used cells in the police station as a safe house. We joke about it: we say that we have to be oh so grateful that the police let us into their cells! However, Turkey is in a phase of change, though I don’t know if that’s because of the EU or not.”

Question from the auditorium:

“Do the police not get involved at all with these families?”

Nebahat Akkoc:

“Yes, they can intervene if there is an attempt to commit a crime. But even if we say that we know with 100 per cent certainty that a murder is going to be committed, the police don’t do anything until something has actually happened.”

Question from the auditorium:

“From what Aytekin has said, I understand that it has not been possible to prove that a murder has been committed in the cases you’ve talked about, but that the preliminary inquiries have pointed out that there are indications that it was not suicide. Are the police making any efforts to change the way they work now that there is an awareness of this problem?”

Aytekin Sir:

“Judging from the records, the police carry out their investigations and interrogations in exactly the same way as before, there have been no changes there as far as I can tell. But if, during the preliminary inquiry, the police become suspicious they can ask a psychologist to carry out an investigation. An example: a girl and a boy are together in a room; the girl throws herself out of the window. Is it suicide or murder? A preliminary inquiry is set up. We get to see the letters, and try to understand her personality. We reach one conclusion, the public prosecutor another. In other cases, the matter is not even investigated. Families stick together, everyone says it was suicide, there is no prosecution, and there is no proof.”

Question from the auditorium:

“We had a case in Sweden, of a father who was suspected, and arrested. It wasn’t possible to prove anything, the post-mortem showed nothing, and the father was set free. Now he’s claiming damages!!”

Another questioner:

“Have the laws in Turkey relating to honour killings now been changed?”

Nebahat Akkoc:

“It is no longer possible to plead honour as a mitigating circumstance; and those who plan a killing are now punished as well. There is still the possibility for a person to plead that he has been subjected to an ‘unjustified provocation’ which has led him to commit a crime, though I don’t think that any judge will accept that in the future.”

Aytekin Sir:

“There have been two very important verdicts: one where a murderer was jailed for thirty years. There was the possibility of the sentence being reduced owing to ‘provocation’, but the judge chose to retain the longer sentence. The second case was where the family council that had been involved in the decision to kill a woman was also punished.”

Sevil Bremer:

“So now there is a precedent that those who plan a murder will also be punished. That’s a very good thing.”

Zeynep Oral:

“The law in Turkey is going to be changed. There’s proposed legislation, that hasn’t been passed yet. The women’s organisations worked together to produce a report detailing what changes they would like to see. Two of their suggestions were not taken up in the draft legislation; most importantly, they had wanted the legislation to expressly state that NO MITIGATION would be awarded to those pleading in court that their crime was committed in the name of honour - but no such clause was included in the law. The second proposal which was not accepted was that rape within marriage would be made a crime. However, they did persuade the legislators that virginity testing should be outlawed.”

Aytekin Sir:

“We’ll have to see how the new law works out. I’m afraid that the killings will switch guise, and become ‘suicides’ instead. As things stand today, it’s possible to commit these crimes quite openly, but if it’s made illegal it will become harder to find the culprits. Though at the same time, it will probably deter some people from committing the crime in the first place.”

One of the groups got into a discussion of Swedish policy on refugees and asylum. One participant asked: “We have a girl who risks being deported, and she fears for her life. Can we tell her how to get in touch with you?”

Sevil Bremer:

“Has the girl applied for asylum?”

Group participant:

“She’s just given birth to a baby.”

Nebahat Akkoc:

“Make sure she doesn’t get deported. I think we should fight against a system like that. Here they are, teaching us and the third world about human rights, and then they threaten to deport a girl whose life is at risk. They can’t do a thing like that.”

Group Participant:

“There have been a lot of changes in the rules in Sweden concerning asylum-seekers and so on. They only look at the political system in the country concerned, not at the non-formal aspects. So it’s important that they check what the people who are working with the girl have to say.”

Nebahat Akkoc:

“That’s something that’s always been abused - getting a statement from organisations like ours in the aim of being granted asylum. I received a phone call from a woman living in Izmir, in western Turkey, European Turkey. After an exchange of letters, I told her, ‘I can’t help you, you really aren’t at risk at all.’ So we do have to make sure we really see the difference: there are those who are genuinely under threat, and there are those who try to exploit the system.”

Sevil Bremer:

“Nebahat, you’ve told me that you’ve helped by writing certificates for girls from your area who have sought asylum. We must work together and exchange experiences in order to make sure that nobody exploits the system in an improper way.”

Nebahat Akkoc:

“People have realised now that they can say that if they’re sent back home they’ll be murdered.”

Group Participant:

“It’s very important that we are careful when using our authority, our professionalism, in order to influence decisions.”

### **Arranged marriages and virginity**

Discussion in one of the groups at the Save the Children Sweden workshop:

“A lot of our pupils who come from Turkey start feeling nervous when they’re approaching school-leaving age, because they’re afraid their parents will arrange for them to marry boys in Turkey. If they refuse, there will be problems at home. Before, before I’d read that much about it all, I used to say, ‘No, you shouldn’t get married to someone without love.’ I used to say they should find a boy who’s good for them, not someone who’ll try to control them. But over the last year I’ve changed the way I look at this; I’ve listened more, and I feel in two minds because I know that they’ll end up accepting their family’s customs. I’ve been thinking about how I can help them get themselves a bit more freedom, so they can live a bit more like Swedish women but without trampling on their family’s honour. In other words, how they can live between two cultures.”

Another group participant:

“I would like to say something that’s connected with this. I’ve encountered cases where the girl has said, ‘OK, I agree to this marriage, but then I’m going to get divorced.’ Their reasoning seems to be that by agreeing to the marriage they have agreed to their parents’ wishes, and then they can get out of that situation and start living their own lives. So what I wonder is, how is divorce looked upon in Turkey, for example?”

Sacide Akkoc:

“It’s not viewed favourably. You are in trouble even if you come home after a certain time in the evening, or if you go out after a certain time in the evening. How long your skirt is, how long your hair is, these things matter. I’ve experienced it for myself, seventeen years ago, in a small town called Urfa, in south-eastern Turkey. That’s a place you can call narrow-minded! My divorce could have cost me my life. You come to a family as a bride, and if you want to divorce yourself out of it, you’re dead. Your body is leaving their family. The things I went through...”

KA-MER:

“Our work is aimed at increasing women’s awareness of their rights. When they have found out about their rights and have learnt another

'language' to communicate in, they can work to make sure they are accepted as they are. This is not a magical method, and it doesn't work straight away. For one thing, the woman has to realise that she is an individual, and that what she says counts. She has to learn how to say: 'Me'. I have started to be able to say, 'Me', after many years."

"It would be a help if there was a similar kind of activity in society. A project could begin by teaching women about communication, then go on to women's human and civil rights, educate girls about sexuality, talk about discrimination and violence, both within the family and beyond. They could help women see the cultural conditioning that underlies a lot of domestic violence. We ourselves have run a twelve-week project like this, and the feedback we had was extremely positive."

Azam Qarai, from 'Women's Network':

"I've been thinking about the question you asked; I think one should turn it around. You said a girl should belong to her family's culture and to Swedish culture. We could however also say that we are talking about women, about women's culture. KA-MER has never heard of Women's Network, and up until now we have known nothing about KA-MER, but we are doing the same kind of work. There are women all over the world working for their rights. At the same time, if you meet a girl who is going to be given away in an arranged marriage, you have to remind yourself that she is the one who has to take the decision, she has to have that maturity. What is needed is to make her aware, to teach her about her role as a woman, what her rights are, raise her consciousness of patriarchal structures. If she decides to break off contact with her family, that's an enormous price to pay, breaking off with all her relations. It could cost her her life. In that kind of situation you can't come from the white middle class and simply say, 'Do it'. Instead, you have to try to help her become aware, you have to encourage, support. In time, she will reach her own decision. We cannot give her the recipe and say: this is what to do."

Group participant:

"No, because she's the one who has to take the consequences."

First group participant:

"But maybe you can tread on her toes a little bit, to help make her aware...?"

Azam Qarai:

"You can talk about what it might be like, what getting married entails, the wedding night, what he will be like."

Sacide Akkoc:

"What happened to me when I was young is that I was given in marriage without knowing the man, I knew nothing about him. And it may sound strange, but I'd heard so much strange talk about the wedding night - 'Things'll start coming out of your mouth', things like that."

Group participant:

"These girls go round in a circle. It's a long process: they are married, they get divorced. You can't say after one conversation that you know what it will be like."

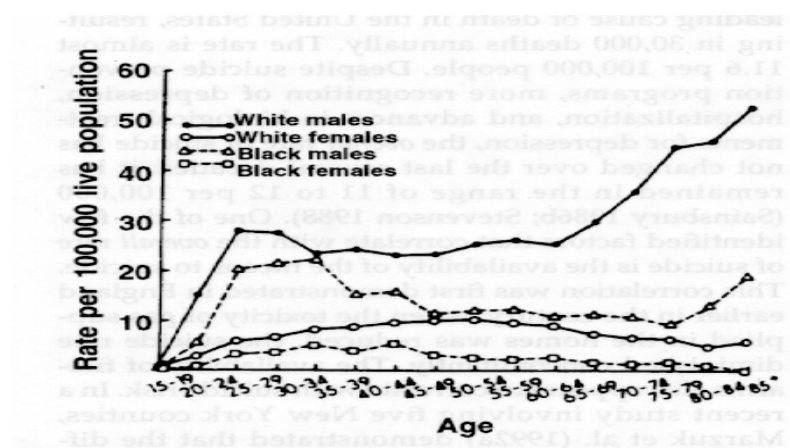


# Death in Honour's Name - Connections between honour killings and suicide

(Summary of a lecture given on 17 May at Save the Children Sweden's offices)

Aytekin Sir is Senior Lecturer in Psychiatry at the University of Dicle in Diyarbakir. He has studied the occurrence of suicide in the district in which the university is situated, and compared the figures with other regions in Turkey and the rest of the world.

Aytekin Sir began by explaining what the suicide figures look like for the world as a whole (the facts and figures mentioned below to which he referred, were shown on overhead diagrams during the lecture; not all of them have been included in this report). The figure below shows the suicide rate among blacks and whites, men and women, in the USA between 1933 and 1985, and also shows the distribution between different age groups.



Aytekin Sir:

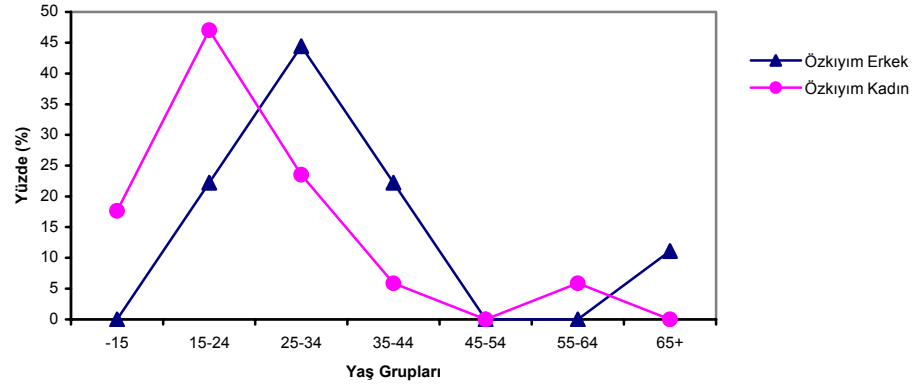
"There is a hypothesis, put forward by Durkheim, that every country has its own suicide level, and that that level is fairly stable. Even the number of attempted suicides, for example among the black population (new diagram, not included here) was relatively constant between 1933 and 1985, with no major differences between any two years."

Aytekin Sir:

"If we take Turkey and look at the level of attempted suicides, and if we ask if there were any great fluctuations in the numbers between 1933 and 1987, we can see that there weren't. Perhaps a slight increase over time, but the diagram shows pretty constant figures."

Aytekin also wanted to show at what age attempted suicides are most frequent, in most areas of the world. The diagram below shows in which age groups there are most attempted suicides among men

(Erkek) and women (Kadin) in Turkey. For women, the highest figures are in the age range 15-24 years.



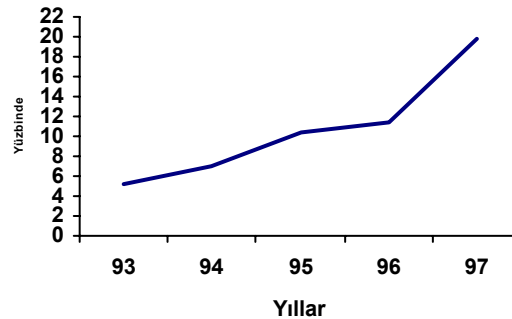
Aytekin Sir:

“In other countries there is another high at around 55 years, but this secondary peak is not so noticeable in Turkey’s case, because the average life expectancy in our country is so low.”

Having given us this background on what the statistics for suicide and attempted suicide look like across the world, Aytekin Sir then went on to present the study he has carried out in Diyarbakir.

Aytekin Sir:

“This study examines suicides and attempted suicides in central Diyarbakir. The total number of suicides and attempted suicides between 1993 and 1997 was 134. We have not used the figures from the police records, but those from court protocols and legal verdicts: there are differences between the two kinds of data, because in the police records a case may immediately be registered as a suicide, since that is what it looks like when the police arrive on the scene. The subsequent inquest and trial may then prove that it was a murder. So, although using the data from juridical records entails delays, because it takes a few years for the courts to reach their final verdict, that is the source we use.”



Aytekin Sir:

“The diagram above shows the number of attempted suicides per hundred thousand inhabitants (in Diyarbakir). What we see is that there

has been an increase from five to twenty per 100,000 over the period 1993-1997. The same applies with regard to suicide: as this figure shows (diagram not included here) there was an increase from three to four-and-a-half over the same period. It is interesting to view these figures in the light of Durkheim's hypothesis - he maintains, you remember, that the suicide rate remains more or less constant, whereas in our case there has been a clear increase."

Aytekin Sir:

"The suicide rate peaks for women in the age category 15-24 years, and for men in the age range 25-35. And we also note a slight increase after the age of 55. The most interesting finding of our study was that there are twice as many suicides among women as among men - the exact opposite of what all other research has shown! Throughout the world, research shows that the suicide rate among women is about half of that among men. This diagram shows the difference in the number of attempted suicides among women and men in different countries:"

Mean incidence of suicide			Mean incidence of suicide		
	Men	Women		Men	Women
Turkey	1,5	0,8	New Zealand	15.4	7.4
Philippines	1.6	0.8	Norway	17.2	6.5
Mexico	3.9	0.9	Singapore	15.3	10.8
Peru	4.5	1.5	USA	19.8	7.2
Greece	4.6	2.0	Canada	20.7	7.4
Spain	7.1	2.3	Australia	19.7	8.7
Colombia	8.4	2.9	Hong Kong	17.9	10.8
Italy	8.4	3.6	Japan	21.4	11.5
Ireland	8.8	3.3	Belgium	22.2	11.3
Thailand	7.6	5.1	France	25.3	9.0
Israel	9.1	5.7	Sweden	28.4	12.1
Chile	12.8	2.6	Germany	28.0	12.7
Venezuela	13.0	3.5	Switzerland	33.0	12.6
England	11.2	6.5	Taiwan	29.3	20.3
Portugal	13.7	4.0	Austria	37.5	13.0
Argentina	13.0	4.8	Finland	42.3	10.6
Netherlands	11.5	7.2	Denmark	33.5	19.7
			International means	17.2	7.5

Aytekin Sir:

"As you can see here, it's generally the case that there are twice as many suicides among men as among women. But in our study, plus just one other study we have found, which was carried out in China, we see an exception. In other words: there is no other country where more women than men commit suicide."

Aytekin Sir:

"The highest proportion of suicides, for both women and men, is recorded in the Scandinavian countries; but here as elsewhere, there is a

considerable difference between women and men, with much higher rates for men.”

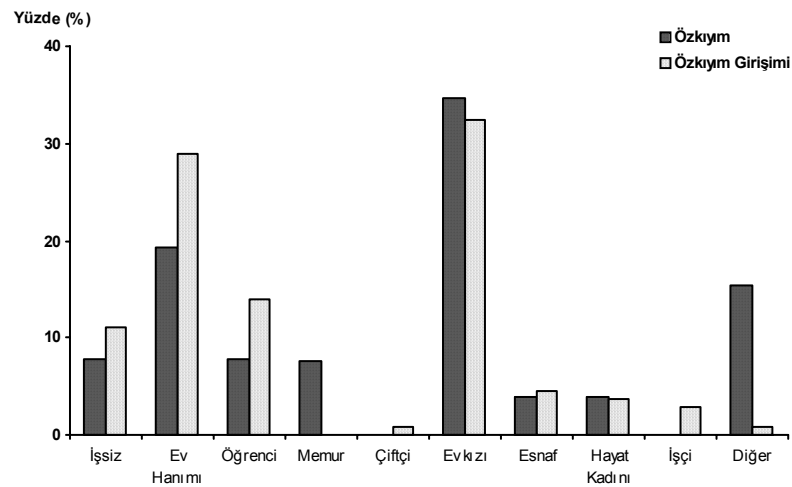
The next question Aytekin Sir and his research team asked themselves was whether the unusual figures they had observed applied equally to western and eastern Turkey. The table below shows the figures for eastern Turkey in the left-hand column, and for western Turkey on the right (NB: Kadın = Women, Erkek = Men).

İl	Kadın	Erkek	İl	Kadın	Erkek
Ağrı	11	8	Ankara	48	99
Batman	14	5	Balıkesir	10	28
Bingöl	3	0	Bolu	10	16
Bitlis	8	0	Bursa	16	37
Diyarbakır	20	8	Denizli	6	15
İğdir	3	0	Eskişehir	6	11
Kars	7	3	Kayseri	6	11
Sivas	20	14	Tekirdağ	7	22
Sanlıurfa	16	9	Uşak	1	7
Sirnak	5	3			
Van	17	15			

Aytekin Sir:

“If we look at the figures for western Turkey, we see that the suicide rate among men is nearly twice as high as the rate among women, while the data from eastern Turkey show that there are twice as many suicides among women as among men.”

Aytekin also showed the distribution of suicide among different occupational categories (see diagram below). The filled-in bars show suicides, and the unfilled bars show attempted suicides. From left to right we see the suicide rates for the unemployed, housewives, university students, office workers, farmers, girls living at home, shopkeepers, prostitutes, labourers others.

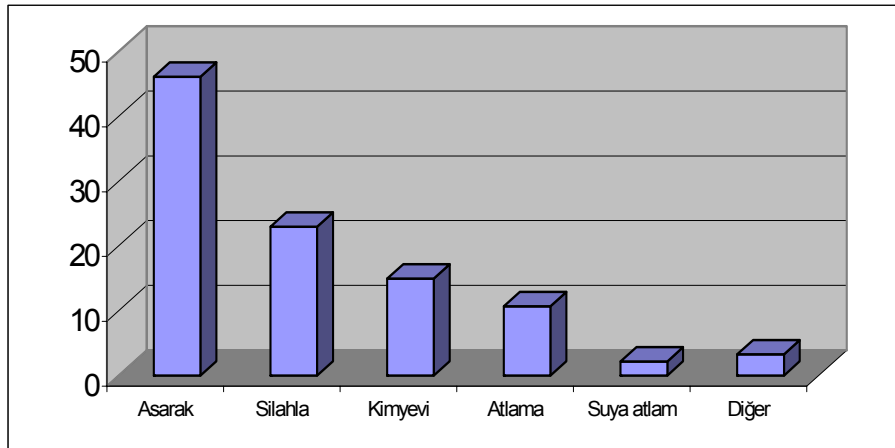


Aytekin Sir:

“You have perhaps already noticed that there are peaks in two places: one of them is for housewives, the other is for girls living at home. If we add together the figures for these two groups, we have one large category with a high suicide rate. And there’s one thing I would like to underline here: both these groups are devoid of economic freedom. The girls who live at home are controlled from the economic point of view by their brothers and fathers, and the housewives are controlled by their husbands.”

Aytekin Sir:

“The next figure (below) shows which methods of suicide are used. Most suicides are committed by hanging, the second most usual method is by using a firearm. Suicide with a firearm is the fifth most frequently used method in western Turkey, but the second most frequent in eastern Turkey. Pesticides are the third most usual method - rat poison, or agricultural pesticides. In fourth place we have jumping from a height.”



From left to right: hanging, firearms, pesticides, jumping from a height, jumping into water, others.

The research team wondered why, according to the research, the suicide rate among women is so high compared to other countries.

Aytekin Sir:

“Is it really suicide? Or is it the kind of suicide we sometimes see, where a woman is locked in a cell and is told: ‘Take this rat poison and purify your honour.’ Is this the kind of suicide we’re looking at in these figures? Or is it the kind where a child is given a gun and told, ‘Shoot your mother and purify your honour?’ Or are we looking at cases where women are hanged, and then they say, ‘Well, she’s hanged herself?’ Are these cases what we are seeing in our figures?”

Aytekin explained that it is very difficult to prove anything like this in a post-mortem, and since the whole family says that it was suicide these cases are very hard to judge.

Aytekin Sir:

“What proof is there? Of course the official verdict is that it’s suicide. But why? I mean, why are these women being killed, why are they being so severely oppressed?”

Aytekin’s answer is that these are women who have no other way out. All of them will not have been sent to school, perhaps some of them can read, and a minority might complete their basic education. What they all have in common is that they have no possibility of breaking the rules laid down by their families.

Aytekin Sir:

“And what happens if they do oppose the rules established by their family? For example, if the woman would like to listen to some music on the radio, and dream of her lover; what happens then? What happens is, that the family’s honour is sullied. And what happens next is that the family council get together to decide on the punishment for that person.”

Aytekin Sir maintains that it is too early to start talking about solutions, but one conviction he wanted to express was that the starting point has to be education: “If these girls can get themselves an education, and then find a job, a career, well then it seems to me that the family won’t be able to just oppress them. There at least we have the beginning of a solution.”

# *A Programme for Psychological Help*

(Summary of a lecture given on 17 May, arranged by the urban district authority of Rinkeby)

Jülide Aral is a psychologist from Istanbul, and has been working together with KA-MER since 1998. She talked about a programme she has developed together with KA-MER, to establish what the needs of the women who come to the crisis centre are.

Among the women who come to the emergency centre there are a number who have been through traumatic experiences; there is therefore a need for psychological help, and the programme described below can be used as a model.

The problem profiles of the women who come to KA-MER are very heterogeneous; the abuse they have been exposed to includes incest, and physical and mental violence, and there are some who have lost relatives in the war. In her work, Jülide Aral has made use of psychodrama, cognitive therapy and 'psychological education' in treating the women.

Jülide Aral:

"We divided the women into three different groups. Each group worked for sixty hours, and to date we have treated thirty-three women. Eighty traumatised women applied to the programme, and of these we chose thirty-three to work with in this form."

## **Assessment Criteria**

Jülide Aral talked about the diagnosis 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder', PTSD. The degree of PTSD from which a person is suffering can be classified using a scale. The scale measures severity of symptoms, impairment of work ability, degree of disability, and so on.

Jülide Aral:

"We can call our three categories 'Light', 'Medium' and 'Heavy'. There is in addition a fourth level, characterised by somatisation, compulsive behaviour, hostility, phobias and so on.

Jülide Aral:

"We wanted to see if we could measure the results, if we could evaluate our stress management methods. Among all the women who came to us, we chose for this project those who had been diagnosed as having PTSD. A colleague and I assessed the women's status using the scale before we started, after three months, on completion of the treatment, and six months after treatment ended."

## ***The participants***

The participants were aged between 18 and 43 years; the average age was 31. All of them volunteered to take part in the project. Those women who had been diagnosed with severe depression were taken to a psychiatric clinic - they did not take part in the study. A third of the participants had completed their elementary education, and two thirds of them had attended elementary school up until the intermediate stage (in Turkey, there are five years of elementary school education). 33 per cent of the women had been married for ten years or more, 36 per cent of them were unmarried. All but two of them were of Kurdish origin. All the participants came from towns in eastern Turkey.

Jülide Aral:

“We organised the study as a marathon, with twelve hours of work in five sessions. We had to plan it that way, because I had to travel from Istanbul, with KA-MER paying my travel expenses.”

## ***The five sessions***

At the first session the women set up short-term objectives for themselves. 31 per cent of them were still being subjected to violence at the time the group therapy started. Their objectives were expressed in terms of a plan for the protection of the group members in their own environment. It was about looking after their own needs. They fixed their objectives as:

- Increasing their self-confidence
- Increasing their self-respect
- Breaking the violence spiral.

Jülide Aral:

“What we achieved during the first session was that the members of the group presented themselves, we informed them about the model we were going to follow, found out what their expectations were, set up their objectives and had a discussion. We then talked about traumatic experiences.”

The second session started by defining psychosocial trauma. Nebahat Akkoc talked about how women see the violence they suffer as part of what being a woman is about. The group examined how Post-Traumatic Stress occurs, and the impact it has on a person's life; this was carried out in the form of the women themselves telling the group about their own experiences.

Jülide Aral:

“Having the group members share their experiences with each other leads to them starting to trust each other; it creates a positive group climate. During this second session the women received psychological education and cognitive therapy.”

The third and fourth sessions were devoted to psychodrama, which is a means of expressing feelings via role-play. An experience which was



very trying for the individual is enacted in a secure environment, in order to achieve a cathartic effect.

Jülide Aral:

“Group members who did not feel ready for it were not obliged to make their traumas visible to the others. Via other participants who did feel able to enact their traumas they were still able to confront their own experiences.”

At the fifth session all the participants did an evaluation of the treatment; this enabled them to express their situation in words, both for their own benefit and for the benefit of the other participants.

### ***Analysis of the group***

80 per cent of those who had been subjected to violence had been assaulted on more than two occasions. In almost half of the cases, the perpetrator was the victim's father, husband or some other family member. 15 per cent of the women had been subjected to incest by brothers or fathers. Four out of five had been living in the traumatic situation for more than five years. The effects were not only psychological: a third of the women had sustained physical injury as a result of the violence. 33 per cent had seen others being injured, 44 per cent had been threatened with death. Despite the very serious mental and physical suffering these women have experienced, only one in three of them had previously ever sought help. 2 per cent of them had been prescribed anti-depressive medication or an equivalent. Three out of four of the women had no plans for the future. The group members were prey to feelings of hopelessness and apathy, alternating with anxiety attacks.

Jülide Aral:

“In the evaluations made after three and six months, we noted that 15 of the 33 women had made improvements of at least one level on the stress diagnosis scale. These women have also continued to show improvement since then.”

## *Summing up the seminars, discussions and question-and- answer sessions*

The meeting of KA-MER and the Swedish practitioners brought certain contrasts into relief; KA-MER's representatives work under radically different conditions compared to the work of both volunteers and professionals in Sweden. Turkish and Swedish society are dissimilar: the roles of the social services and police are differently defined, the gender roles are different throughout society, the economy is different, the general level of education is different, to give just a few examples. In KA-MER's community, the simple act of acquiring identity documents for a woman is a major undertaking - and a necessary one, for without them it is impossible to help her. Equally important and ground-breaking is KA-MER's work running nursery schools which practise gender equality - an approach that is self-evident in Sweden. Nevertheless, there are a number of similarities, and a great deal that we can learn from each other.

All the work, both here in Sweden and in Turkey, must have the woman or girl, and what she herself wants, as its starting point. Decisions cannot be forced; they need to be well thought-through and based on a solid foundation. The girls or women must not be turned into instruments in a struggle - after all, they are the ones who have to live with the consequences of their decisions!

Everyone who has worked at a deeper level with the issues in question was in agreement that one cannot ignore the families when working to support girls and women. Among the Swedish seminar participants there was a certain amount of experience of working together with families, but many expressed uncertainty. KA-MER's work is oriented towards supporting individual adult women, but when they are dealing with threatened honour killings their planning always takes account of the family.

Many of the group discussions were concerned with the question of language use. It is important to be sensitive to the culture of the specific family in question, and to show respect. The difference in roles between the volunteer organisation KA-MER and practitioners employed by Swedish authorities was illuminated when KA-MER were asked how they 'made sure families came to see them'; the question does not arise for KA-MER, since they quite simply go to see the families.

KA-MER's representatives work with problems which are close to their own cultural competence. We saw for example how they are careful not to take the psychologist from Istanbul with them to their first meeting with a strict Kurdish family council. When they meet lawyers or decision-makers, on the other hand, they need a 'stronger language', and send representatives who have professional titles. It is harder for

Swedish practitioners to find representatives with the right kind of cultural understanding to work with families in the target group. One of the suggestions for a fruitful way forward that came from the group sessions was to adopt a cross-cultural approach and use women from the ethnic associations in Sweden as a resource.

One aspect of the 'language question' concerns the words one uses in one's everyday work. KA-MER do not, for instance, say that they are 'helping' the women they work with, since this ties the women to a definition of themselves as victims. Instead, they say that they are 'supporting' the women.

KA-MER sees a clear difference between honour killings and other forms of oppression of women. 'Normal' oppression of women is not less dangerous, and can also lead to women being killed; but the practice of honour killing has certain differentiating characteristics: an honour killing is carried out following a decision taken by a family council, when a woman has brought shame upon her family by not adhering to the rules of behaviour she is expected to follow. The man or boy who is charged with the task of executing the woman cannot avoid carrying out the murder without himself being cast out from the family. A decision to kill a woman in the name of honour can only be overturned if the family council takes a new decision to that effect.

Judging from the research presented, it looks as if honour killings in Turkey are on the increase. The reason for this could be the culture clash between under-developed agrarian sections of the population and modern industrialised society: as urbanisation progresses and members of the rural population move into the towns and cities, the younger people quickly adopt the new lifestyle with more egalitarian forms of social interaction which is developing in Turkey's main cities. When the parents, who frequently only have low levels of education, start to feel marginalised and at the same time feel that they are losing control over their women and daughters, there is a risk that they will resort to violence in the aim of preserving their position of power. There is a parallel here to the situation when immigrant families from Turkey and other countries have a low level of education, and experience a severe culture clash vis-à-vis Swedish society.

When there is the threat of an honour killing the first priority is to protect the woman or girl. If it is to be possible to resolve the conflict there is a need for mediation; often, the girl or woman herself knows if there is such a possibility and who might be able to help. It might be an employer, an imam, a politician, or quite simply an older relative whom many in the family trust and whom the girl or woman feels she can truly rely on.

KA-MER have developed a special method for teenage girls. They work in a long-term perspective which involves talking to the women in the family, and are particularly careful with regard to the kind of language they use. For example, they will not say to the girl, 'Your body is yours to do what you want with' - since this has the ring of a feminist slogan which is much too strong to be used in this context.

Swedish practitioners who have worked with young girls described how girls who have moved to safe houses often, after a while, start missing their families badly. It happens quite frequently that they move back home again, which often gives rise to a situation that is even worse than the original conflict. There is therefore a need for strategies for working with families without exposing the girls to danger; a good opportunity for this work is while the girls are living in the safe house.

In Sweden as in Turkey, girls and women need to be able to acquire basic skills so that they can act to promote their own rights in society. For many, education can open up a route out of oppression.

Having laws that prohibit violence against and oppression of women is a fundamental requirement. It is also important that politicians, religious leaders and others in positions of responsibility publicly state their opposition to the oppression of women. Sweden and Turkey have achieved differing degrees of progress in this regard, but none of us have come as far as we can. In Sweden, one fruitful way forward would be to have meetings with religious leaders and representatives of ethnic associations, even though we cannot assume that they will always have the same perspective on things as us.

All those who attended the seminars and discussions agreed that meeting others who work directly with girls who live under honour-related oppression was a very stimulating way of identifying effective working methods and constructive attitudes and, not least, of finding strength and inspiration to carry on the work. It is through our encounters with the women and girls that we can develop our ability to provide treatment and support, and it is on the basis of these encounters that we can formulate our standpoints on the issues involved.

*Anna Frenning*