

Girls' response to honor-related violence

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Girls in families characterised by strong social control often live a double life. Yet the roles and relations in these families are much less static than commonly thought, according to a new doctoral thesis from the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Honour-related [violence](#) and oppression has become a social problem. But the phenomenon is far more multifaceted and dynamic than typically portrayed in media. These are some of the findings presented by Siv-Britt Björktomta in her doctoral thesis, which is based on interviews with eleven 16-20 year old females who live in families characterised by strong patriarchal control. The interviewees expressed that they live with restrictions and control of their social life and sexuality.

'My study explores the [phenomenon](#) from the perspective of the daughters,' says Björktomta.

The thesis focuses on the girls' strategies to handle conflicts between norms in the family and in the surrounding majority society. They were not allowed to have a boyfriend and had to accept a strict virginity requirement, which restricted their space for action in many ways. Their stories show how the idea that a daughter's virginity is the symbol of the family's reputation and honour meant that they had to shoulder the burden of being cultural symbols and boundary markers – with moral implications – between the 'Swedish' and the 'non-Swedish'.

The [girls](#) described a family situation characterised by control, harassment, emotional blackmailing, threats and physical violence. The

father's authority and power were taken as given in all families. At the same time, resistance against the boyfriend ban and the virginity requirement was presented by all the interviewees – implying that they lived a double life. Yet the resistance did affect how the parents, and the fathers in particular, exercised their power. Both norms and family relations were in constant movement, and in some families there were signs of increased gender equality, whereas the violence was escalating in others.

Almost all studied young women said that family belonging has to be earned. They described a patriarchal family structure at the same time as they were longing for a more democratic and negotiating [family](#).

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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