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Swedish women don headscarves after assault on Muslim

BBC News (19.08.2013) - Swedish women have been posting photos of themselves in traditional Muslim headscarves in solidarity with a woman attacked apparently for wearing a veil.

Among the protesters from various faiths were politicians and TV hosts.

The "hijab outcry" campaigners urged the government to "ensure that Swedish Muslim women are guaranteed the right to... religious freedom".

The victim was taken to hospital after the attacker tore off her hijab and hit her head against a car on Saturday.

The assailant also shouted racist insults at the woman - who was pregnant - during the attack on Saturday in a Stockholm suburb, the victim's friends told Sweden's media.

Police are now investigating the incident.

'March of fascism'

Using the hashtag #hijabuppropet (hijab outcry) a number of women across Sweden published pictures of themselves on Twitter and other social media websites on Monday.

Among the protesters were lawmakers Asa Romson and Veronica Palm, and also TV host Gina Dirawi.

The campaigners said they wanted to draw attention to the "discrimination that affects Muslim women" in Sweden.

"We believe that's reason enough in a country where the number of reported hate crimes against Muslims is on the rise - and where women tie their headscarves extra tight so that it won't get ripped off - for the prime minister and other politicians to take action to stop the march of fascism," they wrote in the Aftonbladet newspaper.

In response, Justice Minister Beatrice Ask said such attacks "must be taken very seriously", according to the TT news agency.

The minister is expected to meet the campaigners on Tuesday.

'Exorcism punishes kids for family's woes'

With several recent cases of parents attempting to exorcise their "witch" children in Sweden, Congolese-Swedish pastor Josef Nsumbu explains the kindoki belief at the heart of the abuse.

The Local.se (14.05.2013) - Nsumbu was called as an expert witness to one of the recent cases in Sweden, where the parents were accused of abusing their nine-year-old daughter. On Tuesday, an appeals court jailed the step-mother for two and a half years, while her husband, the girl's biological father, was jailed for two years and three months.

Nsumbu has previously said that the recent witchcraft accusations in Sweden - with several cases in Borås and one in Stockholm - could be related to the parents' struggle to integrate and thrive in their new home in Sweden. When things were not going as well as they would like, they risked trying to find a scapegoat.

"I understand that people have taken these beliefs with them to Sweden," Nsumbu said, adding that here, as in the Democratic Republic of Congo where kindoki is part of the culture, lack of education helped such beliefs live on.

"People don't understand bacteria, for example, so when someone dies of an illness, it has to be someone's fault," Nsumbu said.

"It's easy to single out the one who is a burden in the family," he said.

He added that his observations of the current cases in Sweden seemed to support what he saw in the DRC - that parents with foster children cannot cope and end up singling out a step-child as the root cause of the family's woes.

"I've noticed that it is rarely a child's biological parents who accuses their child of being possessed," he said.

He said that even in Sweden, he seemed to notice from the unearthed cases that the child was often a step-child.

"In some cases, envy is to blame," he said.

"An orphan knows he or she is alone in the world and studies extra hard in school to build a future, but then the step-parents notice they are doing better in school than their biological kids," Nsumbu said.

As some itinerant evangelical pastors have also migrated to Sweden, there was scope for them to prey on the parents' frustration and ignorance, he said.

"They'll come along and say 'The witch child is eating your child's brain' and then blame the biological kids' lesser progress in the Swedish school on them."

The emergence of small Christian congregations in Sweden reminds him of developments in the DRC in the nineties, when kindoki was robbed of any positive meaning.

"Nigerian missionaries, Americans, South Africans... The Nigerian pastors especially would have broadcasts on television where they told people, for example, that they didn't have a job because of kindoki, rather than blaming unemployment on the government."

Nsumbu claimed that many of the cases in Sweden also involved Nigerian pastors.

He himself tries, whenever kindoki comes up among family and community members, to counsel them.

"Nowhere in the bible does Jesus beat up a patient. I can't imagine that the best way to exorcise demons is to resort to physical harassment," Nsumbu said.

"These poor children end up in a situation that they don't understand, while their parents' ignorance is exploited by Christian sects active in Sweden."
