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Jury in honour killing case finds family guilty of murder

By Allison Jones

The Canadian Press (29.01.2012) - Three members of an Afghanistan-born Montreal family have been found guilty of killing three daughters and a co-wife in what the judge describes as "cold-blooded, shameful murders" resulting from a "twisted concept of honour."

A jury took 15 hours to find Mohammad Shafia, 58, his wife Tooba Yahya, 42, and their son Hamed, 21, each guilty of four counts of first-degree murder in a case so shocking it has riveted Canadians from coast to coast.

Even after the verdict was read, the three denied killing sisters Zainab, 19, Sahar, 17, and Geeti, 13, Shafia as well as Rona Amir Mohammad, 52, their father's childless first wife in a polygamous marriage.

Their bodies were found June 30, 2009, in a car submerged in a canal in Kingston, Ont., in a multiple murder to avenge the family's outrage because the girls sought teenage freedoms from their controlling father and brother.

As the verdicts were being read, Hamed put his head in his hands and hunched over while standing.

Soon, his mother Tooba started to cry.

When the judge asked if they each wanted to say anything, they one by one declared their innocence.

"We are not criminal, we are not murderer, we didn't commit the murder and this is unjust," Mohammad said through a translator.

His wife, Tooba, responded: "Your honourable justice, this is not just. I am not a murderer, and I am a mother, a mother."

Their son said, in English: "Sir, I did not drown my sisters anywhere."

But the judge was unmoved, and spoke directly to the cultural cloud that has hung over the case since it began.

"You have each been convicted of the planned and deliberate murder of four members of your family... (A verdict) clearly supported by the evidence presented at this trial," said Judge Robert Maranger.

"It is difficult to conceive of a more despicable, more heinous crime...the apparent reason behind these cold-blooded, shameful murders was that the four completely innocent victims offended your completely twisted concept of honour...that has absolutely no place in any civilized society."

Throughout the judge's statement, Hamed put his head in his hands, while at one point both his mother and father rubbed his back to console him.

The Crown theory was that Shafia, Yahya and Hamed drowned the four victims elsewhere on the site, placed their bodies in the car, then pushed it into the canal with the family's other vehicle.

The defence had said it was an accident that they had gone for a joy ride with Zainab driving and accidentally plunged into the canal with Hamed watching, although he didn't call police.