

SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE OF HONOR KILLING: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF *PANCHAYAT*^{*} IN RURAL PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This research examines the perceptions and views of the members of *panchayat* about the so-called 'honor killings' in rural Pakistan to evaluate the trends and patterns in this kind of homicides. The major objective of the study is to explore the level of social acceptance of *panchayat* and the role of influenced people in *panchayat* decisions. The study also analyzes the causes of honor killing and major factors involved in this cruel behavior. Design of the research proceeds mainly under the quantitative method. This study has been conducted in 15 rural union councils out of 49 rural union councils in district Jhang located in the province Punjab, Pakistan. Respondents were the existing members of *panchayat*. Univariate and Bi-variate analyses were applied using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to draw the analysis. It is concluded that honor killing is alarming and very serious issue because it is being practiced in all areas, and is taken as a social norm, a custom which the people of that area think is normally right. The major causes behind honor killings were illicit relation or suspicions of illicit relation, love marriages, refusal of fiancé, seeking divorce and sometimes women were also killed when they refused to accept the decision of the family. The difference was found to a great extent between the illiterate and the educated families regarding the beliefs and practice of honor killing. All these things promote and support honor killing and hinder all the policies to stop it. It is derived from the perceptions that education should be promoted to eliminate the practice of honor killing and decisions of *panchayat* should be discouraged.

Key Words: Panchayat, honor killing, social perceptions

1. Introduction

The idea of honor inside the patriarchal discourse remains predominantly a male attribute. Nagel observes that "the terms like honor, patriotism, cowardice, bravery and duty are hard to distinguish as either nationalistic or masculinist, since they seem so thoroughly tied both to the nation and to manliness" (1998, p.203). Jafri also associates the concept of honor with the patriarchy: "Honor is only another way of understanding the operation of patriarchy which is anchored in the assumption of male authority over women and male definition and expectation of 'appropriate' female behavior" (2008).

Violence against women has become a major area of concern in recent years all over the world in diverse forms. Many forms of violence

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are deep-rooted in our culture which is not recognized as violence by the larger section of our society. These forms may range from domestic violence and sexual harassment to rape and honor killing. Honor killing is one of the most heinous violence against humanity because it ends the life of the victim. Murder is defined as the willful (unlawful) killing of one human being by another” (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2000). A female honor killing is “a woman is killed for her actual or perceived immoral behavior” (Hassan, 1999).

1.2 Historical Explanation of Honor Killing

The exercise of honor killings has a long genealogy and it emerged with the appearance of male-controlled (patriarchal) social structures throughout Asia and Europe where the honor of the family is based on sexuality of women. The survival of most of the tribal and agrarian societies was based on the control over means of production such as livestock and land and modes of reproduction that is “female”.

In order to confirm the preservation of lineage, from the paternity of offspring and the privileges to possession of property the regulation of a female’s sexuality and the protection of her chastity was imperative. Fundamentally, then, the respect of a family resided in its property (land) and its women, the concepts of honor and shame came to be connected to these belongings: males would murder to guard their property and they would kill to protect their women and they would murder the women if the code of sexual interactions was violated. The tradition of honor killings hence appeared as key element in the code that organized human associations in communities and it is still exercised in many areas of the world (Malik, 2001).

In some conservative societies, women are still considered the way of all evils and men are deemed innocent and pure. “Zan, Zar, Zameen” (woman, money, land) were considered the sources of all evils in human societies. In male dominated societies, woman’s personality is determined according to the masculine wishes. If she is non-compliant, she is punished through beatings, isolation, and virtual imprisonment and even murder (Barohi, 2006).

As Pakistan is an agricultural state, feudalism remained powerful throughout its history: feudals are the superior heads of the *biradri* (community), define their own structure of justice (*jirga* and *panchayat*),

lay down their own laws, in which their definition of honor is different from that of formal law. In feudal societies the code of conduct for women is very strict: death occurs in the name of honor when a woman violates any of these laws. It is significant that women are usually ignorant of social structures, where as their lives are controlled by casual laws (both as behavioral code of conduct and as formal system of justice). Movement of women is delimited and prohibited, female is rampant, and where the official language of the country is different from that of sub-state clans, women end up like frogs in the well (Shaheed, 1998).

Women rights are constructed locally as a result of conflicts which were decided by the local Jirgas. Broadly speaking, from the gender rights perspective, women are made subjects of conflicts before jirgas in two main ways: firstly, as transgressors of social norms, where women's infidelity and immorality (marriage by choice, illicit relations, seeking of divorce and being raped) are the direct subject matter of the dispute and the aggrieved party – the family of the woman, is seeking a decree against her and her abettor (usually a paramour or husband of choice etc.). Secondly, women are considered a commodity by the members of the jirga to be traded at the time of sentencing as compensation, regardless of the nature of the dispute (Irfan, 2008).

1.3 Sociological Significance

The issue of honor killing is today's lived reality for which Pakistan has been recipient of heavy criticism from all over the world. The research shows that the rate of honor killing is increasingly affecting the population because of its magnitude, frequency and severity. The family institution is considered very important in Pakistani society. Honor killing violates human rights and stigmatizes the family making its survival difficult in the community. It creates the problem of prestige and marriage for other members of the family. Universal Declaration of Human Rights constitutes the freedom of an individual as follows:

Everyone has the right to *life, liberty and security* of the person. Men and women of full age without any limitation due to *race, nationality or religion*, have the right to marry or to have a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage and its dissolution. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free

and full consent of the attending spouses. The family is the natural and fundamental group, unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and state (Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 Article 3&16).

In Pakistan there has been little research on honor killing especially in central Punjab. This study will fill the gap about the knowledge of honor killing. It is a social phenomenon that is affecting the society socially and physically. This study will give the information about societal and cultural norms of central Punjab regarding honor killing.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

1. To study the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents.
2. To explore the factors behind the honor killing.
3. To find out why honor killing is socially approved phenomenon.
4. To find out whether this practice is being utilized for other ulterior purposes.
5. To suggest some suitable remedies to overcome this inhuman 'justice' system.

2. Review of Literature

Lala Hassan conducted a consultation meeting entitled "Call to Plug Legal Loopholes in Cases of Honor Killing" published in Dawn news (2009). In this article different speakers from different fields of life spoke on this issue. The speakers said honor killing was not considered to be a serious crime due to socio-cultural practices, and that in some cases it was even considered necessary to maintain the honor of a family or tribe. SSP Abdul Khaliq Shaikh said that honor killings were mostly stage dramas that scripted well before the crime is committed, as it is decided beforehand who would be the complainant in the FIR, who would be witnesses, and who would be the accused. He added that most of these would normally be 'close relatives'. SSP Shaikh pointed out that in many cases a jirga was held to decide what was to become of an honor killing case. The representative of Aurat Foundation said that honor killing was not considered to be a serious crime due to socio-cultural practices, and that in some cases it was even considered necessary to maintain the honor of a family or tribe.

Nasrullah *et al.*(2009) reported in their study *The Epidemiological Patterns of Honor Killing of Women in Pakistan* that majority of the women killed in the name of honor were married. The main reason behind honor killing was the extramarital relation. All the women were killed by their husbands, brothers and other close relatives. The weapons used for killing were firearms, stabbing, axe, edged tool and strangulation.

Akmal (2008) conducted a study on “Socio-Cultural Causes of Murders: A Focus on the Motivational Aspects” and formulated the theoretical framework which includes the concepts and ideas of Sutherland’s theory of Differential Association. He concluded that there are three types of reasons: First, the basic reasons or reasons before the reasons are ambiguous explanation of matters, conservative customs and traditions lack of justice, lack of religious control etc. Secondly, main reasons such are family conflicts, marriage issues, land disputes, emotional disturbances, illicit relations, sectarianism etc. It is a fact that almost all the individuals in the society are facing these problems but few of them commit murders. Thirdly, there are decider reasons which are as, there are two forces acting upon each individual before he makes his decision on any issue. First is motivating force and second is defending force. Murder is the result of excess of motivational forces towards the (deviant behavior) murder.

Tandon (2008) said in his article “Interviewing Partition Survivors” that at the time of the 1947 Partition men of Singh’s family decided it was better to kill the women than have them fall into the hands of Muslim mobs. These honor killings: where women were killed by male members of their families to prevent them being raped by communal mobs and in the Sikh community thousands of women were killed for this reason. The men were not facing certain death, even if those women who survived after being raped their families could face ostracism. Zahid (2008) conducted a study on “A Sociological Investigation into the Behavior of the Murderers in District Jail Faisalabad” she concluded that majority of the respondents were illiterate, living in joint family system and belong to rural areas. She found that major causes of murder were old malignancy, rage of revenge, self-defense and the honor matters.

Shafaullah (2001) in “Socio-Economic Causes of Murders” concluded that majority of murders took place in rural areas due to land, water and family disputes while honor and revenge were the dominant factors leading to murders. The majority of the murderers did not have the criminal background. The motivation from the local community played a vital role in committing murders. As for as the murder of honor is concerned the murderers justify their act of murder. They stated that it was required by their family and local norms prevailing in their areas. In some cases the respondents told that they were not being rightly involved, some declared that they were innocent and committed murder because they were forced to do it. Rizvi (2000) in “Honor Killing Rises in Pakistan despite State and Religious Opposition” said that mostly women are killed by their brother, father, husband and other close relatives because the women had been interacting with men other than their relatives. He said that this tradition has been in practice in rural areas for centuries and now it is becoming more and more visible in urban centers also. He also concluded that it is not an approved act by the religious leaders.

Akram (1997) reported in his study entitled “A Sociological Investigation into the Reasons for Murders in Punjab” that gain (zar, zan, and zameen), revenge and enmity, sudden quarrel and self-defense were the major causes of murder in rural Punjab, while the gain (zar, zan, zameen) was dominant. Hassan (1995) stated that the practice of men murdering their enemies and subsequently killing one of the women in their family to disguise the affair as an honor killing is also common.

3. Materials and Methods

Present research was designed to explore the perception of panchayat members regarding honor killing in rural Punjab. The quantitative research design was adopted to see the relationship between different variables and the data was collected from the scientifically selected sample with the help of semi-structured interview schedule. The present study aims to know the perception of panchayat members regarding honor killing in rural Punjab. For this research study, panchayatis of the rural area of Tehsil Jhang⁷ were taken as a unit. There are total 61 union

⁷ A district of Province Punjab, Pakistan

councils in Tehsil Jhang. From which urban area consists of 12 union councils, while 49 union councils have rural catchment's area. For the present study 15 union councils out of 49 rural union councils were selected randomly as the universe of the study. Almost every union council consists of about ten to fifteen villages (Local body system, Devolution Plan 2002). For the current study 15 union councils, out of 49 from rural areas, were selected randomly. From these union councils, researcher interviewed all the 50 respondents who were panchayat members, through purposive sampling technique. And this was the sample out of total 49 union council's panchayat members. The interview schedule consisted of structured and unstructured questions used as a data collection tool and prepared in English but at the time of interview the local language was also used to get responses from the respondents. The data was collected in face-to-face situation. Uni-variate and Bi-variate analysis was done through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). On the basis of this analysis, the researcher suggested some valuable remedies.

3.1 Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: If panchayat members themselves believe in the act of the honor killing, this practice will continue.

Table 1: Association between the beliefs of panchayat members regarding the act of honor killing and the continuity of the practice of honor killing

Beliefs of the panchayat members	Practice of honor killing will continue				Total	
	Yes		No		F	%
	F	%	F	%		
Strongly believe	23	88.5%	3	11.5%	26	100%
Believe to a less extent	2	28.6%	5	71.4%	7	100%
Strongly do not believe	1	11.1%	8	88.9%	9	100%
Do not believe	1	12.5%	7	87.5%	8	100%
Total	26	52%	24	48%	50	100%

Chi square=30.139 Significance= .000 Gamma=.914

Analysis

The chi-square value (30.139) shows a highly significant association ($P=.00$) between the beliefs of the respondents in the act of honor killing, and their opinion that the practice of honor killing will continue. The gamma value shows a positive relationship between the variables. The table shows that if the mature, reputed and dominant personalities are in the favor of honor killer then it will be difficult to control this practice. So the hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 2: If honor killing is approved by society as a social phenomenon, this practice will continue.

Table 2: Association between the opinions that ‘honor killing’ is approved by society, and the continuity of the practice of honor killing

Approved by society	Practice of honor killing will continue				Total	
	Yes		No		F	%
	F	%	F	%		
Approved	24	64.9%	13	35.1%	37	100%
Not Approved	2	15.4%	11	84.6%	13	100%
Total	26	52%	24	48%	50	100%

Chi square=9.43 Significance= .002 Gamma=.821

Analysis

The chi-square value (9.43) shows a highly significant association ($P=.00$) between the opinion that ‘honor killing’ is approved by society, and the continuity of the practice of honor killing, and the gamma value shows a positive relationship between the variables. The table shows that if the people believe that honor killing is approved by society, it will continue. So the hypothesis is accepted.

3.2. Major Findings

- Major proportion i.e. 34.0 percent of the panchayatis belonged to age group of 51-60 years and 16.0 percent of the respondents were in the age group of 71-80 years. From the

above findings we can say that panchayatists are always mature and experienced people.

- All the respondents said that honor killing was practiced in their areas. It means that it was a serious issue.
- The majority of the respondents i.e. 70.0 percent said that honor killing had been taken as an ordinary murder in their area.
- Majority of the respondents i.e. 54.0 percent said that women were killed for the cause of honor. But 28.0 percent understood that both male and female were equally killed in the name of honor.
- Majority of the respondents (58%) believed that a person commits honor killing due to high social pressure.
- Majority of the respondents (44%) believed that the difference was found to a great extent between educated and illiterate families regarding the concept of honor killing.
- Greater part of the respondents (78%) percent said that community had the sympathetic behavior towards honor killer.
- Most of the respondents (74%) said that the practice of honor killing was approved by the society.
- Majority of the respondents (60%) percent suggested that education should be promoted to eliminate the practice of honor killing.

3.2 Conclusions

The following results can be drawn from the bivariate analysis given above. Honor killing will continue because it is an approved act by the society and has become traditionally and socially accepted norm of the society. As an Islamic state our formal laws as well as Islamic laws strongly oppose the concept of honor killing. In spite of this, the trend is rising higher in our society because this concept is favored by the well-known, reputed and leading people of the society. They believe that honor killing is a justified act for the honor killer in a certain situation and honor killers always get sympathetic behavior from the society because community considers honor killing a socially approved norm. The findings of the present research are in line with that of Akhter et al

(2001). They conducted a study on “Honor Killing as Socially Approved Murder” and revealed that honor killing is socially approved norm in southern Punjab. People are instigated and pressurized to commit this practice in our society. Honor killing is also treated as cultural norm and custom which is socially approved.

The findings of the present research are also in line with that of Shafaulah (2001). He conducted a study on “Socio-Economic Causes of Murders” and concluded that as far as the murder of honor is concerned the murderers justify their act of murder. They stated that it was required by their family and the norms prevailing in local areas. While Mayell (2002) in his article “Thousands of Women Killed for Family Honor” revealed that the concept of family honor justifies the act in the eyes of the members of the society. Most honor killings occur in countries where the concept of woman as a vessel of the family reputation predominates. There is also another misconception that it leaves the positive impact on the society because it creates a fear among others who indulge in certain unethical activities. All these things promote and support honor killing and hinder the way of all those policies which are made to stop it.

3.3 Recommendations

- Law making and law enforcing agencies should take steps regarding honor killing.
- Severe laws should be enforced to control this practice.
- Religious and formal education should be provided in all the areas. If education is increased, there would be a change in the misconception about honor killing.
- Reforms should be brought in Pakistan penal code regarding criminal justice system.
- Religion should be reinforced as a factor of social control.
- More studies should be conducted to find out why honor killing is legally wrong but ‘morally right’.
- Young generation is aware of the legal rights of women but they do not avail them due to culture and patriarchy. Bad old and new customs should be replaced or rooted out from the society.
- Justice should be assured at each level socially and legally, and within the families by the heads and sardars.

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