

Chapter 1

Honor Killing: Reasons and Perspectives Through Case Studies and Documentaries

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ABSTRACT

Using a few chosen documentaries, the current study examines honor killing cases. The chapter focuses on the moral, religious and social pressures that some people face when defying social norms, which leads them to take the lives of their family members. The documentaries chosen as case studies present the perspectives of both the perpetrators and the victims when it comes to the concepts of honor, dishonor and honor killings (Singh & Bhandari, 2021). Some societies perceive attempts to tarnish their idealized cultural purity by rejecting progressive new ideas. In an effort to prevent their alleged negative influence on society and to set an example for future female rebellions, women who attempt to challenge established traditions are labelled as rebellious and punished. Hence the chapter examines how society's influence plays a significant role in honor killings. The chapter will also give a general overview of media reports and reported case law regarding the apparent frequency of killings related to honor.

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STATISTICAL DATA

Many tragic events, particularly honor killings, often go unreported officially due to various socio-cultural factors. Instead, these incidents circulate as rumors or unverified stories, making it challenging to ascertain and document the truth. The lack of formal reporting is often due to societal norms that tacitly condone such practices. Family members and others in the community may actively participate in concealing these events when they occur. Various cover-up narratives are employed, such as claiming accidental deaths during firearm maintenance. These fabricated explanations are typically supported by male community members and subsequently reported in the media as factual. As a result of these dynamics, honor killings appear to be non-existent in official records and reports, effectively masking their continued occurrence.

During the Libyan civil war, activists from the American organization Physicians for Human Rights reported a disturbing incident. According to their account, three teenage girls were sexually assaulted by forces aligned with the ruling regime at an educational institution in Misrata. In the aftermath of this trauma, the girls' father allegedly took their lives, citing family honor as the motivation for his actions. (Zawati, 2012)

Pakistan is believed to have the highest incidence of honor killings globally. According to the Pakistan Ministry of Interior, 4,101 honor crime cases were reported to courts between 1998 and 2003. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan has noted a continuous rise in honor killings: 869 cases in 2013, an estimated 1,000 in 2014, and 1,100 in 2015. (Heydari, A., Teymoori, A., & Trappes, R., 2021) A 2009 study in Pakistan attempted to quantify honor killings over a four-year period. It found that 1,957 women were killed following accusations of extramarital relationships. Of these victims, 88% were married, and 18% were minors under 18 years old. (Nasrullah, M., Haqqi, S., & Cummings, K. J., 2009)

These statistics highlight the prevalence and severity of honor killings in Pakistan, showing a troubling upward trend and revealing that victims are often married women, with a significant number being underage. The data underscores the urgent need for addressing this issue within Pakistani society.

According to data from the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 243 instances of honor killings were officially recorded in Afghanistan over a two-year period, spanning from March 2011 to April 2013. (Gibbs, A., Said, N., Corboz, J., & Jewkes, R., 2019) This statistic provides a glimpse into the prevalence of honor killings in Afghanistan during that specific timeframe. It's important to note that these figures represent only the documented cases, and the actual number may be higher due to underreporting or difficulties in data collection, especially in more remote or conflict-affected areas of the country.

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