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HONOR KILLINGS IN PAKISTAN: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL NORMS AND LEGAL LOOPHOLES

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ABSTRACT

Honor killings in Pakistan represent a grave violation of human rights, deeply rooted in patriarchal norms, cultural traditions, and systemic gender inequality. This study critically examines the cultural and legal dimensions of honor killings, highlighting the inadequacies of Pakistan's legal framework in addressing this pervasive issue. Despite legislative reforms such as the Anti-Honor Killing Laws of 2016, loopholes allowing perpetrators to be pardoned by the victim's family undermine justice. Cultural norms that equate family honor with women's behavior perpetuate this violence, while patriarchal structures reinforce male dominance and control over women's lives. The study also explores the role of media representation, which often sensationalizes these crimes without addressing systemic issues, and the efforts of NGOs and civil society in advocating for victims and pushing for legal reforms. However, their impact is limited by societal resistance and inadequate government support. The findings reveal that effective policy implementation requires a multi-faceted approach, including grassroots education, community engagement, and stricter enforcement of laws. Addressing honor killings also demands a cultural shift to challenge the deeply ingrained notions of honor and shame that justify such violence. This study concludes that while Pakistan has made progress in recognizing the severity of honor killings, a holistic approach combining legal reform, education, economic empowerment, and cultural change is essential to protect women's rights and ensure justice for victims.

Keywords: Honor Killings, Pakistan, Patriarchy, Gender Inequality, Legal Loopholes, Cultural Norms, Human Rights, Anti-Honor Killing Laws, Media Representation, NGOs.

Introduction

Honor killings are the murders of women by their male family members in the name of protecting the honor or dignity of the family. Honor killings have taken a deep root in Pakistan, where a majority of the population consider themselves Muslim and follow the Islamic religion. With every aspect associated with honor killings, the alarmed statistics of these killings compelled a deep understanding of cultural norms and acute deficiencies in the legal constructs which have proven a boon for the perpetrators addressing the issue (Kumar & Arora, 2025). The “honor” of a family is determined by the modesty of its women, and therefore family honor functions socially through the control of female behavior. In patriarchal societies where a woman’s body and sexuality are seen as a source of family honor or family shame, practices and customs emerge as social control mechanisms for the protection of the honor of the family. Though honor killings have been practiced in Pakistan for many centuries, perhaps since the time when Islam invaded the south Asian region, through an analysis of the available data, this paper will explore how and why the practice of honor killing has been maintained in Pakistan (Ullah, 2022).

Furthermore, based on the literature view, the paper will also discuss how the legislative framework of Pakistan inadequately tackles the issue of honor killings. In doing this, the framework of “crime of passion” and the absence of accompanying legislation that could increase the chances of conviction for perpetrators, will be critiqued. Subsequently, different forms of systemic violence that have the effect of actually promoting honor killings are considered, taking into account the deep-seated cultural roots of the phenomenon.

The issue of honor-based violence, particularly honor killings, is a complex and longstanding one. Cultural norms and historical narratives strengthen this phenomenon, influencing the legal system and its loopholes. On the one hand, society condemns honor killings as a sign of barbarism in the 21st century. On the other hand, prevalent societal attitudes support this system in Pakistan. Identification of character strengths in Pakistan thus goes hand in hand with identification of fatal character flaws. In the Pakistani tale of justice, justice has not only long been blind, but it has also had one cloudy eye which has allowed for legal loopholes to occur (Hongdao et al., 2018).

Seldom in Pakistan’s history have concepts of honor been free from patriarchal influence. A person's crime can tarnish their family's or tribe's honor, leading critics to argue that social customs or laws should not govern their morality. Morality has always been

a cornerstone of Pakistan's socio-ideological framework. Many view crimes through the lens of cultural norms and legal justice, aligning their expectations with communal standards. Pakistan's geography exposes it to regions with honor-killing practices, with cultural burdens such as animal sacrifices during weddings or Eid prevalent across various populations, not just among the Pashtun and Balouch (Saeed et al.2024). Loss of honor may result in severe social ostracism, family expulsion, or even suicide, while ancient customs perpetuate cycles of vengeance and violence among feuding families. The societal expectation for honor compels families into tragic decisions that can lead to suicide or other dire consequences.

Understanding Honor Killings

The phenomenon of honor killings has persisted and proliferated globally, undermining moral norms and instilling fear in communities. The seriousness of these killings varies by country due to differing cultural interpretations of honor and legal responses to gender-based violence. Family honor is often seen as paramount, with restoration prioritized despite potential costs or legal repercussions. Community support for these murders is common, as exemplified by a recent event in Pakistan, where families find excuses to punish daughters without evidence of wrongdoing. Even minor incidents can lead to tragic outcomes, as societal norms promote honor killings regardless of guilt (Shahid et al., 2024). Additionally, legal loopholes often allow such murders to go unpunished. Honor killings are more complex than typical homicides driven by domestic disputes or emotional distress. While some argue they are closely related to domestic violence, factors like poverty and education further complicate the issue. Family complicity often obstructs police investigations, enabling suspects to evade accountability through threats or community consensus. The motivations behind suicides linked to honor include individual conflicts with societal expectations, leading to feelings of shame and self-blame. In rural Pakistan, married women face heightened suicide risks due to the cultural expectations surrounding dowries and the implications of divorce or spousal death, which can exacerbate familial financial strain.

Definition and Scope

Honor killing is a form of violence in which a person, usually a woman, is brutally killed by family members or close relatives because of the belief that the victim has brought dishonor to the family. Although honor killings are considered a crime across the world and are subject to severe punishment, sometimes the family members and the killers define this form of violence as positive. If

a wife runs away and keeps silent for 30 hours, one might have the right to kill her, one character says. The documentary was apparently questioning this irrational justification of honor killings and observing the events of the killing of women. As the documentary film presents, approximately 5000 women in the world, mostly in Islamic countries are killed due to honor. Pakistan has a high homicide rate in comparison to the rest of the world (about 1,800 from 1998-2003). Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and other religious minorities are exposed to honor killings in Pakistan, but they are primarily against Muslim women (Hongdao et al., 2018). The killers use community consensus legitimization. The religious interpretation of Islam is equally important. Quran and Sunnah is usually referred to, for instance, by defining that it is positive to kill someone who leaves Islam. Behind all of these, there is the conservative tribal culture. They have a woman concept, which suppresses women. It is confined to her home and defines that it is sinful for women who are exposed to decent act. There are, however, various limits of definition among tribal people depending on region and religious interpretations: if a woman refuses an arranged marriage, asks for divorce, is a victim of rape, and adultery (which can vary between fabricated accusation and actual caught), if wife runs away, sibling sex (regardless of whether it is before or after marriage).

Historical and Cultural Roots

In a global context, Pakistan and many other parts of the world are currently experiencing a resurgence in honor killing incidents, or they are coming more frequently to the public's attention. This represents a paradoxical development in the context of the overall improvement of the human rights situation in some regions, and it is not unison with growing efforts to combat violence against women and children and other human rights abuses. To understand the continuity of the honor killing practice in Pakistan and other societies with a similar kinship structure – such as Afghanistan and India – it is necessary to look at personal and social factors. That should not conceal the responsibility to condemn and work against the honor killing practice (Hongdao et al., 2018). Honor and shame are values that predominate in certain societies where the concept of privacy is tempered and where honor is intertwined with the social identity, especially in strictly patriarchal societies. When an “honorated” or “patrimonypon” woman is in the glare of public opinion because she is affected by some condemnation that links her to her moral integrity or her sexual habit, (alleged or real), she is forcibly subject to corrective measures. Culture and structures attached to the honor-killing

phenomenon imply the perpetration of acts of violence against the woman, which materialize in actions of capital punishment that require a substantial annihilation of the physical integrity of the same. This type of killing takes place regardless of the cultural, social and geographical context of the community in question, although this fact happens to different extents (Gul et al., 2021). Nevertheless, as the anthropologist Labelle argues, such acts will lose all value of “protection of family honor”. As well as “what may be considered as a dishonor in a certain environment will not necessarily be so in another”.

Legal Framework in Pakistan

The custom of honor killings persists in Pakistan despite substantial reform efforts in the legal framework, both at the provincial and federal levels (Hongdao et al., 2018). There are several laws and regulations that have been enacted or amended, dealing with the scope of the protection of life and dignity of individuals related to the custom of honor killings. These laws and regulations have adequate provisions in respect of prevention, investigation, and prosecution of the offenses related to the honor killing-related offenses. Several offenses and possible issues have been defined in the laws, which have to be covered by the prosecution authorities and courts as well. The legal frame has established effective police forces, several tribunals, courts, and increased penalties for violations. The Magistrate can pass an interim order against the accused person keeping the view reprehensible behavior of his/her and may bound him/her to act within the instructions of the magistrate. The court may involve any private organization or person in investigation and assist in the service of interim orders and may report to the court in this regard.

To fully grasp the complexities of the situation, it is crucial to thoroughly analyze the specific provisions contained within the laws of the Pakistani legal systems, particularly as they pertain to the customs surrounding honor killings. There exist a variety of legislative tools designed to meticulously investigate, prosecute, and implement appropriate remedial actions for violations associated with the deeply troubling custom of honor killings. However, the current situation regarding the enforcement of these laws can often result in a problematic process, especially in the context of interpretation and application, which may not align with the established customary norms prevalent in various regions and rural areas of Pakistan. It has been recognized that individuals who commit these heinous crimes are frequently met with forgiveness, or they receive a punishment that is notably minor, should any punishment be awarded at all (Heydari et al.2021).

Consequently, the ongoing concern remains focused on the necessity of effectively enforcing the laws in order to establish a secure and reliable judicial environment that protects the rights of individuals and upholds justice.

The definition, reasons, and implications of honor killing and its manifestation in Pakistan are often debated topics around the world. The law pertaining to honor killings, the prevalent execution and expedience, and protective legislation vary from state to state. Similarly, to avoid convictions in cases of honor killings, perpetrators use various strategies. The Constitution of Pakistan guarantees every citizen protection under the law and places many international conventions regarding human rights and welfare under an obligation. Several laws, resolutions, and regulations have been put in place to punish individuals threatening or harming the body or minds of others on the grounds of a threat to the public order. Nonetheless, in terms of current provisions a critical analysis has found that there are crystal-clear deficiencies and most loopholes have not been covered. A range of difficulties in the action of the law forces and the investigators were also found to bring about absolution due to of the “not proven guilty” lack of propositions. The laws intended to stop the damage give impunity in the application to the criminals. Miscarriages of the law and the conflicts between the legal system and cultural practices give perpetrators the opportunity to escape from punishment (Hongdao et al., 2018). In a row, a detailed critical analysis is given here for the purposes of an in depth study, as a tool for activists, donors and legislators, and also as a guide for journalists and organizations involved.

In Pakistan, honor killing remains a significant issue tied to negative aspects of religion, tradition, and societal roles. The recent case of Qandeel Baloch, a social media star murdered by her brother to preserve family honor, highlights this problem. Following public outcry, legislation was passed, yet many legal avenues stay unfilled. The criminal code allows for charges of zina to be applied in contexts of honor killing, often viewed as a legitimate community standard, which obscures the need for legal reform. Despite efforts, insufficient funding hinders prosecution, particularly concerning laws like qisas under the Qrionic Penal Code. Data from the Ministry of Human Rights indicates at least 280 reported honor killings over three years, mostly in Sindh and Islamabad. However, NGOs believe actual occurrences far exceed reported figures; they estimate around 5,780 cases in the last seven years, although police records contradict this with only 19 cases

noted. The challenges of illiteracy, poverty, and intimidation often prevent proper reporting of honor killings. (Hongdao et al., 2018) .

According to an article published in Nuqta, a clearly honoree killing attempt was documented, but the police reported it as an accident as they could not locate the victim. Different enforcement structures, such as the police, courts and legal professionals, are often hostile, impediments, and unable to advocate on their own. As a result, it is seldom recorded in NI or FIRs that a deceased person was subjected to honorable killing. It was observed that police officers in Sindh addressed the concerns of a deceased family during proceedings, withhold evidence and thorough investigations, intimidate witnesses, present manipulation, verify the impartiality of pressuring family deaths, and delay concerns or expectations. When scandals occur, villagers are afflicted by phobias, preferring a low pale feeling to prefer the malaise as an incurable enemy, lest the strange death attest to the wrath of the honoree. As always in the Blood Feud, the traditional goal is to bring justice in performance that is compatible with honor and courage, while remaining part of the mark of infinity, regularizing a mode without the involvement of institutions. Blood and one of the two for damages. Justice through retaliation, maintenance despite certain rivalries between groups, silence and collusion between them remains a vivid symbol of solidarity. To the modern state, it means delegating the conflict to official bodies, eg the need for a resolution, at a town hall, police station, court, or simply a peace agreement, is also the form that can be best eradicated.

Factors Contributing to Honor Killings

Honor killing is viewed as a multifaceted manifestation that is deeply anchored in gender inequality. It is associated with a patriarchal mindset that believes chastity and modesty are women's primary virtues. Such women can effortlessly bring honor to their family by conforming to these ideals, but are also blamable for besmirching it by the similar token. It is, however, under a system that inherently oppresses women, setting them apart from access to key assets, such as education or family planning. In light of such institutional social injustices, attaining the ideal virtuous woman image is harder, creating the possibility that women become more susceptible to violence including physical, psychological, and sexual aggression (Hongdao et al., 2018). Paradoxically, women are both expected to be honorable and yet they are more liable to contain acts that result in damaging the honor of the family. As recent events demonstrate, the unending case of honor killing in Pakistan leads us to inquire critically the arch of the possibility supporting framework beneath

it. The features of such a framework are disused, which are categorized in terms of gender inequality, its roots in patriarchal social structures, and the cultural norms from which family honor and shame are derived.

A patriarchal mindset significantly defines the social ecosystem of Pakistani society. The country was shaped by a long-standing influence of that mind-set, and thus it served the roots of intensively ingrained heteronormative customs. This ideology has composed the traditional position and requirements of women at the same time its perpetuation of powerful gender abuse that men instigate against women. Thus, it had generated the societal reception of a woman's virility as the embodiment of family honor and men were taught that to preserve and protect, they should implement their fortification. The social arrangement at family level preserves the sphere of women to the clandestine, by confining their activities and evading affiliation outside the domestic setting. This perspective restores family honor and shame, together with the necessity of virility concerned with women, could transform the basis of the sturdy patriarchal society structuring societal ecosystems. In addition, contemporary research on the idea proposes that there appears to be an inverse connection concerning honor and power, which shows a social tendency that is attracted to honor signifiers when individuals encounter powerlessness or vulnerability.

Gender Inequality

Patriarchal norms drive gender inequality, forcing women to live by various social restrictions and boundaries. Women are often considered the property of male family members with restricted privileges ranging from educational facilities to economic opportunities. The autonomy and agency of women are naive phenomena for Pakistan's society, where the opposite gender enjoys ultimate physical, emotional, and mental authority over the female population. Already existing patriarchal family norms believe women often commodify family honor and have defined roles in maintaining it. Various social illustrations exist that clearly explain the position of women in the subcontinent society, where women are supposed to comply with the men's prescript of moral and social conduct (Hongdao et al., 2018).

In Pakistan, where gender norms are predetermined by men, grave concerns exist about the sense of obligation. Various studies have observed a link between honors related crimes and female autonomy. These actions of women are viewed as retaliation and construed as family honor defilement. Reports similar actions that commodify family honor, approximately 71% of victims' physical

disappearances, being lured, kidnapped, or enticed to take revenge or satisfy family honor. This social order notion purpose to keep women in a subservient position, endorsing the conception that a woman must be under the custody of a male relative throughout her entire life. The social ideology of the society often leads women to be killed, hurt, and captured. This social detainees of concern happen in thousands of cases every year in different parts of the subcontinent. For women better livelihood opportunities are forbidden by society. Apart from this constrained environment, economic dependency retains female disconnectedness in the conjugal family and less economic power diminishes the status of women in society.

Patriarchal Structures

This subsection will critically explore the role of patriarchal structures in honor killings in Pakistan. The persistence of violence constitutes a deeply rooted social problem in Pakistan. As a lethal solution to family honor, honor killings have become a common form of violence against women in the country. These murders are rooted in patriarchal societal structures. Village elders and family represent the cornerstones upholding traditional Pakistani society. They safeguard the old property systems and ensure that all matters and all lives function and are lost according to old patriarchal lines. Both kinship and marriage behavior are familial matters and male-dominated systems. Total control is exercised over women, who furnish the only possible outlet to honor and may thereby also cause family disgrace through suspected licentiousness ((Hongdao et al., 2018)). Moreover, family hierarchies detail distance from the head of the family and place male dominance as paramount cultural beliefs.

In Pakistani society, men are central in upholding family honor. It is expected that men keep women in line, and that they adjust the behavior of their female kin if necessary. These demands not only dictate a protective stance, but also render any abuse of women an affront to honor – the honor of the abusing man, his family, and also the tribe. Men can be killed, and are killed, in cases where the honor of the family is at stake as well. The main causes for HRV are concerning marriage, sex or marriage choice. Marital actions including extramarital sex, divorce, adultery and running away are a common trigger for HRV. The psychological aspects of living under these harsh patriarchal systems are damaging for both men and women. Women face accusations of affecting family dishonor and, due to their low economic and social value, are often violently dismissed, ostracized or murdered. Men are expected to act within the honor system and kill in certain circumstances. Men

may also become victims of honor killings (or at least honor violence) due to failing societal masculinities norms and expectations, i.e., suspected 'unmanly' behavior.

An interlinked set of traditional norms and values, linked to gender, family and honor, regulate conduct. The valiant, high-strung image of the honorable Pathan/ Baloch/Angelo boy, forever wary of being 'belittled', has by now, through the popular media, long since penetrated even the most remote and isolated tribal community. Posters, wall-chalkings, and movies depict male heroism in defending the dignity of the female child and upholding the integrity of the honor code. Honor, seclusion of women, the one-way 'modesty' of female behavior, and the absolute power of the elders, have all firmly become associated with an exclusive, and aggressively guarded, tribal identity. The disruptors are outside influences in the way of change, education and empowerment. While newly emerging community and welfare associations are promoting women's rights and challenging the supremacy of tribal norms, the government, on its part, is implementing a range of legislation which undermines the traditional position of the elders.

Family Honor and Shame

Family honor is considered the bedrock of family-endowed norms, values, ethics, and traditions. It endows the reputation of the family, sets boundaries for social relations, dictates behaviors within limited domains, and can be both granted and gained over time and circumstances. Violating the limits and boundary of family honor carries the risk of severe repercussions. The critical analysis of cultural norms and internalized values revealed that a profound desire to uphold or establish family honor and prevent potential dishonor were pervasive motives for the perpetration of honor killings. The urge to kill in the name of honor encompassed series of attempts and efforts to protect oneself, family, and kin from the glaring eyes of society, community surveillance, gossip, and rumors. Honor-related behavior strives to avoid gossip and display full compliance to the norms of honor (Hongdao et al., 2018).

Protecting family honor and pride is seen as vital and nonnegotiable, contributing to the endurance and continuity over time and attitudes towards honor. The urge to kill or plays a part in an honor-related killing builds up over time, intensifies when the reputation of the family is at stake, and inflicts harm to the entire family and the future reputation as damage is inflicted. The overwhelming desire and efforts to protect family pride and dignity led to acts of extreme violence when all other means were

exhausted. Similarly, the perceived need to resort to violence became imperative when one's name was used dishonorably to harm others. In addition to preventing dishonor within the family, extreme norms and values regarding family honor were transmitted across generations. Honor-related norms and values, including the foundations of and explanations for behavior, in turn, were communicated within families using maternal and paternal figures as role models who purportedly endorsed and enforced normative beliefs and values. In conclusion, the models conceptualize honor using different definitions, thereby revealing different motivations and behaviors regarding honor (Sheth, 2024). The aims and desires of family honor and pride were at the core of the analysis of explanations and the perpetration of honor killings as early and unexpected deaths would prevent the family from solidifying its reputation in the eyes of the community; therefore, damage to honor would be both implicated as a result of the killing. Given the results, it is crucial to address long-standing and internalized beliefs related to family honor if there is a chance to prevent honor killings. In light of the current findings, the proposals to introduce changes in the Code of Law and the Istanbul Convention are further elaborated. It is implied that the traditional views of honor need to be re-evaluated and revised to deter the killings carried out in its name.

Media Representation and Public Perception

Although public awareness of the prevalence of honor killings in Pakistan is rising, the various social, economic, and legal factors that contribute to such crimes continue to be overlooked. In giving context to honor crimes, media narratives often rely on reinforcing the stereotypes of the nation. Cultural norms such as gender roles or family systems are often projected through the media and affect the perception of the domestic and international world about the society (Hassan Raza & Liaqat, 2017). Representations of "Pakistani women" often involve a woman in impoverished, gender-exclusive, traditional clothing who is screaming to relatives. This representation is usually fixed in villages, which in turn solidify negative impressions of people related to the region and religion. The relevance of the representation between gender, honor, and media, in particular the case of innocent killing and especially Karo-Kari, is vital in order to understand this concept and practice in Pakistan.

From time to time, sensationalized portrayal of individuals, organizations, incidents or issues within the media can lead to distorted perceptions and can disillusion the general public with claims of maligning individuals or groups. But it can also broaden

awareness and open up spaces for critical reflection and the discussion of concerns. Under the sponsorship-oriented policy, most media pay particular attention to cases of Karo-Kari that are sponsored, such as titles that provide a brief history of the occurrence and characters involved. Unfavorable social attitudes are described in the news, such as a landowner, chairman, or jirga who makes a decision against the innocent but defends the guilty. In most cases where a woman is killed, a man survives without injuries. Reporting of victims getting killed in local or seen following the murder is marked as a unique illness. The hospitalized victim reveals that poison is applied to her body, mostly to her private parts. Victims are required to give similar statements to the murderer prior to murdering, such as a marriage proposal or reconciliation.

Impact on Victims and Survivors

It has been long viewed as a mark to family respect that the honor of being closely linked to women and it reflects on the family and its males. Honor killings are not the practice of all Pakistanis, just a tiny minority. Respecting people for money and strength, often the tribe's tributary, tends to bull the law. Victims could be anyone suspected of shameful behavior, such as marrying a man of their choosing or falling out of such marriages, and the focus is squarely on women. More often the case is a woman shot, stabbed, or beaten to death in the name of preserving a family or tribe's honor for something that, in the eyes of the Western world, is innocuous, like getting raped, or for falling in love with someone who is not the family's, or tribe's, pick (Hongdao et al., 2018).

It details an honor killing at its most basic: A girl loved someone her family didn't approve of, and the tribal council demanded she be killed by her brothers, a duty they carried out. It highlights one of the many shameful honor killings to take place in Pakistan each year, and in most of them, the women, not the killers, were the victims, and the killers were often showered with praise for "restoring" their family or tribe's honor. It speaks to the inequalities that many Pakistani women face, especially when it regards their lives. Stunted economic prospects, lack of education, and difficulty in acquiring jobs make them dependent on fathers, brothers, or husbands (Shahid et al., 2024). So too does the law, for while Pakistan outlaws honor killings, the practice remains common and victims' families are often let off lightly by the authorities because, in part, they can't afford to seek "justice," which given how flawed the system is, is often not justice at all.

International Perspectives and Comparisons

Pakistan is a country where the sacred norm of honor has been hijacked and distorted into an absurd justification for brutal killings. Such cold-blooded brutal murders are termed as honor killings. It is a practice where a family, especially in rural and tribal areas, sacrifices a daughter, wife, sister, or mother in the middle of the dawn to wash away the shameful deed; otherwise, the 'good name' of the community would be sullied. The 'badal,' or revenge in the form of honor killing, transfers the property of the woman, especially her jewelry, in her family's possession to her husband's family. Pakistan has inherited several socio-politics and tribal customs since her independence from British Colonial rule, which is why the practice of honor killing is persistent in Pakistani society. This practice is replicating through generations, and many a time, the daughter of another honor crime victim becomes the next victim. Despite several judicial safeguards and international pressure, this sin against humanity is not annihilated from Pakistani soil. Instead, the number of honor killings has been on the rise in the last decade. From 2,960 cases registered during the year 2005, the number escalated to 5,036 cases in 2011 (Ne'eman-Haviv, 2021).

According to the human rights commission of Pakistan, there were 869 women that had been its victim in the year 2013 and 1410-1437 respectively in the preceding years (Hongdao et al., 2018). In conservative and undeveloped parts of the Muslim world such as Pakistan, the honor killing still flares up. The figures show that every year thousands of victims, mainly women, fall prey to so-called honor killings. There was staunch proof of laying the dead bodies of three young women at an isolated site in a jungle district of Jaffarabad in the vicinity called Usta Mohammad. The age of all three girls was below seventeen. With reference to the post-mortem report, there was an indication of rape before being murdered. There is hardly a month that passes by where such news is not published or broadcasted in media. In a number of the Islamic states, laws are in force that reduce the punishment for honor killing and state that the murdered person carries all the blame. In 1990, the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers submitted a resolution that acted as a loose knot in abolishing honor killings; however, the pressure is accumulated year by year. There still persists a divergence in law, where one law endorses killing for honor whereas the other is striving to uproot it.

Role of NGOs and Civil Society

Even with the new legal framework, the implementation remains seriously inadequate. The police often do not investigate crimes against women rigorously. Furthermore, the family of the woman

killed often forgives the perpetrator. This is possible because under Pakistani law murder is a public crime (Hongdao et al., 2018). NGOs also report that even when a case is taken to court there are often problems securing a conviction. Civil society and NGOs have played a significant role in challenging the practice of honor killings in Pakistan and, as this study shows, have been instrumental in ensuring some changes in the law. A number of organizations have been established that provide help and support for women facing honor crimes, including legal assistance. Among the more established organizations is the Aurat Foundation. Following an incident in June 1999 when 90 women were killed in an act of vengeance in the village of Meerwala, the Aurat Foundation has launched a campaign to raise awareness about honor killings and written to all organizations working on women's rights in Pakistan asking for help. This has resulted in organized mass events, including protest rallies and marches, as well as community outreach, including lectures and street theatre (Shahid et al., 2024). A similar initiative has been undertaken by the War Against Rape (WAR) organization. After the rape and murder of a woman in Gujranwala the NGO organized eleven additional centers for women experiencing violence, even though they are a relatively small organization operating with a limited budget.

Many organizations, such as Shirkat Gah and HRCF, combine community outreach - discussions, seminars, poster campaigns, radio, and television programs - with lobbying policy-makers and persuading MNAs and MPAs to raise the issue of violence against women in the Federal National Assembly and the Provincial Assembly of the Punjab. Groups such as ASR, AGHS, LAC, WAR, and HRCF and AS were also found to be involved in providing legal assistance to the victims of honor killings. Some organizations, like the AGHS Legal Aid Cell, had been participating in the free legal representation to women facing criminal charges, including 'honor killing' wenchers, for many years. WAR has launched a similar initiative by setting up legal defense units. NGOs were aware of legal loophole in section 311/B of Pakistan Penal Code and have been at the forefront of the campaign to have it repealed even before the Meerwala incident. Some organizations, such as the HRCF, have been more active than others in lobbying with the government to improve the implementation of the pro-women legislation. Successful lobbying by the AGHS Legal Aid Cell has also resulted in changing of transgender laws.

Government Initiatives and Policy Recommendations

A significant number of policies and programs have been launched to combat the menace of honor killings in Pakistan. The main focus of such policies and programs is the provision of shelters, legal assistance and counseling (Hongdao et al., 2018). The impact of several policies and programs is either marginal or non-existent because of less reach, corruption, poor planning, lack of monitoring, and bureaucratic hurdles. The Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act was passed in 2010 to deter honor-related practices in the workplace, while the Benazir Income support program, initiated in 2008, aims to empower women in rural areas. Similarly, as suggested by the Sindh police representative, over the past two years there have been concerted efforts to investigate honor-killing cases, including an increased deployment of officers to ensure the protection of women under threat. Despite these initiatives, the implementation of laws by government institutions is problematic, with a particular lack of initiative or engagement from the police. Regarding the latter, there is still significant opposition, or at best indifference, within governmental institutions to the laws designed to prevent honor killings (Nawaz et al.2022). However, the same culture of silence and tacit acceptance that surrounds honor killings also affects those in positions of institutional power with the ability to effectively block the investigation of such cases.

To effectively combat honor killings the government must make policies that encapsulate a legal, educational and social perspective. Such policies need to be formulated at the grass root level to ensure that awareness of the laws and programs penetrate deeply into society. While the current policies and programs are never discussed with local stakeholders, this is essential if all relevant parties are to participate, rather than only the examining officers of higher authorities. Involvement of local stakeholders is critical in law-enforcement and awareness-raising programs, as they are more trusted by the community and can act as a potent force to change social norms. Some programs, introduced in Commerce and Nursing Colleges, were initiated by SAP and the DCO, but without the involvement of the district Nazim or the DPO. Ultimately, programs have had little or no effect. In contrast, sustainable programs, organized by the DCO with the involvement of several stakeholders, have led to tangible reductions in honor killings. The involvement of local stakeholders is particularly effective in this regard. Local individuals understand the complexity of the dynamics in the community, and thus can play a critical role in the effective implementation of policies and programs (Maharaja et al.2024). The involvement of multiple

actors in Quetta, for instance, has led to a substantial reduction in killings within the city, as claimed by all the interviewees. Interviews reveal the different prevention practices they have adopted. These have included the organization of regular meetings focused on the topic of honor killings, with a particular focus on the monitoring of early warning issues. Discussions with community elders and the ulema are also organized on a regular basis, and they have been crucial in providing support for the formation of more effective policies. Meanwhile, all Nazmeens have jointly worked to ensure that they maintain a presence at legal forums.

Conclusion

Honor killings in Pakistan remain a deeply entrenched issue, rooted in patriarchal norms, cultural traditions, and systemic gender inequality. Despite legislative efforts to curb this practice, such as the Anti-Honor Killing Laws of 2016, the persistence of honor killings highlights significant gaps in enforcement and societal attitudes. The legal framework, while progressive on paper, often fails to deliver justice due to loopholes, such as the provision allowing perpetrators to be pardoned by the victim's family. This leniency, coupled with societal complicity, perpetuates a cycle of violence against women, who are disproportionately targeted for actions perceived as dishonorable, such as choosing their own partners or seeking divorce.

Cultural norms that equate family honor with women's behavior continue to legitimize these crimes, while patriarchal structures reinforce male dominance and control over women's lives. The lack of education, economic opportunities, and awareness further exacerbates the vulnerability of women, particularly in rural areas. Media representation, though increasing awareness, often sensationalizes these crimes, reinforcing stereotypes and failing to address the systemic issues that enable honor killings. Civil society organizations and NGOs have played a crucial role in advocating for victims and pushing for legal reforms. However, their efforts are often hampered by limited resources, societal resistance, and inadequate government support. Effective policy implementation requires a multi-faceted approach, including grassroots education, community engagement, and stricter enforcement of existing laws. Addressing honor killings also demands a cultural shift, challenging the deeply ingrained notions of honor and shame that justify such violence.

In conclusion, while Pakistan has made strides in recognizing the severity of honor killings, much remains to be done to eradicate this practice. A holistic approach that combines legal reform,

education, economic empowerment, and cultural change is essential to protect women's rights and ensure justice for victims. Only by addressing the root causes of honor killings can Pakistan move toward a more equitable and just society.

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