

Magnitude and Dynamics of “Honour Killing”-The local perspective

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What is 'honour killing'?

- **“Unlawful homicide, culturally sanctioned premeditated killings of women perceived to have brought dishonour to their families, often by engaging in illicit relations with men”**
- **“Premeditated killings of family members, primarily women, who are thought to have brought shame or dishonour to their family by engaging in certain behaviours considered unacceptable (e.g.-marital or extra-marital sexual relationships, or relationships with boys not approved by the family”**

Honour killing vs. Domestic Violence



- **Planning in advance for honour killings.**
- **Family complicity- multiple family members involved.**
- **Stigma- Perpetrators of honour killings often do not face negative stigma in their families or communities.**

Origin of 'Honour Killing'

- **Dates back to 'pre-Islamic' period when Arab settlers occupied a region adjacent to Sindh, which was known as Baluchistan.**
- **Settlers had strong patriarchal traditions with such practices as the live burial of unwanted newborn daughters.**
- **Such gender norms have become deeply entrenched in the social psyche of Sindh (Pk). Karo-Kari is the name for Honour Killings.**

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- **The notion of honour and shame and its justification for violence and killing is not unique to any one culture or religion.**
- **Some worldwide examples:**
- **Dueling was a practice in western societies.**
- **In Britain-the fifth wife of Henry VIII was killed based on allegation of adultery.**

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- **In British literature, Shakespeare's Desdemona was killed over allegations of infidelity.**
- **In the early times of Peru, the laws of Incas permitted husbands to starve their wives to death as punishment for committing an adulterous act.**
- **Aztec laws resulted in death by stoning or strangulation for female adultery during the early times of Mexico.**
- **In ancient Roman times, the senior male within the household retained the right to kill a related woman if she was engaged in pre-marital or extra-marital relations.**

Cont...Honour based violence



- **It is between men, sometimes involves women as collaborators.**
- **Circumstances: adultery, pre-marital sex or having a child out of wedlock, disobeying parents, patriotism/personal insult/defaulting on monetary debts, romantic partners without family's approval, marriage against family's approval etc.**

Fake Honour Killings

- **Reported by Amnesty International.**
- **Karo-kari used as a camouflage for men who murder other men in personal disputes.**
- **This tradition has been manipulated by tribes to settle rivalries in Pakistan-the typical example is that of ‘Mukhtara Mai’**
- **Women who demand divorces from their husbands.**

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- **In poorer communities of Sindh, especially when a woman is felt to have become a financial burden on the household.**
- **Convenient way of acquiring wealth or land by declaring a woman of their household as 'Kari'. This allows the family to obtain the victim's share of inheritance, as well as appropriate compensation from the co-accused 'karo' of their choice.**
- **Prevent a widow or divorced mother from remarrying in order to avoid the transfer of wealth to another family.**

Epidemiology of ‘Honour killings’



- **According to UN: 5,000 women worldwide are victims of such killings every year.**
- **This is an underestimate as many cases go unreported.**
- **Inaccuracy of these reported cases is reflected in the wide discrepancies between figures provided by various agencies.**
- **Human Rights Commission report: 1,464 killings in Pakistan between 1998-2002.**

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- **Victims of honour killings are mostly married females (HRCP, 2006)**
- **Single males are also affected.**
- **Perpetrators are male family members: husbands, brothers, family member under age 18. Males who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, under pressure to fulfill the gender norms of their culture. Males who find themselves unable to meet their gender role expectations, may resort to violence against women in order to assert their masculinity or as an outlet for frustration.**

Legal scenario

- **Some lawyers use as ‘honour defense’ with a plea that protection of honour is a type of self defense.**
- **Some attempts to use the plea of ‘temporary insanity’ or ‘crime of passion’ arguing that the homicidal acts were not premeditated but caused extreme provocation that lead to psychological distress, subsequent loss of control and impaired judgment.**

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- **Over the past decade, Human Rights groups have increasingly exposed various forms of gender-biased honour killing. A number of countries have legislative positions that allow for partial or complete criminal defense against criminal charges for such killings: Argentina, Ecuador, Guatemala, Turkey, Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Iran, Israel, Peru, Venezuela and Palestine.**

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- **Such killings have continued to occur in countries where they have been explicitly outlawed, such as Albania, Brazil, India, Iraq, Uganda, Morocco, Europe and North America.**
- **Pakistan has been notoriously known for high number of such cases. The ‘Hudood Ordinance’ was repealed by ‘Women’s Protection Bill’-yet the incidence is high.**

Canadian Perspective



- **So far slightly more than a dozen cases have been reported in Canada since the last ten years.**
- **Reported cases are low in number as compared to UK and USA.**
- **Famous cases are: Aqsa Pervez-ON, Kingston saga, Jaswinder Kaur Siddhu-AB, Montreal Report, Ottawa incident.**

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- **Under Canadian criminal laws-first degree murder is the intentional, premeditated killing of another person.**
- **With media reporting, Canadian Government has become for aware and sensitive to this issue.**
- **The recent CIC guide booklet mentions about non-tolerance of heinous crimes like ‘honour killing’.**
- **Canadian courts have occasions to analyze the phenomenon of such killings in the context of refugee protection law, in connection with such incidents outside of Canada.**
- **In 1993, Canada was the first country in the world to adopt gender persecution guidelines that assist in recognizing gender-based violence as a form of persecution for refugee status purposes.**

Psyche of perpetrators



- **Concept of “id” based on the principles pleasure principle.**
- **Biological differences among criminal psychopaths.**
- **Personality traits?**
- **20% offenders are psychotic.**
- **Personality Disorder as principal or secondary diagnosis.**

The Canadian Justice System



- **The Canadian Justice System has come across a number of cases with flavor of ‘Honour Crime’**
- **Arguments about religion &/or culture based homicide comes in courts.**
- **Existing laws does not give any pardon for a first degree murder.**
- **Dilemma of being multi-cultural state and tolerance.**

What can be done?

- **Legal System: No cultural consideration should be shown.**
- **Honour killing by virtue of its nature should be treated on par with any first degree murder.**
- **Stricter background family history checks for immigrants.**
- **Public education on this issue.**
- **Help line for potential victims.**

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- **Media campaign.**
- **Collaboration with organizations working against violence of any sort.**
- **High level government committee with stakeholders from every agency.**
- **Involvement of mental health professionals.**
- **Promotion of more research into this area.**