



Honor Killings in Pakistan: Patriarchy, Law, and the Struggle for Human Rights

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Abstract

Honor killing remains a pervasive issue in Pakistan, primarily rooted in patriarchal norms and cultural traditions that place a disproportionate emphasis on family honor, particularly linked to women's behavior. This study investigates the socio-cultural, legal, and religious factors contributing to the persistence of honor killings, exploring their frequency, impact, and the complex challenges surrounding their prevention. Despite the enactment of The Anti-Honour Killing Laws (Criminal Laws Amendment Act of 2016), implementation remains inconsistent, largely due to the dominance of customary practices over statutory law. The research highlights how gender inequality, tribal codes, and misinterpretations of religious teachings perpetuate this form of violence. Victims and their families often endure profound emotional trauma, social isolation, and systemic injustice. This study provides a critical review of current legal frameworks and identifies gaps in enforcement, while also offering recommendations for more effective policy implementation. These include strengthening law enforcement mechanisms, promoting legal literacy, and fostering societal awareness to challenge the cultural acceptance of honor-based violence. Furthermore, the paper calls for community-based interventions, educational initiatives, and religious discourse reform to dismantle the ideological foundations of honor killing. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the national and global discourse on human rights by advocating for a multifaceted approach to eradicating honor killings in Pakistan.

Keywords:

Honor Killing, Gender Inequality, Pakistan, Tribal Culture, Legal Reform, Religious Misinterpretation, Anti-Honour Killing Law 2016, Patriarchy, Cultural Norms, Human Rights.

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Introduction

The killing of women considered to be shameful to their families is a serious human rights violation in Pakistan (Ghazi & Salamat, 2024; Hadi, 2020). This custom stems from patriarchal beliefs where women's actions and sexuality determine a family's honor (Ali, 2024). Even though laws against honor killing have been passed, they still lead to many deaths yearly (Churchill, 2018). In South-Asian places, honor is valued, and not following society's rules is often seen as dishonorable for a woman (Talha et al., 2024). When women are killed because of honor, it is something individuals justify, even though it violates laws and respects human rights (Abid & Matloob, 2024).

The Anti-Honour Killing Laws (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act of 2016 in Pakistan was intended to tackle honor killings (Singh & Bhandari, 2021). However, the law includes a provision that allows the family of the victim and the offender to agree on a settlement, which generally results in a light punishment (Abdullah, 2023). Also, community support for honor killings and the effect of tribal justice contribute to the difficulty in putting a stop to them (Gabbay, 2024; Kanwal, 2021). We should consider what happens in cases of honor killing. During this analysis, we will explore the past and culture of such organizations, analyze the laws around them, and offer ideas for defeating them. The aim is to carefully identify ways forward and challenges faced today so that the essential efforts against honor killings can continue in Pakistan.

Research Justification

Honor killings are a significant concern for Pakistan and affect the fairness of society and gender. There are still cases of honor killings happening after new laws were put in place. Such crimes are mainly triggered by old traditions and the fact that laws are not the same across the board. Understanding what causes honor killings is very important for discovering how to put an end to them. One should keep in mind that unfair treatment towards women and men's absolute control are reasons for many honor killings in Pakistan. Since there are difficulties in stopping honor killings, this study is timely in Pakistan. The main goal of the article is to back an approach where everyone is considered by directing attention to religion, culture, and changes in the law. The outcomes may support future actions in Pakistan for equalizing gender and human rights in other parts of society.

Research Objectives

1. To discuss the historical context of honor killings in Pakistan.
2. To highlight the theoretical context of honor killings in Pakistan.
3. To analyze the legal framework addressing honor killings in Pakistan.
4. To identify the key challenges regarding honor killings in Pakistan.
5. To propose effective prevention and intervention strategies.

Research Methodology

1. **Relevance:** Researches that directly addressed the questions posed by this study are included.
2. **Quality:** Studies that meet a certain quality threshold (e.g., methodological rigor, bias risk) are included. Most of the research is from Scopus-indexed and Clarivate Analytics journals and reputed publishers.
3. **Recency:** Consideration of the publication date to ensure that the review reflects the most current evidence. Most of the studies are from the last three years.
4. **Language:** Only studies published in English are included.
5. **Data Completeness:** Previous studies must provide sufficient data on outcomes of interest for practical synthesis; this is also ensured in this research.

This study did not use primary data from human participants; therefore, no ethics clearance letter from the ethics committee was required.

Literature Review

In Pakistan, honor killings are widespread because the culture puts more value on family honor than on rights (Talha et al., 2024). As an example, the case of Qandeel Baloch drew attention worldwide, as her brother killed her in 2016 after she was criticized for her social media activities (Abbas, 2021). Even with the Anti-Honour Killing Laws in place since 2016, cases like Qandeel's reflect how hard it is for society to change these kinds of traditions. The practice of honor killings is based on the desire to safeguard family honor. It mainly targets women who have broken certain social norms, such as getting married outside family permission, requesting a divorce, or marrying outside marriage (Khan & Awan, 2021). This crime keeps happening even with legal changes, which suggests the presence of strong cultural and social factors supporting it (Ali, 2024). More efforts are needed to study and tackle the social and legal factors behind honor killings.

Many scholars point out that the belief in cultural and religious beliefs enables honor killings in Pakistan (Khayam, 2022). Studies also suggest that communities often use the wrong understanding of some Islamic teachings to justify extrajudicial killings, and this happens despite the religion urging justice, mercy, and respect for all (Zafar & Ali, 2020). Although reforms like the Anti-Honour Killing Laws (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act of 2016 prescribe harsher penalties for murderers, there are gaps in the law that often result in being too lenient and letting the murderers go free (Gul et al., 2023). Furthermore, most inhabitants still consider honor killings acceptable, which makes tackling this crime even harder.

Honor killings leave powerful social and psychological effects on their victims and also on their families and society. If someone survives an honor killing, they face stigma throughout life as they are seen as the source of family shame (Ghazi & Salamat, 2024). Relatives of victims often suffer trauma and go through financial difficulties, particularly if the victim has been the primary breadwinner and the family gets entangled in the judicial process or suffers ostracism (Gabbay, 2024). Those changes can be tackled by combining updated laws, educational efforts for the public, and support services such as counseling, legal guidance, and aid for the family's income (Abid & Matloob, 2024).

Addressing the problem of honor killings in Pakistan requires working on gender inequality, as it supports such killings (Neik & Jamal, 2023). Helpful actions include raising girls' and women's levels of education, helping women find employment, and extending their rights in law. These can challenge patriarchy and reduce honor killings (Bakht & Alizai, 2023). For example, giving women more opportunities to be educated may play a role in changing social views about their roles and decreasing honor killings. Additionally, speaking with religious and community leaders can help (Abdullah, 2023).

Honor killings in Pakistan are affected by religion, culture, and laws. Still, changes to repair this problem are hindered by society accepting it, gaps in the laws, and alternative systems of justice held by specific groups (Hadi, 2020). Stopping honor killings requires solid legislation, greater gender equality, and homing in on cultural changes that reject the violence towards women that some cultures enforce (Jain, 2023). If these problems are solved, Pakistan can build a society where every person's rights and dignity are respected (Kanwal, 2021).

Historical Context of Honour Killings in Pakistan

In the years before the advent of Islam and even after, honor killing in Pakistan was common since the behavior of women affected the status of families (Jain, 2023), while Pakistan was declared independent in 1947, honor killings continued to happen, often being defended by cultural and religious reasons (Abid & Matloob, 2024). Tribal customs, mainly through the Jirga system, gave more weight to honor killings since these informal groups often allowed them (Bakht & Alizai, 2023). Although laws against honor killings were introduced in 2016, the practice is still common, revealing how difficult it is to break up these traditional customs (Ghazi & Salamat, 2024). Because honor killings still exist, there is a need for efforts

that change laws and beliefs about gender (Talha et al., 2024). Solving these problems calls for a joint effort from different sectors, such as government, society, and community leaders (Ali, 2024; Gabbay, 2024).

Theoretical Context of Honour Killings in Pakistan

An appropriate theoretical perspective that would explain honor killings in Pakistan would incorporate the patriarchal theory, cultural relativism, and social constructivism. Patriarchal theory Patriarchal social systems have been discussed as a way of explaining how the social system dominated by males has continued to exercise control over female bodies and behavior, with family honor often being tied to female chastity. In some areas of Pakistan, cultural beliefs support the notion that women can cause the family to lose honor through their perceived disobedience, i.e., by choosing their husband, refusing to be married against their will, etc. In this case, violence is justified as a way of regaining honor. Social constructivism also explains that these norms are not inborn, but are built socially and passed down through generations. Honor killings are, therefore, not individual crimes of passion but indicators of gender inequality, tribe culture, and poor implementation of laws. Even with the legal changes, the social attitude and the abuse of the rules of forgiveness usually permit the offenders to walk scot-free, and it is, therefore, essential to approach both the legal and the cultural aspects of curbing the practice.

Legal Framework Addressing Honour Killings in Pakistan

Impressive changes have been made in the Pakistani justice system to stop the unjust act of honor killings. Importantly, the Criminal Laws Amendment Act of 2016 was created to ensure those convicted of honor killings would be sentenced to life in prison. One of the objectives of the law was to change the divisive point at which families and the offender had to agree on compensation for the victim, as most offenders managed to escape punishment due to it. Even with these reforms, the new legislation has many flaws. As an example, if the victim's family is able to forgive the person who committed the crime, often the penalties are lighter, which goes against the aim of the law and allows many of the perpetrators to avoid being held accountable.

Apart from the Anti-Honour Killing Laws, the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) and the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) include immunities regarding honor killings. Although the law tries to prevent honor killings, it is not applied successfully due to the general acceptance of those cases in specific groups and the established rules of tribal justice. Moreover, many victims and their families are not informed about their rights. The majority of people do not realize how much help they can receive, and the cost of having a lawyer is often too high for them to afford justice.

To put an end to honor killings, we need to make sure that efforts to enhance the law deal with all the complex issues involved. It calls for the elimination of openings in the law, strengthening the government's methods for accountability, and increasing understanding of the rights of victims and the resources available to them. If Pakistan takes a broad perspective, it can support the development of a law system that keeps individuals safe from possible harm posed by honor-based violence.

Challenges in Eradicating Honour Killings in Pakistan

1. A primary obstacle to the end of honor killings in Pakistan is the strong meaning given to family names in the country's culture. The norms often show that the honor of a family is seen through a woman's conduct, and so drastic actions may happen to protect that honor.
2. Even though new laws have been put in place to limit honor killings, there is weak enforcement. It is mainly because many people in society view honor killings as a proper response to mistakes, and strong tribal justice systems hide those

responsible. So, many offenders escape justice, which causes the problem of violence to continue.

3. People who are victims of honor killings and their families usually do not know what their legal rights are. A lot of them do not understand what rights they have, and the high price of getting a lawyer prevents many from seeking justice. Often, victims of domestic violence realize they cannot escape or ask for help due to their ignorance of this situation.
4. The general issue of gender inequality is the main reason behind honor killings. It is frequently thought that women's actions represent the reputation of their family. These attitudes ensure that women are treated inhumanely and their lives can be taken to satisfy family pride, so it is crucial to pay attention to gender inequality when working on a solution.
5. Even though the religion stands for justice, mercy, and respecting life, some individuals misinterpret its teachings to make honor killings seem right. Since these inaccurate beliefs are part of the culture, it is necessary to rethink and correct them so that more women are not harmed.

Discussion

Honor killings continue to serve as a serious human rights concern in Pakistan, with hundreds of women being killed annually by their relatives on the grounds of defending the so-called family honor. Such killings are usually instigated by acts that are considered dishonorable, like marrying without consent, seeking divorce, or even minor social interactions. Honor killings are firmly embedded in patriarchal societies and tribal cultures, whose members hold the misogynistic belief that women are the repository of family honor and that they need to adhere to strict norms of obedience and chastity.

The implementation is, however, poor despite the enactment of legal changes such as the 2016 Criminal Law (Amendment) Act that abolished the right of the family of the victim to pardon the murderer. Most of the cases are not reported, or they are resolved using informal systems of justice like jirgas, which tend to favor the perpetrators. The fear of retributive attacks, social stigma, and ignorance of the law further make the families of the victims fail to demand justice.

The last barrier to change is cultural acceptance of honor-based violence. The honor killing issue in Pakistan must be combated on various fronts, not just by improving the rule of law but also by educating about equal gender rights and undermining deep-rooted cultures through community mobilization and media sensitization. As long as these cultural and structural abodes of dwelling are not addressed, honor killings will maintain a flourishing business even amidst the successes of laws.

Conclusion

Honor killings in Pakistan are a complicated phenomenon that lies in the patriarchal culture, traditions, and poor law enforcement. Legislative changes have tried to curtail this violence; however, ingrained attitudes within society have legitimized and stabilized this kind of violence. Actual development must involve more than a change in the law- it must be a change in culture that questions the discrimination that exists between people of different genders and a redefinition of the concept of honor. The honor killings need to be stamped out, and the three steps that can help achieve that are the empowerment of women, the education of communities, and the enforcement of laws. It is only after long-term work at the social and institutional level that Pakistan can dream of putting an end to this savage practice and defending the rights of every citizen.

Recommendations

1. Ensure the anti-honor killing laws are without gaps, and also make sure the rules are adequately enforced. Reforming laws that allow family compromise may mean

that offenders do not get the lighter sentences they generally receive. A sound legal system is needed so that honor killings don't happen, and proper justice is given to victims.

2. It is essential to inform the public about what the law states and the consequences of honor killings, which can be done by conducting public awareness campaigns. Such efforts must be carried out in cities and villages so that almost everyone understands the importance of not accepting such violence.
3. To fight for a position against honor killings, women should be enabled via education, improved opportunities in work and business, and additional protection under the law. When women are able to provide for themselves, learn, and work, people may become more respectful, and their risk of facing violence can be reduced.
4. It is essential to reach out to religious authorities to challenge and revise arguments that use Islam to allow honor killings. Through communication with members of their communities, spiritual leaders can help emphasize justice and mercy based on true Islamic principles.
5. It is critical to train law enforcement on how to deal with honor killings sensitively and capably. Their training should include the right resources and explanations so they can correctly manage these crimes and support victims.
6. It is necessary to supply victims and their families with the care and assistance they require. Legal services, counseling, and secure centers should be part of this by giving a way for abused individuals to escape their partners without fear of those partners.
7. Regulate Tribal Justice Systems, such as the Jirga, to prevent them from supporting honor crimes. Monitoring actions has the potential to stop such systems from violating formal laws and making people more vulnerable to penalties.
8. It is essential to use the media to bring more focus to honor killings and to remove the cultural beliefs that contribute to these acts. Active participation in media can alter attitudes in society, feature survivor views, and help bring change at both the local and national levels.
9. Taking in more data helps officials know the full extent of honor killings and guide policies on them. It may find patterns, target specific steps, and see if what is being done is working to end honor killings.
10. If you become part of a global organization, you can gain resources, access the best techniques, and receive grants for your campaigns against honor killing. Cooperating with others allows Pakistan to have better tools for confronting slavery and always match modern human rights and gender equality standards.
11. Reform Tribal justice by giving official status to the Jirga so that honor killings become illegal
12. Work through the media to inform people and influence cultural patterns contributing to honor killings.
13. Better Monitoring: Gather more information on honor killings to help decision-makers understand the issue's actual impact.
14. Form global partnerships to share strategies and raise the necessary funds for fighting against honor killings.

Research Limitations

Work on honor killings in Pakistan is limited by several problems. It is difficult to obtain accurate information due to people not consistently reporting and society's disapproval of domestic violence. In addition, both victims and their families are less likely to report for fear of negative repercussions; because of this, discussing domestic violence remains

complicated. Finally, tribal courts make collecting data more complex, and changes in the legal system render research results quite fast.

Research Implications

Looking into honor killings in Pakistan brings specific vital findings. At first, it can help make laws tougher and improve how they are enforced. Second, it helps to organize public awareness campaigns meant to shape attitudes and support gender equality. Third, it provides support for legal aid and counseling services to help victims and their relatives. Finally, it encourages efforts at the international level, sharing experiences and advice.

Future Research Directions

Future studies on honor killings in Pakistan could explore different essential aspects. In the beginning, it could check if the present laws are doing their jobs and suggest ideas to solve any gaps in the system. Then, it could understand the roles of religious and community leaders in shaping attitudes toward honor killings. Next, it could assess how activities aimed at changing attitudes have affected society. Finally, it could collect information from survivors and their families to support them and suggest policy solutions.

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