

Opinions of university students on honour killings: Perspective from Islamabad and Rawalpindi

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Abstract

Honour killing incidents have been reported from every province of Pakistan. In 2014 a pregnant woman was killed in front of Lahore High Court, by her family members, in the name of honour. This study was conducted to determine the perspective of university students on honour killing with specific reference to one such killing incident in Lahore. Cumulatively, 989 students participated in the survey. Compared with female students, male students were less likely to agree and were more unequivocal that a woman has a right to marry any man she wants despite her family's disapproval, in a statistically significant manner. Similarly, male students were statistically significantly more likely to report that killing in the name of honour is always justified and were less equivocal about it compared to female students. Nonetheless, cumulatively 824 (83.3%) students believed that killing in the name of honour is not always justified.

Keywords: Legal age, Marriage, Students, Pakistan.

Introduction

Honour killing is a form of domestic violence, and Wikipedia defines honour killing as "homicide of a member of a family by other members, due to the perpetrators' belief that the victim has brought shame or dishonour upon the family or has violated the principles of a religion, usually for reasons such as refusing to enter an arranged marriage, being in a relationship that is disapproved by their family, having sex outside marriage, becoming the victim of rape, dressing in ways which are deemed inappropriate, or engaging in homosexual relations".^{1,2} Killings in the name of honour have been reported from Asia, Africa, and Middle East; while in Europe it has been reported among migrants.³⁻⁶

Only one study has reported on the epidemiological profile of honour killings in Pakistan, reporting 1957 such killings from 2004 to 2007 with a mean annual rate of 15.0

per million, among women/girls aged 15-64 years.⁷ A study based on 630 respondents aged 18-71 years in Islamabad reported in 2006 that based on a given vignette that majority of respondents considered honour killing justifiable.⁸ Human Rights Commission of Pakistan reported 869 honour killing of women in 2013.⁹

In May 2014, a pregnant woman was stoned to death by her family members in front of Lahore High Court, for marrying the man she loved, over her family's disapproval; a gruesome incident that was widely reported by international news media.¹⁰ There are no studies in Pakistan on the opinions of graduate and under-graduate students on opinions on honour killing or on any specific honour killing incident in Pakistan. This study was conducted to determine the perspective of university students on honour killing with specific reference to one such killing incident in Lahore.

Methods and Results

Using a pre-tested, self-administered questionnaire; a cross-sectional survey with convenience sampling was conducted among 20 to 29 year old male and female graduate and undergraduate students in 2 private and 4 public universities in the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

Opinions about the recent honour killing incident as well as other questions about opinions on men and women's rights to marry, daughters and wives obedience to fathers and husbands, and justifiability of killing in the name of honour were asked. The questionnaire was prefaced with the statement 'Did you hear or read about one woman who was stoned to death by her family members, outside Lahore High Court in a so-called honour killing for marrying the man she loved'. Questionnaire comprised of close-ended questions, and was administered from June to September 2014. Four trained male and female graduate students approached students in university campuses in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, and distributed the questionnaires after obtaining verbal informed consent and collected the completed questionnaires while ensuring complete confidentiality.

Data were analyzed using statistical package STATA 13, by

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Table-1: Opinions on honour killing incident in Lahore.

Opinions	Male (N=416)	Female (N=386)	P-values
This woman deserved to be killed			<0.0001
Yes	27 (6.5%)	12 (3.1%)	
No	345 (83.0%)	365 (94.6%)	
May be	33 (7.9%)	6 (1.5%)	
Don't know	11 (2.6%)	3 (0.8%)	
Family did the right thing by killing this woman			0.0001
Yes	22 (5.3%)	6 (1.6%)	
No	374 (89.9%)	370 (95.8%)	
May be	16 (3.8%)	6 (1.6%)	
Don't know	4 (1.0%)	4 (1.0%)	
Woman's family should have killed her husband as well			<0.0001
Yes	45 (10.8%)	22 (5.7%)	
No	317 (76.2%)	332 (86.1%)	
May be	37 (8.9%)	16 (4.1%)	
Don't know	17 (4.1%)	16 (4.1%)	

§ Based on Pearson Chi-Square test: All "Yes, May be & Don't Know" responses were combined into one group.

applying chi-squared test to assess the independent associations between categorical variables studied and gender. Statistical significance was defined as two-sided P-value of <0.05. All the affirmative answers were combined with 'May be' and 'Don't know', and compared with negative replies. This was done to determine the statistical association of affirmative and equivocality of responses.

Cumulatively, 989 students participated in the survey; 523 (52.9%) males, and 466 (47.1%) females; with 457 (46.2%) enrolled in bachelors programme, while the rest in masters programme. The mean age of male and female students was 23.2±2.8 years and 22.2±1.7 years respectively. The mean age of both sexes was found to be statistically significantly different (p-value = <0.0001), with male students being older than female.

Cumulatively, 802 (81.1%) respondents had heard about the Lahore honour killing incident; only these students were asked three specific questions about the honour killing incident. Table-1 lists the responses to these three specific questions pertaining to honour killing incident, disaggregated by gender. Responses of 'yes', 'may be', and 'don't know' were grouped together and compared against affirmative reply of 'yes', and their association was statistically determined between two gender groups. Males were more likely to reply that this woman deserved to be killed, family did the right thing by killing this woman, and that woman's family should also have killed the man who married that woman as well; or report more ambiguity by replies of 'may be' and 'don't know'; all three associations were found to be statistically significant.

Table-2 lists the opinions on gender role, obedience to father/husband, and killing in the name of honour. Again responses of 'yes', 'may be', and 'don't know' were grouped together and compared against affirmative reply of 'yes', and their association was statistically determined between two gender groups. Compared with female students, male students were less likely to agree and were more unequivocal that a woman has a right to marry any man she wants despite her family's disapproval, in a statistically significant manner. However, no statistically significant association was observed between the two gender groups, when the similar question was asked about man's right to marry. Similarly, male students were also more likely to agree and were less equivocal, that a daughter should always obey her father and that a wife should always obey her husband, in a statistically significant manner.

Regarding killing women/girls in the name of honour; male students were more likely to agree that such killing is justified, and were less equivocal compared to female students. Similarly, male students were statistically significantly more likely to report that killing in the name of honour is always justified and were less equivocal about it compared to female students. Nonetheless, cumulatively 824 (83.3%) students believed that killing in the name of honour is not always justified. However, when asked whether killing in the name of honour is justified in some circumstances only; no statistically significant association was found between the two gender groups. As cumulatively 448 (45.3%) students replied either affirmatively, or were equivocal about it.

Table-2: Opinions on gender role, obedience to father/husband, and killing in the name of honour.

Opinions	Male (N=523)	Female (N=466)	P-value§
A woman should have a right to marry any man she wants even without her family's permission or approval?			0.01
Yes	129 (24.7%)	91 (19.5%)	
No	302 (57.7%)	231 (49.6%)	
May be	74 (14.2%)	122 (26.2%)	
Don't know	18 (3.4%)	22 (4.7%)	
A man should have a right to marry any woman he wants even without his family's permission or approval?			0.081@
Yes	156 (29.8%)	112 (24.0%)	
No	267 (51.1%)	212 (45.5%)	
May be	91 (17.4%)	121 (26.0%)	
Don't know	9 (1.7%)	21 (4.5%)	
A daughter should always obey her father?			<0.0001
Yes	373 (71.3%)	252 (54.1%)	
No	55 (10.5%)	91 (19.5%)	
May be	87 (16.7%)	114 (24.5%)	
Don't know	8 (1.5%)	9 (1.9%)	
A wife should always obey her husband?			<0.0001
Yes	373 (71.3%)	218 (46.8%)	
No	70 (13.4%)	108 (23.2%)	
May be	71 (13.6%)	130 (27.9%)	
Don't know	9 (1.7%)	10 (2.1%)	
Killing women/girls in the name of honour is justified?			<0.0001
Yes	52 (9.9%)	7 (1.5%)	
No	420 (80.3%)	428 (91.8%)	
May be	29 (5.6%)	19 (4.1%)	
Don't know	22 (4.2%)	12 (2.6%)	
Killing in the name of honour is always justified?			0.002
Yes	47 (9.0%)	15 (3.2%)	
No	418 (79.9%)	406 (87.1%)	
May be	39 (7.5%)	31 (6.7%)	
Don't know	19 (3.6%)	14 (3.0%)	
Killing in the name of honour is justified in some circumstances only?			0.094@
Yes	127 (24.3%)	79 (17.0%)	
No	273 (52.2%)	268 (57.5%)	
May be	89 (17.0%)	95 (20.4%)	
Don't know	34 (6.5%)	24 (5.1%)	

§ Based on Pearson Chi-Square test: All "Yes, May be & Don't Know" responses were combined into one group.

@ Not statistically significant.

Conclusion

Honour killing incidents have been reported from every province in the country.^{1-7,9} In many parts of the country, women are construed as property of their family — akin to ownership of material goods — and this 'ownership' is passed on to her husband's family upon marriage. However, this transfer of ownership to husband's family is only deemed acceptable if marriage has been blessed by the woman's own family.

In our study male students reportedly had statistically significantly more conservative attitudes reflecting patriarchal and tribal traditions that — in the extreme form — result in brutality and violence against women.

Modernity and secular condemnation of honour killing has not eliminated institutionally ingrained misogyny in even purportedly educated strata of our society. Our study population — ostensibly more educated, cognizant of the rights of women, and belief in the rule of law — had alarmingly disturbing attitudes when it comes to extrajudicial killings in the name of crime based on misguided honour.

Quantifying the burden of honour killings and studying opinions and beliefs of the population on such killings in the country would be the first steps in developing targeted health educational campaigns to counter this public health problem. Nationally representative,

population based studies are needed to study such opinions including opinions on ways to combat killings in the name of misguided honour, trivializing human life.

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