



Media Hush on Honour Killing in Pakistan: The Case of Punjab

- i. **Dr. Irem Sultana**
- ii. **Dr. Malik Adnan**
- iii. **Dr. Muhammad Bilal Nawaz**
- iv. **Muhammad Umair Ashraf**

- i. Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication, Government College University, Faisalabad
- ii. Assistant Professor, Department of Media Studies, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur Corresponding Author
- iii. Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication Lahore College for Women University, Lahore Jhang Campus
- iv. Ph.D. Scholar (Sociology) School of Government, Universiti Utara Malaysia.

Abstract

This article examined the state of honour killing in Punjab-Pakistan. The study tried to find out the reasons of silence on national media regarding this shocking societal scenario. The study inspected the situation of honour killing during last eight years in most populated province of Pakistan and ignoring behavior of media giants of the country on this immoral social attitude. The results of the study showed that Pakistani media ignored the very crucial societal issues and focused just politic and so-called breaking news. There are political talks on media all around, but the real societal issues have no space on both print and electronic media outlets of main stream. The research finding showed the scenario of the media understudy that there is not a single detailed, objective report or investigative story on any of the TV channels, regarding this unethical communal behavior of the most populated province of Pakistan. The study also presented a view that there might be some commercial benefits and ulterior motives behind this attitude of mainstream media. The qualitative content analysis technique was used to have the upshots of the scenario.

Keywords: Honour Killing, National Media, Societal Behavior, Punjab, Pakistan

Introduction

Media had been considered the key component of the modern societies and to inform the people had been considered the basic responsibility of media as it had mentioned by Ahmed (2018) that, about the activities in society the role of Media to inform the public is very important. The media have to play a role like watchdog and inform the people about experiences and happenings around. The picture had been clear with several studies that society, as whole demands truth from individuals and media too. Ahmed (2018) presented the reality with these words, "Truth is worldwide datum and no any faith, civilization or public allows stand-in or asking in paradox of the Reality.

To search and present the truth is continuously remained a mandate by community to the media”.

As Coronel (1908) stated that, “People demands, and media personnel should work like a supervisory body (watchdog) of the public to search the reality and ‘Truths’ from messed information coming from various corners and sources.” Concept of ‘honour killing’ is defined in the Encyclopedia of Britannica as under, “These kinds of killings are a method of gender-based forcefulness that branched from the acceptance that a woman’s worth integrated in her sexual decorum and ‘purity’. In societies where this faith is extensive, damage of that ‘purity’ is reflected to bring humiliation upon a family. Hence it is supposed that ‘honor’ can be reinstated through these acts of ferocity”.

The killing of someone, especially girls is always be considered immoral and a crime against humanity and women. The data showed that honour killing is high in Muslim majority areas of the world. The international organizations like UNO, UN Women, UNIFEM and others had advised to stop this type of activities all over the world through women empowerment and enlightenment. Media in third world generally and in Pakistan especially has to play a developmental and specialized role to eliminate the honour killing. The honour killing in Muslim areas had wrongly associated with Islamic preaching (Muhammad, Ahmed, Abdullah, Omer, & Shah, 2012). The honour killing in Pakistan had not been a recent issue but it always be pinpointed with backward and tribal areas of Sindh, Baluchistan and KPK through NGOs and international media. The province of the Punjab considered a bit literate and moderate area and media never ever showed the high level of honour killing in Punjab and never speak on the phenomena behind this type of killing of women. But current figures of education rate showed this consideration partly wrong, as the data of education department 2018-19 presented, that overall matriculate population in the country was 17.29 percent but in Punjab the ratio was 16.78 percent, below than all other provinces. The Punjab had graduate rate 3.23 percent from overall 4.38 percent and sixteen years master’s ratio 1.07 percent from overall 1.58 percent, which is the clear sign of low literacy rate in this province of Punjab, Pakistan.

The national media always associated the honour killing, “*Karo Kari*” with Sindh and Baluchistan generally, the most populace province of the country, Punjab had been considered at lowest regarding immoral behavior of honour killing. But the official data presented another picture that Punjab is highest to all other provinces regarding honour killing phenomena. The honour killing in Punjab seemed to be much higher and girls are especial target of this immoral and unethical activity but there is no voice in national media to protect the lives of the victimized people and truths of this bitter reality of the society. Along with determining the media hush and its reasons current study also describe how media should play its basic role as a mirror of the society keeping in view the socially responsible role of the media. As theory basically provide five points of guide line for media to full fill the duties of the media for the society.

Methodology

This study was aimed to explore the silence and reasons of this silence of main stream media on immoral and unethical behavior against females, regarding their murders and brutal violence on them in the most populace and generally liberal considered province of country (The Punjab). The study assessed perception of sociologists, Senior Media persons, and representatives of civil society, senior police officials through scheduled interviews regarding the issue under study. Official data of police departments and different human right organizations re-

garding honour killing in Pakistan and its appearance on media is analyzed and described qualitatively. The news stories of honour killing published in international print media were explored and analyzed to find the facts, that there were stories, which are not presented in Pakistani media. The qualitative content analysis technique and descriptive method was used to find and present the results of the study. To study the state of honour killing and its presentation on main stream media researcher tried to the phenomena qualitatively, Logical analysis of the interviews was done to understand phenomena behind this ignoring attitude of main-stream media outlets. Researcher constructed the questionnaire keeping in view the five guidelines of the social responsibility theory (Middleton, 2009). Those are as under,

1. A truthful, widespread, and smart version of routine happenings of events in circumstances which give them meaning.
2. Media is a healthy platform for comments and criticism.
3. Representative of people and specific constituent groups among the population.
4. The representative and explanatory role of aims, values and objective of the society.
5. Comprehensive access to the day light's brain of the society.

Results and Discussion

The honour killing never considered big issue in Punjab and media always mentioned tribal land of the KPK, backward areas of Sindh and Baluchistan as center of this immoral act. There might be some media presentation regarding honour killing about the southern districts of the Punjab and literacy rate and morality issues presented with it. Internationally, the honour killing in Muslim countries associated with Islam and a wrong perception was lying that Islamic ideology becomes the cause of this immoral attitude. The Islamic principles never allowed to accuse anyone without evidence and required four eye witness of seeing sexual intercourse with their eyes otherwise the complainant has to punished with *Qazaf* law and accused not. According to *Quranic* teaching the spying in someone's personal affairs is strictly prohibited.

In Pakistani context, our laws strictly prohibited the killing of anyone with any name or blame. The killing with the name of honour not permitted in accordance with law and rules. There is no extra favor for killer if associated the killing with honour. Instead of this the killing associated with honour had not yet stopped in the country. The honour killing is clear sign of obscurity, blackness and ignorance of Islamic principles, *Quranic* teaching, country's law, international rules and human rights. Pakistani Media generally ignored the issue of honour killing, and associate it with Sindh and Baluchistan if presented it, in any report. There had not been seen any program or report regarding honour killing in Punjab during the last ten years in mainstream Pakistani media. The official data showed that honour killing rate is higher in Punjab than other areas of the country. The data presented the scenario that 2523 persons, more than 80 percent females were killed with the name of honour in Punjab during 2011 to 2018. Interestingly, the highest rate of honour killing was remained in Faisalabad region as compared to other eight regions within the Punjab. The Punjab had highest honour killing rate as compare to other provinces. The Sindh was second in this regard but very low as compare to Punjab. There were 181 persons killed in Punjab and 92 in Sindh during 2017; in Punjab 244 and in Sindh 108 during 2018 with name of honour. The honour killing rate in KPK and Baluchistan remained lower than Sindh (Police records).

For anyone who is after, the news from Pakistan, proceeding few months has enough for ugly reading, when it comes to fierceness of ferocity against women in Pakistan. Here are few examples of translated news from local newspapers; those were not seen on main stream media, especially on electronic media channels.

“Just a twenty one year’s women in the Punjab, was raped and strangulated to death by the man, she had trusted on him to save her from ‘ honour killing’ by her family”. (*roznama sarfrosh faisalabad* dated 5/5/2019) “*Saba Maqsood*, miraculously stay alive being fired by her families and discarded in to a raj bah (small canal) in Hafizabad town in Punjab, for trying to wed the man of her choice, contrary to the wish of her family members” (*Roznama Aaena*, Faisalabad 12/7/2019).

“Recently in Lahore, *Farzana Iqbal* was badly beaten to death with bricks, by up and about to many (more than 20) kinsfolks, together with her father, for wedding the man she loved and valued”(Roznama *Masha-e-Rah* Sheakhupura 18/3/19 & Amnesty International). “A Pakistani woman with her 2 kids, and 6 of her other parental kinfolk were unluckily killed on Monday, due to self-assumed ‘honor killing,’ in Multan south Punjab, Reuters reported. Concerned investigation officials said that *Muhammad Ajmal*, her husband, had returned back from Saudi Arabia, he was employed there as a tailor, to carry out the multiple killing because he saw a snapshot of his wife, *Kiran*, with a male and doubting extra matrimonial affair” (Archives of Amnesty International).

Hundreds of women including young girls like *Kiran* are thought to be sufferers of ‘honor killings’ each year in Pakistan. These slaughters are a kind of sex based heart less vehemence and usually happened in societies and ethos where female are understood and treated as material goods, property and personal belongings, whose value, lies in their virginity or sexual shyness, These are undoubtedly ‘honor killings’. As he (*ajmal*) saw a snapshot of his wife with other male and supposed that she was having an extra matrimonial affair, and murdered her”. Fire on furious that no time and place on main stream media in general and on electronic media channels specifically, as societal unethical and criminal issue. Few more news stories quoted here from local newspapers and same were in archives of international NGOs, to make blur picture clear, that these news stories were not reported by electronic media at all.

On January 10, 2020 reported that Sheikhpura police solved a unsighted murder case and arrested the real father of deceased teenage *Mehwish*, who was brutally killed for honour. Rapidly a native farmer called the 15 emergency police, as he saw *Madiha's* dead body on a farm, to report it. The twenty six year unmarried female had been cruelly slayed, with her gullet cut frequently and her entire body injured with knife injuries. *Madiha* is from *Nau-shehra Warkan*, a small town of eastern Punjab. She was cruelly murdered due to her desired to wed by her selection. Her family, including her parents was not agreeing with the wedding. FIR (Initial inquiries) reports, her mother and 2 real brothers killed her, in the name of 'honor' ‘*izzat*’ of clan. Ali Akbar, an area police investigation officer, wrote in report. Natives told that she had escaped with men 4 years ago. Some days prior to her murder, her family had find out to *Madiha*, through her sister and guaranteed her that in case of her return home, the family would forgive her sin. “We told her that we forgave her [for getting married]. When we were coming back, my 2 sons stopped the motorbike and told me to stay there. “Then both brother took *Madiha* to the farm and murder her, *Iqbal Bibi*, Mother of Accused girl said. Honor killings aggravated in the gloomy solitude of the homes. It is the right moment, to uncover this type of crimes to the light of communal inspection, to the education of the masses and country law through media for larger interest of the society. Miserably, hundreds of females including young girls are focus to “honor killings” in the country annually.

All of above cited stories and many others were published in international print media or they were published in news collection of NGO’s reports, or in local Pakistani newspapers. But

they could not find their place in Pakistani Electronic media. Hundreds of such stories from Punjab could not found on mainstream media due specific mind sets of the reporters and policy of media houses. The high rate of honour Killing required attention of media to highlight the issue, its pros and cons and aware the people in this regard with religious and legal aspect. But Pakistani media still failed to fulfill its responsibility towards the honour killing. Society seemed to be voice less and ideologically away from morality in this regards. The “ignorant behavior” of Pakistani media, on the issue of honour killing, is a question mark on media’s basic duty of presentation of truth (Mellado & Lagos, 2014). In some cases presenting doubts by media about deliberate obliviousness with some ulterior motives. The commercial benefits elements also seemed behind this oblivion and oversight attitude. The high rate of honour killing in Punjab is showing the illiterate attitude, immoral behavior and blackness approach of the society. The situation required guidance and awareness for society with Islamic, legal and international perspective. Media is the basic stake holder to guide and aware the society and the mainstream media have to meet challenge of contemporary Pakistan and guide the society according to its objective with all required aspects to decrease the phenomena of honour killing. There is no trust worthy certified statistics on “honor killings” as this kind of cases most of the time went unreported or are reported as suicide or natural deaths by kinfolk and family. But then again as a hint, in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, minimum ninety four (94) women were killed by their close family members during last year. Averagely one thousand females including teenager female were killed on the name of honour “*Izzet*” in the country annually.

Only in Faisalabad there are more than two hundred young women are killed during last year including 3 university students, among two were from GCUF. Both were not reported as honour killing but one is converted in suicide and other is in murder, family in spite of their wealth did not peruse the cases properly. in one case of GC university student’s murder her friends and other fellows tried protest but none of family members of that girl appear in protest. Only one local channel *City 41* covered this story only for 2 day and just created the doubts about murders by presenting the interviews of family members (father & one brother). All other national channels remain silent on the issue. Fellow in spite of hard effort could not get attention of mainstream media resultantly case was ignored by police department too and after a year no one is arrested till now.

Data collected, from the local newspaper for the year of 2018 showed that above fifty percent (55%) criminalities with female in the country of Pakistan done by their family (blood relatives). The collected data does not cover the entire incidents of this specific crime in the country but it is sufficient for an expert of social science research to draw an image that can find out certain elementary reasons of the issues regarding media and society understudy. Let me quote some statements of the murderers to prove in human and unethical social behaviors of the killers who were unashamed and unrepentant.

“I killed my sister because she brought bad name for the family,” Murderer told to his neighbors, in Faisalabad, a district of the Punjab, Pakistan.

“I killed her and her lover for family honour. I want it to be a lesson for all girls in the town” Lahore; a division of the Punjab, Pakistan. They are not only brutal but their tones showed the pride, that they felt on their so called justified and honoured act. “No matter how much one highlights this nuisance, government, rarely arrest and punish the actual culprits. The disturbing part is, that all the killers I interviewed, never felt guilty.” said a journalist.

A senior, district police officer *Imran Mehmood*, in Multan, where nine people were killed brutally, told in an interview to Reuters. “He does not repent his actions,” “Residents consider that other members of the killer’s family may have been involved in but, till the fifteen days passed after the bodies were found; no arrests have been made by police, although police are aware of the accusations.”

The Dawn reported, women, from Lahore, fired to death, apparently by her own son, her brother and brother-in-law, after exit from her husband’s home and taking shelter at her friend’s place. Police (admitted) said, they recover the dead body of *Arooj Shahzad* just after twenty-four hours, when she contacted to police officials, and showed her fear that her family would follow her and kill her. Police lodged a FIR against five unknown persons. *Arooj’s* murder was the twelfth in a fortnight (NGO’s archive) linked to “honour” killing in Pakistan recorded by the authorities. Every week in country brings fresh news stories of married women strangulated, daughters fired or sisters sunk for a superficial supposed slight to family “honour”. At times one person is responsible for such crimes but more often, a group of male kinfolk is involved. In these types of cases mostly criminals went unpunished. In *kirn* and her 9 family members’ murder case, *Ajmal* has admitted to firing the relatives of *kirn* and setting fire to the house, as per FIR. *Ajmal* and his father was the partner of the crime, are now in police custody and have been charged with murder. Police still in search of his brother, whom they thought was involved in the case. This heinous crime was also not reported by main stream electronic media as it should be reported properly as per news vales as well as for socially responsible media. Statistical data from the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan showed, there were more than thirteen hundred same kinds of killings in a period of 2 years but only four hundred (400) of which were formally recorded as crimes by the police stations. Electronic Media never reported such kind of information and did not hold a discussion on it.

Above cited examples of news about violence against women in Punjab and related data almost cleared the picture of social/criminal issue and scenario of Main stream media regarding its presentation. Furthermore to fulfill the objective regarding reasons of issue under study that is not simple but very complex. Current study tried to reveal the reasons behind as under; Human rights campaigners said more than fifteen hundred killings occurred, number anecdotally established by, vice chairman of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan during her interview as ‘off the record. *Maliha Saeed*, a woman’s rights activist since many years, says in her interview the country government administration has to fix this is need to much more to do, that is being done, to control ‘honour killing’ in the country. It has to do empowerment and enlightenment of women, politically, economically, socially and morally. She further suggested Government should direct the PEMRA to use Media Channels for spreading the message against honour killings on country level, through news, dramas and talk shows and other productions. It should help to discourage viciousness against women through media countrywide.

Pakistani parliament passed bill of legislation unanimously, to counter the killings related to the concept of “honour”, or “*izzat*”, subsequent the brutal killing of *Qandeel Baloch* in 2016. It was the single case that was reported nationwide because of social media celebrity and involvement of religious scholar. The murder of the celebrity *Qandeel Baloch*, who was murdered by her younger brother for “honour”, flashed international outrage. Murders of those individuals, who break up firm “patriarchal codes” have still sustained at the same ratio, told *Nida Kirmani*, associate professor of sociology, at Lahore University. “Honour crimes” are

stanced as a way of amending or correcting womenfolk, male community who are noticed to be profane these rules.

Impartially as substances linked to kinfolk are solid in blood, so those who make efforts to make vigilant the establishments (of society like culture, faith, gender etc) danger their lives, relations and property too. *Afzal Kohistani*, a journalist and human right activist who raised voice for the punishment of those who involved in the *Kohsitan* scandal, in which 5 females murder as well as *Kohistani*'s three brothers too, was killed in March this year. None mainstream media reported this case as per merit. Pakistani Electronic media never showed the real issue of *panchayats*, that they hold illegal form of justice, even police accepted the decisions of *panchayats* and always wait for the illegal involvement of them and deliberately delayed FIRs. Members of *panchayats* also often charge a commission and are instrumental in perpetuating their power. The judgments affirmed by these male members (they are always male) are often illogical, male-controlled and very anti-women, such as giving women in inter-change, women in payback revenge, and treating women as bartering chips and as property.

Media especially electronic media never reported these cases properly but it also doesn't become the voice of innocent killed. It is also on record that media persons got threats from the family and influential people in case of reporting more than average. Reporters also bribed in case of taking interest in honour killing cases in Punjab. Policy of Media and rating system of the electronic media is also a strong barrier in way of reporting actual issue of honour killing, these cases if reported they were treated as ordinary crime not an issue of society that should be stopped.

Another point of view about honour killing being not presented on media properly, is, the male crime reporters of media, who themselves filter these news story because of the member of the same society having same set of values and culture. They (reporter) were biased about honour of the family and ignore the innocent women killed as they were themselves feel that act of women, dishonored the family and hence family has right of punishment. Claim of 'ghairat' or honour is accepted as a social phenomenon for a long time in human history and in different faiths as well. It is so deep rooted that even a media reporter and policy maker could not get escaped psychologically in spite of their logical knowledge.

'Honour killing' is not reported properly in electronic media, it is a proven fact of the current study, but there are so many reasons. Beside all other, one is more important now days that is downsizing in media, in general. Especially in electronic media outlets number of reporters is too short to cover issues like 'honour killing' in the presence of so called "breaking news" of Political corruption, Sports and showbiz etc. Mostly cases of honour killing are from remote areas of Punjab, due to few reporters of electronic media there is no time, space and resources for probing and investigation. All media reporters are over worked and overburdened due to rate race of so called breaking news. Concept of investigative stories on main stream electronic media is drowned during current financial and downsizing crises of media. That is the outcome of government policies about media industry and the policies of non-journalistic ownership of too. Issue of non-journalistic ownership is the limitation of the current study.

"Just as matters related to family are settled in blood, so too those who try to alert the authorities risk their lives", is another excuse for reporters not to report honour killing properly. Civil society representative still argued that honour killing in Pakistan is not an issue; it is just a stunt of "*Mom bati mafia*" to defame Pakistan and an effort to destroy family system in Pakistan. Invasion of western culture on media corrupts Islamic culture is also an argument for

not supporting the issue according to civil society. Women as a daughter, sister, mother and wife are responsible of grace, dignity and respect of their families is still a valid argument for civil society. So her moral duty is to priorities honour .whenever respect of family and her desires are in contrary to each other she should surrender her wishes. They further argued according to Islam a woman is dependent of man so *mahram* or *wali* is responsible to decide her fate. Media houses and reporters are working according to the stereo types of such kind of civil society regarding “honour killing” and domestic violence against women. The heinous issue of honour killing of female gender in Pakistan is not only an issue to report on media, is become an ethical ignorance of reporters of electronic media too. They are incapable of establishing the issue of honour killing on media in such a way that society and authorities can overcome the taboo of respect, *izzat* or honor. As electronic media is not presenting the killing of young girls properly, they only focused on so called breaking news. The murders of young women of and on appear on screen of television as tickers not as a crime story to highlight the issue. It could be debated that crime of Honour Killing must be dealt as *Tazeer* that means; ‘Crime’ against the State and it should be considered out of the ambit of *Qisas* so that *Wali*, the guardian of female victim cannot compound or waive off the punishment. Because in mostly cases of honour killing and valiance against female has done, one of her relatives, the Husband/Father/brother or son has murdered his wife/daughter/sister or mother. In case if brother killed his sister, the Father becomes *Wali* and at the end of such kind the offence, it is either surrendered or compounded under Section 309 or Section 310 PPC and such practices are being accepted in Pakistan and no issue regarding such law although it should be amended. In situations like this the role of media become more crucial and obvious but National mainstream media never reported these stories in a way that this crime against women should be established as illegal and unethical crime against society and in broader sense against the state of Pakistan.

So it can deduced that main stream media in the country over all none of any guideline of social responsibility (Bajracharya, 2018) is practiced. In Punjab All electronic media keep silence throughout the eight years of the study regarding honour killing in Punjab. Even Media did not provide a platform for discussion or criticism. This media hush is a question mark on entire political and social system of the country.

Without a democratic state and independent responsible media Sidiqqi (2018), which empowers women and enlighten whole society, honour killings will continue. Justice for Pakistani women requires a broader government effort, including more state prosecutions of “honor killings,” reformed criminal laws, and greater access for women and girls to safe emergency shelters and other services when they report risks from their family. The government should end a system in which a woman’s life is considered worthless and family members can kill with impunity. Crime reporters and media authorities, law enforcement agencies, government (National & local), police surgeons, Human right activists and civil society should be one page, regarding this heinous crime against women in the name of respect “*Izzat*”. Women in society as well as on media should not be treated as property or commodity; she is an individual having all rights that are the same as any other gender. Main stream media and its reporters should be trained and educated for establishing the Issue of Honour killing in society. Media should be responsible for the mental and ethical growth of the masses by providing the True information about issues of the society. And by establishing the crucial issue, media can provide the forum of discussion and criticism to the civil society to improve the fabric of the ethics and society. To provide better life and equal opportunities to the masses is the ultimate goal of democracy and all belief systems, media could help the system

to achieve the ultimate goals of better life and equal opportunities by information and education.

Conclusion

This research reached certain findings like; The highest rate of Honor killing in Pakistan is lying with the province of Punjab, contrary to common perception, that it is occurring more in interior Sindh, KPK or Baluchistan and in Punjab, unlikely in Southern Punjab, it is central Punjab, specifically, Faisalabad Division, where honor killing has been committed most. Punjab police data shows that there are only in one year i.e.2018, more than 200 honor killing cases reported in Punjab. Again, contrary to the general perception, it is shown through data, that literacy rate, in most populated province i.e. Punjab, is lowest than other provinces.

Media has their main role of being a mirror to the society. But when it comes to Honor Killing in Pakistan, media generally and Electronic media, specifically, has failed to play their role. For last eight years, media did not pay much attention to this heinous crime and remained almost hushed.

Further digging into the matter why media has been hushed, interviews of renowned journalists were conducted and it showed that as a member of the society as well as a journalist they see no big harm in honor killing when the question of honor of the family comes into play. They find 'no news' in highlighting such killings. Mainstream media neither doing the role, as mirror of the society nor it is socially responsible regarding presentation of the issue of 'honour killing'. For this most populace area of the country current study found, that none of guide line of social responsibility theory has been followed by national media. This specific situation creates doubts against media as fourth pillar of estate (Amodu, Usaini, & Ige, 2014) and its watch dog role as well, in a democracy.

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