

Study of Causes and Correlates of Honor Killings in District Sukkur

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Abstract

Honour killings in Sindh are result of backward attitudes, male-oriented suspicion, cultural customs and rural ecology. The perpetrators are male-dominated actors, usually husbands, brothers and fathers. The victims are excessively married females young ranging from ages twenty to thirty one. Pistol, gun and hatchet are the main methods of the killing. Honour killings are customarily prevalent in Upper Sindh. This study explores the causation and characteristics of honour killings in district Sukkur, Sindh, Pakistan. Theoretically, people become violent when they are threatened and fearing that they are losing their self-worth(Toch,1993). The incidence could be controlled through mass awareness, attitudinal change, weapon control, community-oriented policing and women playing active role in Criminal Justice System.

Keywords

Honour Killing, Karo Kari, Sukkur, victim-offender relationship

Background

Honour Killing is an imprecise term for murder precipitated by aggressor's loss of honour. It is defined as the "ritualized form of violence usually with male perpetrators and often, but not always, female victims". The offender (otherwise the victim) is typically killed by close family members, most often a brother, father or husband, on their own accord (Cess & Sawtiri,2001) Honour killing of a girl or woman by her father, brother or relative may occur because of the suspicion that she has engaged in sexual activity before or outside marriage and thus has dishonored the family (Siegel, 2009). The woman/girl, believed as custodian, is believed to have dishonoured the family (Goonesekere, 2004).She has involved in sexual misconduct requiring her to be killed for upholding the family honour (Siegel & Welsh, 2009). The incidents of honour killings are reported very high in Upper Sindh districts including Sukkur. This study is geared to determine age-characteristics & marital status of female victims, victim-offender relationship and weapons used in honor killings in the Sukkur district of Sindh, Pakistan.

Honour criminality involves beating, battering and killing girls or women by a family member or a relative In other words the killer is motivated to kill the victim because the family respect has been threatened (Frank, 1994).Rural Women in Sindh equally participate in agricultural labour. Their labour and daily routine

activities automatically pitch them in the environment conceived by male-dominated society as suspicious. The vulnerability to the victimization is partially determined by paradox of the freedom provided to females in rural social milieu.

The lack of trust on females shapes the circumstances of honour killing (Pierre, 1997). Criminology in rural areas has been theoretically neglected. Felson (2006) has pioneered the approach in context with rural crimes, their nature and linkages to ecology and social environment.

There are various perspectives and theories related to violence. There are different reasons why people become violent. Violence may be result of low-self esteem (Schoenfeld, 1988; Toch, 1993). Honour killings are definitely involve violence. Honour-related violence does have typical nature. Toch (1969/1993) observed that many violent men seek out or manufacture situations in which their self-worth is challenged, with the result being a violent confrontation. Violence may be result of perceived sense of disrespect, insult and strain. Honour killers perceive that they humiliated by the women who has involved in illegitimate sex. Saving honour creates lot of strain on perceived family head. Violence is outcome of threatened egotism. Self-enhancement and self-verification motives converge to provoke retaliatory response to the perceived threat or insult (Baumeister, Smart & Boden, 1996). The honour killers are in a state of mind rationalizing violence for protecting family honour. They are unchecked to kill the female especially whom they attach the symbol of family sanctity.

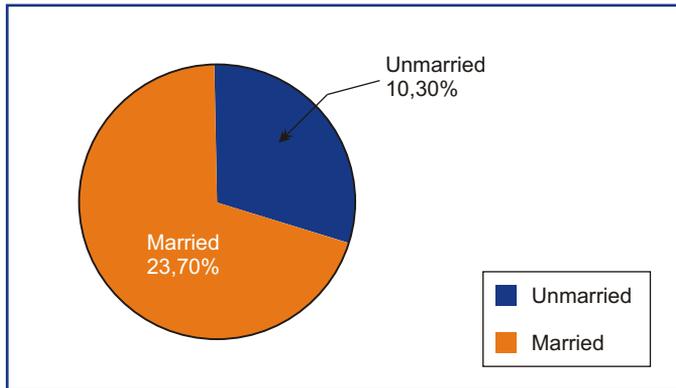
Hackney (1969) and Gastil (1971) argued about the prevalence of violent crime in American South and attributed it to subculture of violence. Thus, violence is sanctioned in defense of honor, family and property. The concepts of Zar (wealth), Zameen (property/land) and Zan (woman) are roots of strife and violence more adequately in Sindh. Problems in Sindh revolve around these three elements. Failure of the Criminal Justice System facilitates lawlessness including violence against women. Cohen (1992) also supported the above thesis believing that the violence can be situational in nature and cultural context (Walters, 2002). Honour killings are sometimes result of situations shaped by the actor couples or by their family members. Violence thus ultimately turns into homicide-situation. Women are killed while seeking the life-partner of their own choice.

Study Method

This study is descriptive in its nature. The study has focused incidents of honour killings in Sukkur district of Sindh. The F.I.R. (First Information Report) based information has been the main source. F.I.R. consists of official information recorded by the police from the complainant against the accused party. This study includes the data of the cases of the years (2008, 2009 and 2010). The data is entered from the year (a) 01.03.2008 to 31.12.2008, (b) 1.3.2009 to 31.12.2009 and (c) 01.01.2010 to 17.03.2010.

Data Analysis

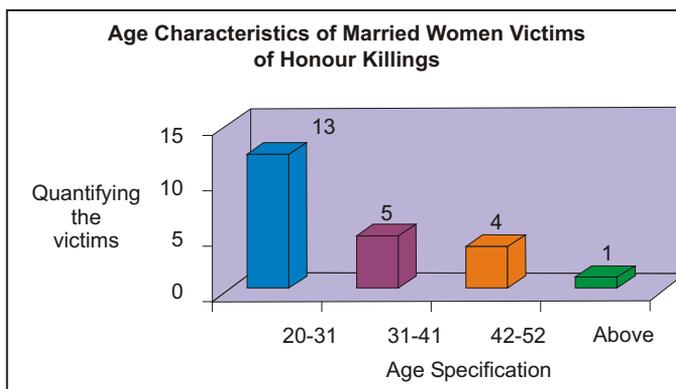
I. Marital Status of Female Victims of Honour Killing



Source: District Police Sukkur

There were thirty three (33) reported deaths of females due to honor killings in the period studied. The ten (10) incidents involved killing of the unmarried females in District Sukkur. Twenty three (23) married women were killed. The married women's ratio to unmarried is 70 % to 30 %. Seven males were also killed excluding the above figure.

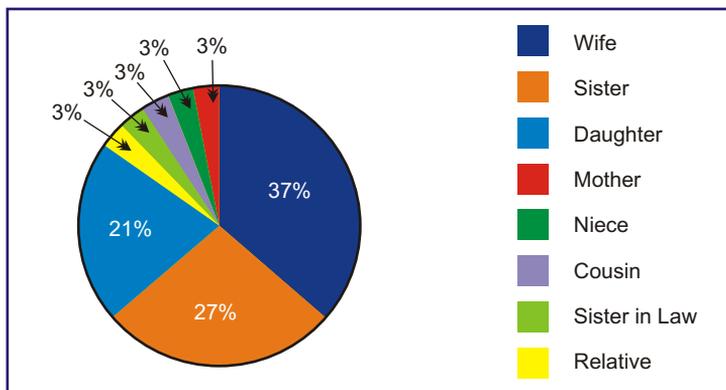
II. Age Characteristics



Source: District Police Sukkur

The figure shows that twenty three married women became victims of honour killing in Sukkur District in the period of the study. The age-category(20 to 31 years) was predominant with highest accumulative number of incidents This indicates that thirteen very young girls /young women were killed.

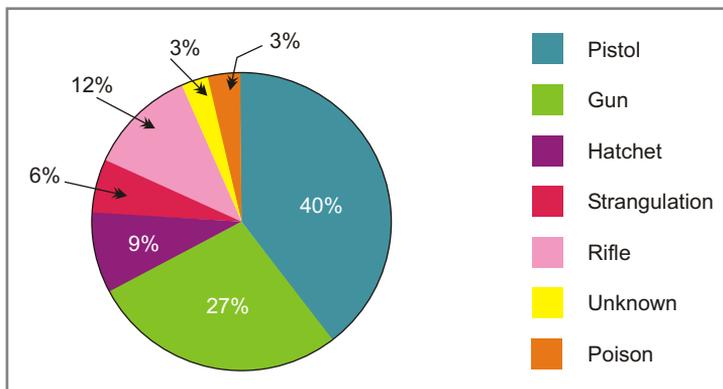
III. Honour Victims' Relation to Killers



Source: District Police Sukkur

The above chart indicates that twelve (12) wives, nine (9) sisters and seven (7) daughters were killed besides other relations in the incidents. The percentage shows the seriousness of the pattern of offending. This proves that killers are blood-relatives; they are husbands, brothers and fathers. This shows the lack of trust and psychology of suspicion in the areas where honour killing is a dignified custom. The role of the relatives killing the victims is very clear. The question why they kill still seems very challenging. There are other reasons why people kill their wives, daughters and sisters especially.

IV. Methods & Means



Source: District Police Sukkur

The above chart shows pistol was used in 13 incidents, gun in 9 incidents, hatchet in 3 incidents, strangulation in 2 incidents, rifle in 4, unknown mean in 1 and poison in 1 incident. These included thirty three incidents in total. The reasons underlying are easy access and availability of weapons (licensed and illegal)

Findings & Discussion

Honour killings involve violence against women triggered due to male perception of suspicion, lack of trust on women and reasons like weapon availability. Honour killings result from the factors like disgrace, property, and moral strain. The physical environment also facilitates the shaping of conditions/situations causing honour crimes.

Honour Killings are typical homicides prevailing in rural context of Sindh. The culture of violence, the male-dominated thinking, availability of weapon and intimate-violence are key characteristics of honour killings in Sindh. District Sukkur in Upper Sindh has predominant culture of violence against women. The study found that married women were excessively killed in the period, 2008, 2009 and starting three months of the year 2010. In total thirty three women were killed in which ten were unmarried and twenty three were married. This indicates alarming contrast. It seems quite illogical why married women involve in illegitimate sex. There may be other reasons underlying the pattern. The reasons are that many marriages are done without consent and willingness of the females in Sindh. Many husbands in Rural areas of Sindh are not earning resulting in situation forcing the women to earn by any means for survival. This will trap her in sexual encounters causing her death. The other reason is mismatch marriages where wives are young and husbands are very old. The jungle and crop ecology contribute to incidents in facilitating the circumstances and creating the suspicion.

Thirteen married women were killed having age characteristics between twenty to thirty one years. Husbands are highly involved in killings (37%) besides brothers (27%) and fathers (21%). Pistol (40%), gun (27%) and hatchet (9%) were the main methods of honour-related deaths. The easy access to weapons and ineffective criminal justice system has further grimed the scenario of honour killings in Sindh.

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