

Why Do Pakistani Women Kill?

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The present study was conducted to investigate the indigenous perspective of Pakistani women killers. Qualitative study based on focus group discussion, was conducted with the experts in the area of forensic psychology to have their opinion on the issue under consideration. Data gathered through this interactive group session was recorded and transcribed to derive the important themes. Grounded theory was used to assign codes and develop categories of the data. The major themes emerged from the data were psycho-social causes, women bondage with the victim, demoralization of society, men as victim, dealing with crime scene, women disposition in crime, portrayal of women as victim and modus operandi. This study has wider implications for the forensic psychologists, women killers and significant others to develop an insight that how a victim becomes a killer.

Keywords: indigenous, womenkillers, psychosocial perspective, themes.

Crimes, especially violent crimes appear to be termed as men's business throughout the human history. It is believed that women have nothing to do with this expression of aggression. Those who are a little different from this stereotypical approach are either not acceptable for us as women or can easily be characterized as "bad women". Our media also supports this idealistic framework regarding women's personality (Weatherby, Blanche & Jones, 2008). Largely this is the issue of less acknowledgement of changing role of women in relation to psychological and sociological perspective.

Theoretical framework of women criminal behavior

Many theories have addressed the women criminal behavior. Some of these are briefly discussed here.

Agnew's general strain theory is based on the idea when people are dealt inappropriately they may get distressed and involved in crime. Agnew (1992) proposed that an individual may involve in crime as a result of experiencing negative emotions, if the feelings regarding uncooperativeness of environment are generalized.

Women are usually involved in murder of their own relationships like siblings, husbands and children etc. Their disappointment in terms of their close relationships leads to this extreme act (Benekos, 1995). Extensive research in this area explains the woman's use of violence as an outcome of abusive relationships; thus, women's violence is often termed as her reaction against the abusive situation (Shaw & Dubois, 1995). It was generally accepted that women will be more inclined to kill their partners if they are "battered women" (Browne, 1987, Block, 1990, Bannister, 1991). Consequently, scientists in social context believe that homicides committed by females are mostly the consequence of women's efforts to secure themselves from their male partner's abusive conduct (Browne, 1987).

In distinction to men, women are more inclined to commit a violent crime at any easily available safe place like at home. Weizmann-Henelius, Viemerö and Eronen (2003) explored that females are more inclined to murder their close relatives than strangers.

Another theory, "Chivalry theory" states that the female criminal is treated in a more compassionate and gentle manner only because of her sex (Herzog & Oreg, 2008).

Media Portrayal of Women Criminals

Women are believed to be unique and unusual breed of criminals throughout the history. Male killers always exceed the number of their female counterparts. The few notorious female murderers have made us to believe that as compared to their male counterparts, the media and public perceives these women in tremendously different manner. Research proposes that this difference is originated from the cultural forces, focusing the perception of females being naturally feminine and nurturing (Arrigo & Griffin, 2004). The court system, media, and public behave in exceptionally hard way if the particular atrocious and unexpected sets of crimes are performed by women, which contradict with the general perceived social norms of femininity. Media coverage effects the trials of female offenders throughout the proceedings of case and judicial process when contrasted to men. In criminal justice system, Context-specific interpretations are thus dominated by stereotyping factors (Horne, 2003). The goal of bias free justice in case of females cannot be achieved.

Psychological Perspective of Women Killers

Throughout history women are perceived to be self-sacrificing, emotional, nurturing, and passive. In such context, if woman is a criminal then she must be pathologically ill (Brown, 1996). The major aspect of labeling women as psychologically unstable is to remove the aspect of responsibility from them which than also be linked with the element of lenient sentencing (Brown, 1996).

Women Criminals in Pakistani Perspective

In Pakistan generally, we don't accept women as murderers. They are usually taken as the victims of crimes committed by men against them. Pakistani women as murderers contradict the general schemas based on our societal norms. Most of the statistical data portrays women as victims. No doubt crimes are done against women, but this is a bitter reality that tender and sensitive women do commit murders. There is a need to investigate how these innocent, naive women become murderer. What are those reasons which evade their sensitive, tender and nurturing behavior and make them criminals.

Few Pakistani studies have been conducted on this avoidant dimension of women personality. Tariq and Anila (1993) showed

that marital maladjustment is associated to female crimes such as running away from home and murder. The results showed that behind criminal acts done by women in Pakistan, marital maladjustment is a significant factor.

Objectives:

- To investigate the factors that lead to killings by women.
- To investigate the methods used by Pakistani women for killing.
- To develop an indigenous theory of Pakistani women killers.
- To test the application of western theories with reference to our culture.

Method

Sample

Sample consisted of five participants having an expertise in the area of the forensic psychology. The age range of the participants was 32-50 years.

Research questions

- What are the possible reasons of women murdering in our indigenous perspective?
- To whom do women kill?
- What do you think that women take advantage of their innocent position?
- Why are we not ready to accept women as bad or criminal or anything other than stereotypical image of women?
- What are the methods used by women to kill others?

Assessment Tools

Focus group discussion: Focus group discussion was conducted with psychologists having expertise in the area of forensic psychology to explore their views about the phenomena “why do women kill”.

Procedure

The purposive sampling technique was used for the focus group discussion. It was held in the library of the Psychology Department of the Public University, Lahore. Experts participated in the discussion facilitated by the moderator. The focus group discussion lasted 1 hour and 30 minutes. The whole discussion was audio recorded, transcribed and analyzed.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed by using grounded theory method. It is a systematic analysis tool, which is frequently used in social sciences. Grounded theory method (GT) actually operates in reverse order as compared to conventional method. It initiates with collection of data with few questions which are under consideration. Codes are given to the collected data, categories are made from these codes to make the data more effective, and then themes are generated from these

categories that eventually lead to the development of theory (Smith, 2003).

Results & Discussion

The aim of the study is to develop an understanding about the indigenous perspective of “why do women kill”. The research is based on focus group discussion to develop an indigenous theory of killing by women. Results revealed themes such as psycho-social causes, women bondage with the victim, demoralization of society, men as victim, dealing with crime scene, women disposition in crime, portrayal of women as victim and modus operandi. Focus group discussion was carried out on why women kill by psychologists having expertise in forensic psychology which led to the development of indigenous theory of Pakistani women killers.

The *first theme* emerged from focus group discussion is “*Psycho-social causes*” which explains the reasons of why do Pakistani women commit murder. This theme includes the following reasons; “*disappointment in relationships, disappointment in trust, mental disorders, self defense, economic reasons, property or inheritance, serial killing, political reasons, religious reasons, socialization, effects of bad company, drug use, in robbery cases; to protect themselves, sudden propagation, revenge, distance from religious teachings, murder after victimization, build-up rage, jealousy, protection of dear ones and domestic violence.*”

This theme explains that women kill when the family relationships become meaningless. Sometimes they want to retain their “*sense of individuality*”. If women are betrayed by their family members especially husbands in the form of extramarital affairs, then this frustration results in murder.

Women are usually involved in murder of their own relationships like siblings, husbands and children etc. Their disappointment in terms of their close relationships leads to this extreme act (Benekos, 1995). It has been discussed in the focus group that like the western culture, women in our culture are also very much inclined to murder their close relatives.

It has been discussed that another very important reason is the “*economic instability*” which highlights the issue of unemployment of husbands which makes the whole family frustrated resulting into killing of husbands and children. This approach indicates that murderer has a desire to seek control over circumstances. The “*joint and elongated family system*” in our society is also the cause of interpersonal problems, unhealthy competition, jealousy and other social evils. Those women who do not have children after a long marriage and those who have unstable marriages remain insecure and at times they seek the help of “*Aamal*” and following him commit murder.

Women belonging to broken families experience “*distress and identity crisis*”. Being unsupervised by the parents, women may fall a “*prey*” to a number of adverse problems. The problems start from identity crisis and may advance to addiction, violence and other criminal activities, like involvement in robberies, child kidnapping, ransom and murder to save themselves from punishment. It has been shown through the research that female criminals are usually less educated, married, poor mental health and have undergone from difficult childhood experiences. Females were sufferers of childhood psychological sexual and physical maltreatment along with conduct problems (Rossegger, et al., 2009). In our society, women criminals are also more or less having the same background

like the women criminals in west. Women who commit murder are usually less educated and have undergone difficult life experiences as reported by participants in focus group discussion.

In Pakistani society we have a male dominant system where fathers, husbands and brothers are supposed to protect the women. This 'blind trust' on male family members can have devastating consequences .Experts discussed that sometimes these family work

place may turn into a cause of harassment by the male colleagues. Women victims are threatened of the consequences. The constant and severe harassment may end up in murder at times. In our society "rape" is considered as a tool to bring disgrace to a family on political and social grounds. Women who have been victimized sometime seem to take "rape as turning point" in their lives because after losing everything and experiencing the height of helplessness

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| <p style="text-align: center;">Category 1 Reasons of killing by women</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disappointment in relationships • Disappointment in trust • Mental disorders • Self defense • Economic reasons • Property or inheritance • Religious reasons • Socialization • Effects of bad company • Sudden provocation • In robbery cases; to protect themselves • Retaliation • Distance from religion • Political reasons • Serial killing • Result of revenge • Murder after victimization • Build-up rage in female • Jealousy • Domestic violence • Protection of dear ones | <p style="text-align: center;">Category 2 Relationships with victims</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A person who is harming their loved ones • Women don't target strangers • Work place relations • Family relationships • Love relationships • Crime in homosexuals |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Category 3 Derogation of moral standards of society</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in rate of male victimization • Male as sufferer of domestic violence • Change in trends • Change in moral values • Male are not expected as victims • Negative role played by media | <p style="text-align: center;">Category 4 Low ratio of reporting women's crimes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased rate of crime committed by women • Gang rape by women • Problems in socialization |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Category 5 Psychological pattern of women killing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remain at the same place • Create the situation • Planning • High surrender ratio | <p style="text-align: center;">Category 6 Women's role in crime</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conspiracy maker • Planner • Not as direct killer • As accomplice • As perpetrator • As instigator • Story of HeerRanjha • Motivating one person to kill the other |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Category 7 Stereotypical concept of women as victim</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Category 8 Methods of killing</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If males are not expecting women as killers • Element of sympathy can be present • Women criminality can't be justified | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dagger • Strangulation • Cases of burning • Use of oppressor's weapon to kill him in cases of domestic violence • Changing in choices with changing trends • Cultural differences in method of killing |

Table 1 shows the codes and the categories emerged from the data.

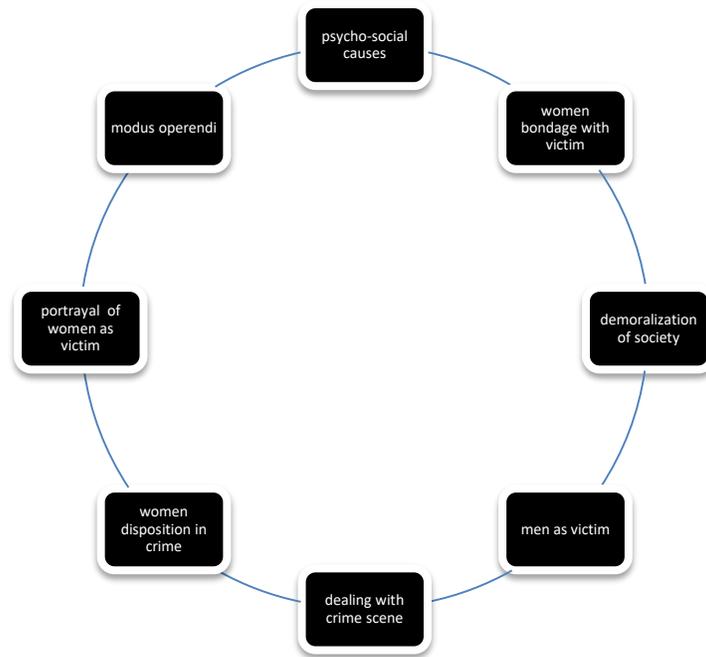


Figure 1: Figure indicates the main themes of an indigenous theory of Pakistani women killers.

make them rebellious to their social system and they stand against these evils and don't hesitate to take revenge by murdering their culprit.

"*Domestic violence*" appeared to be as another important reason of murder committed by women. It showed that being the victim for the long time and tolerating addicted husbands who are also financially dependent on them and ineffective coping mechanisms turns a victim into a criminal. The indigenous perspective supports Agnew (1992) theory of strain, where he proposed that when people are treated in a bad manner they may get disturbed and involved in crime. Through researches it is proved that women violence is often termed as her reaction against the abusive situation (Shaw & Dubois, 1995). Brown's 1987 research showed that almost half of the women convicted in America have killed their husbands in the context of domestic violence. Consequently, scientists in social context believe that homicides committed by females are mostly the consequence of women's efforts to secure themselves from their male partner's abusive conduct (Browne, 1987). With respect to our culture, findings discussed in the focus group indicated that it is very much relevant to our women as well where they are left with no other option than to attempt such a heinous act in order to secure their position. As one participant in focus group reported;

"*Our society doesn't believe in positively reinforcing women. Apart from that we usually block the positive reinforcement and introduce the negative reinforcement at its place like criticism, punishment etc. We don't allow females to adapt to the situation through the use of their defense mechanism against the situation. As the result of it, anger inside her burst out at times and she attempts the murder of targeted individuals.*"

While in our culture, it has been also discussed that the element of "*build up rage*" is important in this case. Things have to move step by step for taking women to such an extreme. Women

experience domestic violence not only at the hands of significant others but also others who have no significant position in their lives.

It has been discussed in the focus groups that in our culture women are also seen to protect and sometimes overprotect their loved relations and go to any limit and may deal with the situation assertively as they are protecting against criminal or sexual attacks. In case of love affair of their husbands, women can't tolerate as they are very possessive and they never want their husbands to be shared by another woman. Women play a traditional role by "*strongly possessing their beloved one*". An immediate jealousy arises towards that woman. Frustration in relations may also result in tension and depression which may further extend to other psychological disorders and ultimately heinous actions like murder if it remains unaddressed.

The *Second theme* emerged from the data analysis was the possible "*bondage of killers with victims*". Women are not inclined to kill strangers. Their victims always found to be those with whom they have close relationships like husbands, sisters and grandparents. Findings support Weizmann-Henelius Viemerö, and Eronen (2003) who reported that female are more inclined to murder their close relatives than strangers. Their disappointment in terms of their close relationships leads to this extreme act (Benekos, 1995). In relation to the western context, the picture is very much same in our culture as well. Women in our culture are also very much inclined to kill their close relatives as compare to strangers as mentioned in focus group discussion.

The *third theme*, "*derogation of moral standards of society*" emphasizes that overall moral standards also seem to be deteriorating as our society is becoming "materialistic". Mostly relationships are formed because of financial benefits or for materialistic gains. Nowadays unfortunately we don't enjoy relationships based on unconditional love. Now we develop ties and

like to be connected with others who have financially strong backgrounds.

Exposure to media also increases the awareness of crimes and leads to higher dissatisfaction among people. Print and electronic media is spreading negativity and derogating the value system of Pakistani society. The increasing divorce rate is another indicator of low tolerance among married people. A divorce does not seem to be ending at the separation of husband and wife but at times the custody of children and provision of their basic needs remains a question for both parents. Those mothers who remarry with the custody of their daughters seem to remain more under pressure as their daughters grow and remain “unprotected and insecure” with the new father. There are reports where mothers have committed murder in order to protect their daughter against sexual harassment imposed by their second husbands.

Fourth theme emerged from the data, “*men as victim*” shows that women are found to be involved in criminal activities and the rate of this involvement is alarmingly rising. The findings discussed in the focus group indicated that dreadful crime cases which have been reported both in rural and urban areas, show that women criminal activities are no less harmful and planned if compared with male criminals (pattern of organized and disorganized crimes). They may be less in number but equally severe in intensity. Women crime activities are reported in the form of allegations against victims on social and political grounds. They also blackmail men for money and use sexual harassment to control the victim. Acid throwing incidents were also condemned by the participants who truly reflect the emotional intensity in relationships rather than logical reasoning by women. In case of aged and experienced women criminals, the tactics seem to be more ferocious in nature. Gang rapes were also used against male victims. Victims lost their self esteem completely as they were attacked by weaker opponent. This goes against the men’s image as they are thought to be physically stronger and harm-givers rather than harm-takers. They also lose courage to share with others even if shared are not accepted by the society at large because of stereotypical image of women. Such incidents put the male’s ego at stake.

Fifth theme “dealing with the crime scene” indicates that women have tendency to try to hide the murder, get away with the proofs available or create a situation where they seem to be innocent and avoiding all chances of being doubted in an investigation process. They may be familiar with the legal processes and especially those which favor women. From the analysis, we can infer that women criminals are very good story makers. Many recent examples were quoted from the society. A case was reported by one participant in focus group discussion, that a woman murdered her husband with the help of her lover as the result of extramarital affairs. After committing the murder they both disposed off his body in a vacant plot near the house. She was living in the same house with her children, giving an impression to the others that her husband has been missing and that she didn’t know anything about him. But soon police caught her with her lover through the accumulated heap of evidence. Another case discussed, woman cut the body of her second husband, and cooked the “Quorma” of it. She thought it as an easy way to dispose off his body. The expressed reason behind this action was to secure her daughter from the bad intentions of her second husband. She froze the remaining parts of his body into the refrigerator. But as the smell spread in the area, she was caught with all the evidences which proved her crime. It has been proved that

women actually remain at that place after committing the murder and do not run away. They try to deal with the crime scene in the most appropriate way but if the evidences collected against them then they even don’t hesitate to accept the responsibility of their committed crime.

Sixth theme “women disposition in crime”, illustrates that women in Pakistan are also found to be involved in crime both at minor and major levels. Their commitment to crime may be intentional or situational. Women have less inclination to take revenge because of their natural physical limitation. Crimes by women are seen to be the result of motivation originated as a result of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Sometimes their involvement is an instigator where they do not directly commit murder but instigate the other family members against a common enemy for the reasons of family prestige, share in property, family revenge taking or for greed and lust of money or other personal motives. As one participant in the focus group discussion reported:

“In our culture, usually woman acts as a conspiracy maker. She motivates other person to kill someone for her purposes. So she mostly indirectly involved in cases of murder. She must be instigator or facilitator in cases of murder which usually take place in families.”

The traditional story of “Heer & Ranjha” also shows the deep rooted relationship of women as planners and instigators in our society; they do not play a direct role but an indirect one. In the focus group discussion deep concern was shown on the deplorable involvement of women in crimes. Women are involved in instigating men on domestic issues.

Seventh theme evolved from the data is the “*portrayal of woman as victim*”. We have a society with collectivist culture with a very traditional and defined role system. We are still living with the idea that a female can be a victim but not an oppressor. This stereotypical image of women is part of our socialization. Women can’t be justified for their criminal acts on any grounds if it’s against society, against religious teaching or against morality. Woman can’t be provided with the element of justification even in the cases of self defense unless it is proved that it was the only possible option for her. If woman can control the situation with a less violent action than murder can’t be justified on the grounds of self defense. The element of rationalization should be there. If we look towards the research for the support of our idea than we find it out that, Chivalry theory states that the female criminal is treated in a more mild and merciful manner simply because of her sex (Herzog & Oreg, 2008).

In case of crimes committed by women justification can only be provided on the basis of mental disorders, where the individual can’t be held responsible for the acts performed. In our society women are trained to intake the anger and pain inwardly. The lower rate of homicide in females is usually due to transformation of active anger in to passive mode of expression (Ogle et al., 1995; Dressler, 1995). So sometimes when woman shows such a rebellious action then there must be some very strong instigator behind it.

Eighth theme emerged from the data is “*modus operandi*”, which includes that women are found to use the available domestic and usual materials against their victims in cases of violence and attempts of murder. Majority of the women mostly use poison to take the lives of their victims. These poisonous materials included the insecticides, pesticides and copper sulfate which are mixed in

drinks or edible items. In some cases, anesthetics are also used to control the victims.

They are found to use the dagger and gardening tools as common weapons. They also use the method of 'strangulation' where they choke the victims with the help of pillows, bed covers and quilts and other house materials. Stove and burning are also used as ways for committing planned murder. Electric shocks are also used as a way, even if used at low rate, but still the method is applied. Analysis indicated that the time factor is also very important in the selection of method to kill. Previously, slow poisoning was used as the most secure, effective and common method to kill someone. Sometimes in cases of domestic violence, there are high chances that women would kill the oppressor with the same weapon which was initially used to threaten her.

Cultural factors were also reported in use of methods to kill anyone by women. As women in our culture are not facilitated by her dressing style (usually shalwar, kamiz and dupata) so high activity level is not possible for her. As one participant in the focus group reported:

"In our society, it is not possible for women to actively commit a murder. Their dress and level of physical strength don't permit them to do so. Because of this reason they will look for such options where the use of force and technical skills (like the use of gun) for committing murder will not be required. Therefore, for committing murder, they will mostly select those things which are domestically available."

Women usually prefer the method which involves less energy, effort and fewer skills. Unlike here, firearms are more commonly used in the west by women for murder while in Pakistani culture, domestic tools are more significant for such purposes.

Conclusion

This study highlights the increasing role of criminal activities by women both in rural and urban areas of Pakistan. Psychosocial perspective in understanding the women's criminal activities is particularly important. The role of media is found to be strong in increasing awareness and changing the overall environment and crime scenario in our society. This study provides an insight about the psychological pattern of killings committed by women. Stereotypical images of women are constantly under a change even in collectivist cultures, where they seem to be more ferocious in criminal attempts. Women are no more just the nurturing and caring but they are finding other ways of expressing aggression as well. Women's aggression is mostly the result of reaction. The number of male victims is also on constant increase. Though it seems in conflict with male domination but it has become the reality of time. Murders committed by women are highly planned and the murderers are their close relatives.

This indigenous theory of Pakistani women killers led to the following hypotheses

1. Psycho-social causes prop up crime committed by women.
2. Women criminals prefer easily accessible modus operandi for killing.
3. Most of the women criminals use indigenous modus operandi.
4. Society challenges stereotypical image of women as victims.
5. Women have a significant position in crime.
6. Women deal psychologically with crime scene analysis.

7. Women victimized men.
8. Demoralization of society plays an important role in killing by women.
9. Women criminals have a close bondage with victim.

Limitations

The present study deals only with the perspective of experts about why women commit murder.

Implications

The study has widespread implications for the forensic psychologists. It helps to develop an awareness regarding this ignored aspect of women personality. It provides an insight how do innocent helpless female victim turns into a killer. It challenges the stereotypical image of men and women in our society. It helps in developing the policies regarding women criminals. The study helps in understanding the indigenous perspective of Pakistani women killers.

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