



# From Tradition to Crime: The Global Reality of Honour Killings

Ms Lochan Gupta<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr Madhu Bala<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup>Research Scholar, Maharishi Markandeshwer deemed to be University Mullana Ambala

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor of Law, Maharishi Markandeshwer deemed to be University Mullana Ambala

**Citation:** Ms Lochan Gupta<sup>\*</sup>, Dr Madhu Bala<sup>2</sup>(2024), From Tradition to Crime: The Global Reality of Honour Killings, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(1) 6882-6886

Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i1.10129

## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

Honour killings, a form of violence committed under the guise of protecting or restoring family honour, remain a deeply rooted issue in many societies across the globe. Traditionally justified through cultural or religious narratives, these acts of violence disproportionately target women and girls, often for perceived transgressions related to autonomy, relationships, or dress. This paper explores the global dimensions of honour killings, analysing their prevalence, cultural underpinnings, and the challenges faced in addressing them through legal and human rights frameworks. Drawing on case studies from South Asia, the Middle East, and diaspora communities in the West, it examines the tension between cultural relativism and universal human rights, highlighting how international legal systems increasingly categorise honour killings as criminal acts rather than private family matters. The study underscores the urgent need for coordinated global responses, legal reforms, and grassroots cultural change to combat honour-based violence and uphold the dignity and rights of those most at risk.

**Keywords:** Honour Killing, violence, dignity, transgression, legal reforms, rights

Honour killings are a global issue involving family members committing violence against women, often due to perceived shame or dishonour. In South Asia, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh have reported numerous cases, while Middle East countries like Jordan, Iraq, and Iran struggle with addressing them. Western countries, like the UK, Canada, and the US, have taken steps to address the issue through legal steps and community outreach programs. International organisations and human rights groups continue to advocate for protection and change.<sup>1</sup>

Honour Killings represent a grave violation of human rights, rooted in cultural and patriarchal beliefs that prioritise family honour over individual lives. The motivations behind these killings stem from perceived dishonour due to actions such as seeking divorce, engaging in premarital relationships, or defying traditional gender roles. Honour Killings are deeply embedded in cultural traditions that view women as vessels of the family honour.<sup>2</sup>

Actions perceived as dishonorable can include refusing arranged marriages or interacting with men outside the family. In many societies, arranged marriages are viewed as a cornerstone of family honor and social cohesion. When a woman rejects such a marriage, she is seen as defying the family's authority and disrupting social norms, which may lead to severe consequences. Similarly, interactions with men outside the family—whether through friendships, professional engagements, or social settings—are often seen as compromising a woman's purity and modesty, negatively impacting the family's reputation. These actions, among others, challenge deeply entrenched cultural and patriarchal structures that equate family honor with women's behavior and adherence to traditional roles. Consequently, they can trigger extreme measures such as honor killings, which are erroneously justified as necessary to restore the family's honour.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mohamad Samiulla and Dr Rajesh Kumar Srivastava, "Honour Killings in India and Beyond: A Global Perspective" 7 *International Journal of Law, Management and Humanities* 1508-1515 (2024).

<sup>2</sup> Heeuk D. Lee, Chanchal Garg and Shweta Tyagi, "Honor Killing" *Advances in digital crime, forensics, and cyber terrorism book series* 295-312 (2024).

<sup>3</sup> Jennifer Bowman and David C Dollahite, "Why Would Such a Person Dream About Heaven?" Family, Faith, and Happiness in Arranged Marriages in India" 44 *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 207-226 (2013).

According to the United Nations, it is estimated that approximately 5,000 women are killed annually in honour-related crimes, though actual numbers may be significantly higher due to underreporting. These killings often go unreported or are misclassified as suicides or accidents, making it difficult to ascertain the true extent of the problem. The clandestine nature of these crimes, coupled with societal stigma and the reluctance of families to come forward, contributes to the significant underreporting. Efforts to combat honour killings face numerous challenges, including cultural resistance, inadequate legal frameworks, and a lack of enforcement. In many regions, local customs and patriarchal norms continue to overshadow legal protections, allowing perpetrators to evade justice. Moreover, victims' families often face immense pressure to maintain silence, either due to fear of retribution or the perceived need to preserve family honour. To address this pervasive issue, international and local organisations have been working tirelessly to promote awareness, advocate for legal reforms, and support grassroots initiatives aimed at cultural change. Educational programs, community outreach, and the empowerment of women are crucial components in the fight against honour-based violence. By challenging the cultural norms that perpetuate these crimes and strengthening legal and institutional frameworks, it is possible to begin dismantling the structures that enable honour killings to persist. Despite these efforts, much work remains to be done. The international community must continue to collaborate, share resources, and pressure governments to take decisive action against honour killings. Only through a concerted and sustained effort can we hope to eradicate this brutal practice and ensure the protection and dignity of all individuals, regardless of gender or cultural background.<sup>4</sup>

### **Increase in Honour Killings Amid Rising Extremism and Cultural Conservatism**

Honour killings, acts of violence committed to protect or restore family honour, have reportedly increased in recent years, particularly against the backdrop of rising extremism and cultural conservatism. These killings, often targeting women and girls, are justified through deeply entrenched cultural and patriarchal beliefs that prioritise family honour over individual lives.<sup>5</sup>

### **Impact of Extremism and Cultural Conservatism**

Extremism and cultural conservatism have exacerbated the occurrence of honour killings in various regions. These ideologies often reinforce rigid gender roles and perpetuate patriarchal structures that view women as bearers of family honour. As communities become more conservative, the pressure on women to conform to traditional expectations intensifies, leading to severe consequences for perceived transgressions.<sup>6</sup>

### **Influence of extremist ideologies**

Extremist ideologies, whether religious or political, play a significant role in fuelling honour-based violence. These ideologies often promote a strict adherence to traditional values and norms, with any deviation seen as a threat to the communal or familial order. Women who seek autonomy, engage in relationships outside of marriage, or defy traditional gender roles are particularly vulnerable to honour killings under these circumstances.<sup>7</sup>

### **Rise in Cultural Conservatism**

Cultural conservatism, marked by a return to traditional values and norms, has also contributed to the increase in honour killings. In societies where cultural conservatism is on the rise, there is a heightened emphasis on maintaining family honour and social cohesion. Actions perceived as dishonourable, such as refusing arranged marriages or interacting with men outside the family, are met with extreme measures to 'restore' honour.<sup>8</sup>

### **Regional Variations and Case Studies**

The prevalence of honour killings varies across regions, influenced by local cultural, religious, and political contexts. In South Asia, countries like India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh have reported numerous cases of honour killings, often linked to stringent cultural practices and patriarchal norms. The Middle East, with nations like Jordan, Iraq, and Iran, faces similar challenges, where honour killings are intertwined with

<sup>4</sup> Phyllis Chesler, "Worldwide Trends in Honor Killings," 17 *Middle East Quarterly* 3 (2010).

<sup>5</sup> Sarah M AL Qahtani, Danah S Almutairi, *et.al.*, "Honor Killings in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: A Narrative Review" 11 *Healthcare* 1-8 (2023).

<sup>6</sup> Sarah M AL Qahtani, Danah S Almutairi, *et.al.*, "Honor Killings in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: A Narrative Review" 11 *Healthcare* 1-8 (2023).

<sup>7</sup> UN Women, "Women in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism" 1-119 (2021)

<sup>8</sup> Olampia MK Campbell, Cecilia Padilla-Iglesias, *et.al.*, "Genetic Markers of Cousin Marriage and Honour Cultures Author Links Open Overlay Panel" 45 *Evolution and Human Behaviour* 1-9 (2024).

cultural conservatism and extremist influences. In Western countries, such as the UK, Canada, and the US, honour killings have emerged within diaspora communities, highlighting the persistence of cultural practices even in more liberal environments. These countries have taken steps to address the issue through legal reforms and community outreach programs, yet challenges remain in effectively combating honour-based violence.<sup>9</sup>

### Challenges in Addressing Honour Killings

Efforts to combat honour killings confront numerous obstacles, including cultural resistance, inadequate legal frameworks, and a lack of enforcement. In regions where cultural conservatism and extremism dominate, legal protections are often overshadowed by local customs and patriarchal norms, allowing perpetrators to evade justice. Additionally, societal stigma and the reluctance of families to report such crimes contribute to significant underreporting, making it difficult to ascertain the true extent of the problem.<sup>10</sup>

### Legal and Human Rights Frameworks

International and local organisations continue to advocate for legal reforms and human rights protections to address honour killings. Educational programs, community outreach, and the empowerment of women are crucial components in this fight. By challenging the cultural norms that perpetuate honour-based violence and strengthening legal and institutional frameworks, it is possible to begin dismantling the structures that enable these crimes to persist.<sup>11</sup>

Despite ongoing efforts, much work remains to be done to eradicate honour killings. The international community must continue to collaborate, share resources, and pressure governments to take decisive action. Only through a concerted and sustained effort can we hope to eliminate this brutal practice and ensure the protection and dignity of all individuals, regardless of gender or cultural background. The rise of extremism and cultural conservatism has significantly contributed to the increase in honour killings. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach, involving legal reforms, awareness campaigns, and cultural change. Only through coordinated global responses and grassroots initiatives can we hope to combat honour-based violence and uphold the rights and dignity of those most at risk.<sup>12</sup>

Legal systems often fail to adequately address honour killings, with perpetrators frequently receiving lenient sentences or escaping prosecution altogether. This failure can be attributed to several factors, including deeply entrenched cultural norms, inadequate legal frameworks, and systemic biases within judicial systems.<sup>13</sup>

In regions where honour killings are prevalent, cultural customs and patriarchal values often overshadow legal protections. Traditional beliefs about family honour and community cohesion can influence the attitudes of law enforcement officials and judicial authorities, leading to a lack of seriousness in addressing such crimes. This cultural resistance to change makes it difficult to enforce laws that protect victims and punish offenders.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, inadequate legal frameworks contribute to the problem. In many countries, laws pertaining to honour killings are either nonexistent or insufficiently robust. Some nations lack specific legislation addressing honour-based violence, while others have laws that are not stringent enough to deter perpetrators. This legal gap allows offenders to exploit loopholes and evade justice, perpetuating a cycle of violence.<sup>15</sup>

Systemic biases within judicial systems also play a role in the lenient treatment of perpetrators. Prosecutors and judges may harbor prejudices that align with cultural norms, leading to biased decision-making. In some cases, perpetrators are granted reduced sentences or even acquitted based on arguments that justify their actions as culturally acceptable. This undermines the rule of law and fails to provide justice for victims.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Tanya D Lima, Jenifer L Solotroff, *et.al.*, “For the Sake of Family and Tradition: Honour Killings in India and Pakistan” 5 *Antayajaa-Indian Journal of Women and Social Change* (2020).

<sup>10</sup> Tanya D Lima, Jenifer L Solotroff, *et.al.*, “For the Sake of Family and Tradition: Honour Killings in India and Pakistan” 5 *Antayajaa-Indian Journal of Women and Social Change* (2020).

<sup>11</sup> Swet Nisha, Umesh Kumar, *et.al.*, “Assessing the Issues of Honour and Violence Against Women: A Human Rights Discourse Framework for the Detection of Violence Against Women” *BIO Web of Conferences* 1-11 (2024).

<sup>12</sup> Dr Saraswati Raju Iyer, “Honour Killing – Crime Against Mankind” 10 *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 1-4 (2013).

<sup>13</sup> Katja Luopajarvi, “International Accountability for Honour Killings as Human Rights Violations” *Nordisk Tidsskrift for Menneskerettigheter* 22:1 1-21 (2004).

<sup>14</sup> Sarah M AL Qahtani, Danah S Almutairi, *et.al.*, “Honor Killings in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: A Narrative Review” 11 *Healthcare* 1-8 (2023).

<sup>15</sup> Sarah M AL Qahtani, Danah S Almutairi, *et.al.*, “Honor Killings in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: A Narrative Review” 11 *Healthcare* 1-8 (2023).

<sup>16</sup> Sarah M AL Qahtani, Danah S Almutairi, *et.al.*, “Honor Killings in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: A Narrative Review” 11 *Healthcare* 1-8 (2023).

The reluctance of victims' families to report honour killings further complicates the issue. Societal stigma and fear of retribution often prevent families from seeking legal recourse. This underreporting makes it challenging to ascertain the true extent of honour-based violence and hinders efforts to address the problem effectively.<sup>17</sup> To combat these challenges, comprehensive legal reforms and robust enforcement mechanisms are essential. International and local organizations advocate for the establishment of specific laws addressing honour killings and the strengthening of existing legal protections. These reforms should be accompanied by training programs for law enforcement officials and judicial authorities to ensure unbiased and effective implementation.<sup>18</sup>

Additionally, educational programs and community outreach are crucial in changing cultural norms that perpetuate honour-based violence. By raising awareness and promoting gender equality, it is possible to challenge the beliefs that underpin such crimes and foster a culture of respect and protection for all individuals.<sup>19</sup>

Despite ongoing efforts, the battle against honour killings remains arduous. The international community must continue to collaborate, share resources, and pressure governments to take decisive action. Only through a concerted and sustained effort can we hope to eradicate this brutal practice and ensure the protection and dignity of all individuals, regardless of gender or cultural background.<sup>20</sup>

While honour killings are often framed as cultural practices, they also reflect broader issues of gender inequality and violence against women. Some argue that framing these acts solely as cultural phenomena can obscure the need for systemic change in gender norms and legal protections globally.<sup>21</sup>

The stigma surrounding these crimes further complicates the reporting and legal action, as families often deny the occurrence of honour killings. This denial is rooted in the fear of social ostracization and the potential shame it brings upon the family and community. Honour killings are perceived as a means to preserve family honour and societal standing, and admitting to such acts would contradict the very purpose they are believed to serve.<sup>22</sup>

In many cases, families may go to great lengths to conceal the crime, manipulating evidence or even presenting the death as an accident or suicide. The pressure to maintain a façade of honour can lead to the suppression of vital information and discourage other community members from coming forward as witnesses. This culture of silence and the fear of reprisal create an environment where justice is severely hindered, and perpetrators can continue their actions with impunity.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, the survivors and witnesses of honour killings often face immense societal pressure to conform to these cultural norms. They may be threatened or coerced into silence, fearing for their safety and that of their loved ones. This further complicates the legal processes, as the lack of evidence and testimonies makes it difficult for law enforcement agencies to build strong cases against the perpetrators.<sup>24</sup>

Efforts to break this cycle of stigma and silence must focus on empowering communities to speak out against honour-based violence. Educational and awareness campaigns can play a crucial role in changing mindsets by highlighting the legal and moral implications of such crimes and promoting the protection of victims. Support networks, including safe shelters and legal assistance, are essential to provide victims and their families with the resources they need to safely report these crimes and seek justice.<sup>25</sup>

Ultimately, dismantling the stigma surrounding honour killings requires a comprehensive approach that addresses both cultural beliefs and systemic barriers within the legal system. By fostering an environment

<sup>17</sup> Katja Luopajarvi, "International Accountability for Honour Killings as Human Rights Violations" *Nordisk Tidsskrift for Menneskerettigheter* 22:1 1-21 (2004).

<sup>18</sup> Aradhana Sahu, "Honour Killing in India: A Critical Study" 6 *International Journal of Legal Science and Innovation* 165-252 (2024).

<sup>19</sup> Aradhana Sahu, "Honour Killing in India: A Critical Study" 6 *International Journal of Legal Science and Innovation* 165-252 (2024).

<sup>20</sup> Sarah M AL Qahtani, Danah S Almutairi, et.al., "Honor Killings in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: A Narrative Review" 11 *Healthcare* 1-8 (2023).

<sup>21</sup> Kelly Amanda Train, "Patriarchy and the "other" in the Western Imagination: Honour Killings and Violence Against Women" 12 *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies* 143-157 (2021).

<sup>22</sup> Kelly Amanda Train, "Patriarchy and the "other" in the Western Imagination: Honour Killings and Violence Against Women" 12 *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies* 143-157 (2021).

<sup>23</sup> Katja Luopajarvi, "International Accountability for Honour Killings as Human Rights Violations" *Nordisk Tidsskrift for Menneskerettigheter* 22:1 1-21 (2004).

<sup>24</sup> Kelly Amanda Train, "Patriarchy and the "other" in the Western Imagination: Honour Killings and Violence Against Women" 12 *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies* 143-157 (2021).

<sup>25</sup> Sarah M AL Qahtani, Danah S Almutairi, et.al., "Honor Killings in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: A Narrative Review" 11 *Healthcare* 1-8 (2023).

where victims feel safe to report crimes and are assured of fair treatment, society can take significant strides towards eradicating honour-based violence and upholding the rights and dignity of all individuals.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Sarah M AL Qahtani, Danah S Almutairi, *et.al.*, “Honor Killings in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: A Narrative Review” 11 *Healthcare* 1-8 (2023).