

Psychological Trauma of Honor Killings: Survivor and Community Perspectives

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Citation: Sushil Kumar, et al. (2024), Psychological Trauma of Honor Killings: Survivor and Community Perspectives, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(1), 6525-6531

Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i1.9828

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Honor killings, rooted in cultural and patriarchal ideologies, represent a profound violation of human rights, leaving survivors and communities with lasting psychological trauma. This study examines the multifaceted impact of honor killings on survivors, including family members, and the broader community. Survivors often face isolation, fear, guilt, and long-term mental health challenges such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety. Communities, in turn, grapple with fractured relationships, eroded trust, and cultural stigmatization, perpetuating cycles of silence and complicity. The study also delves into the socio-cultural dynamics that fuel honor killings, shedding light on the societal pressures that prioritize family reputation over individual autonomy and well-being. By analyzing the intersection of gender, culture, and psychological resilience, the research emphasizes the urgent need for survivor-centric interventions, community education, and policy reforms to combat the normalization of honor-based violence. Ultimately, this study advocates for a holistic approach that integrates legal, psychological, and social frameworks to address the deep-rooted trauma and foster healing, empowerment, and systemic change.

Keywords: Honor killings, psychological trauma, survivors, community perspectives, cultural ideologies, gender-based violence, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), mental health etc.

Introduction

The practice of honor murders, which put family prestige above individual freedom, is motivated by deeply ingrained cultural traditions that are upheld by patriarchal systems and social conventions. Through customary local norms, these crimes typically target women and other vulnerable individuals in an effort to preserve the reputation of the family. Victims face punishment from their families not just when they refuse planned marriages but also when they pick unsuitable love partnerships or defy gender norms. Attack survivors, their families, and their whole communities suffer long-lasting psychological injury, yet there is a dearth of therapy for long-term effects³.

Both the direct victims who escape and their close relatives suffer from serious mental and emotional injuries as survivors of honor killings. While battling societal rejection, survivors face guilt-weighted judgment, PTSD, despair, and anxiety. Beyond the immediate victims, honor killings have an effect on communities by making it such that others are afraid to speak out and accept the humiliating outcomes, which continue until the violence becomes ingrained. In addition to sustaining harmful cultural ideas, honor killings cause collective suffering that shatters family ties and social ties.

The research aims to investigate the psychological effects of honor killings on both survivors and people of the surrounding community. The long-lasting consequences of these heinous deeds are shown by analyzing the testimonies of survivors in conjunction with local social structures and cultural systems. Such study shows that

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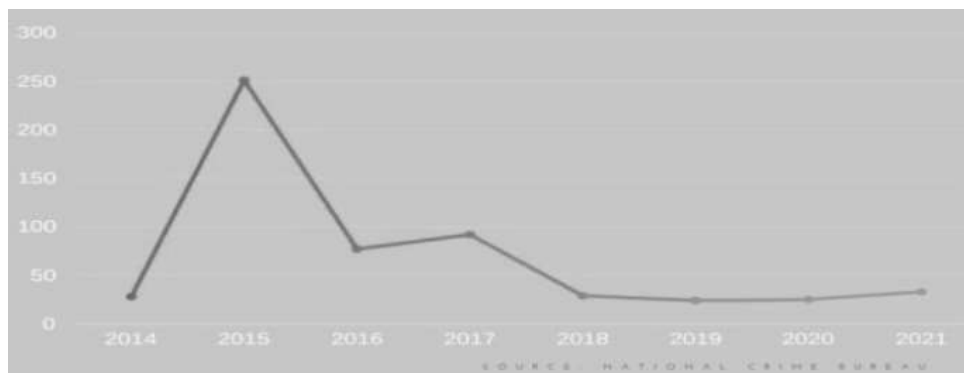
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³ Alqahtani, S. M. ; Almutairi, D. S. et,al (2022). Honor Killings in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: A Narrative Review. *Healthcare*, 11(1), 74. <https://doi.org/10.3390/HEALTHCARE11010074>

in order to break the patterns of honor-based violence and empower individuals, survivors need focused interventions, legislative changes, and community education⁴.

Honor-based killings in India

India's economic empowerment has increased significantly over the years, yet social ills like honor killings continue to afflict Indian culture. Nearly 25 incidents of honor killings were documented in the previous year, according to a 2018 National Crime Record Bureau data⁵. Another research shows an increase in honor killings in India, particularly when the couple involves intercaste ties, despite the fact that these statistics are incredibly underreported.



Research methodology

This strategy will include a thorough examination of the body of research on the psychological effects of honor killings on survivors and their communities, including scholarly publications, reports, and case studies. To learn more about the long-term emotional, social, and mental health effects that survivors of honor killings experience, secondary data sources including government publications, reports from human rights groups, and psychological research will be examined. The study will also examine how communities see and react to such traumatic incidents, especially those in areas where honor killings are common. The research intends to contribute to a larger conversation on gender-based violence and its long-term impacts by combining the available data to provide a deeper view of the psychological trauma endured by people and communities. The results obtained from secondary sources will provide a basis for further investigation into intervention tactics and the need of psychological assistance for survivors.

Main Body

Mental Health and Honour Killings

Honor killings are a result of patriarchal prejudices. Nonetheless, a large number of people with comparable sociocultural factors oppose such behavior. This is why, as mentioned in the preceding section, one must also take into account the role of psychopathy⁶.

Regarding the victims, there is universal agreement that violence and repression not only violate a woman's fundamental rights but also endanger her physical and mental well-being. The victims' mental health is also impacted by patriarchal attitudes. Women have a sense of anxiety as a result of the regularity of honor killings and the suddenness of their targeting. A woman's self-esteem may be damaged by feeling restricted and denied equal chances, which increases her risk of developing a number of mental illnesses, including anxiety and depression. Involuntary or voluntary suicide may sometimes result from the fear of honor killings. When women are implicated, they may commit "honour suicides" out of embarrassment over their dishonourable actions or out of dread of a vicious assault. This might help to explain why research shows that women in certain cultures commit suicide at high rates. The psychological effects that children who see honor-based violence and household disputes experience are another crucial factor to take into account. These kids are more likely to have behavioral issues, drug misuse, anxiety, and sadness. Additionally, these kids will be more likely to imitate behaviors like honor killings in the future.

⁴ Singh, D., & Bhandari, D. S. (2021). Legacy of Honor and Violence: An Analysis of Factors Responsible for Honor Killings in Afghanistan, Canada, India, and Pakistan as Discussed in Selected Documentaries on Real Cases. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211022323>, 11(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211022323>

⁵ Kirti, A., Kumar, P., & Yadav, R. (2011). The Face of Honour Based Crimes: Global Concerns and Solutions. *International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences*, 6(1/2), 343.

⁶ Chand Basha, P. (n.d.). HONOUR KILLINGS-CAUSES. *International Journal of Enhanced Research in Educational Development (IJERED)*, 4, 2320–8708.

1. Psychological Impact on Survivors

After honor killings, survivors endure severe, long-lasting psychological suffering. Following honor killings, many survivors have a variety of mental and emotional challenges that significantly impair their overall health⁷. In survivors who personally see or experience the events, such brutality brought on by honor killings has long-lasting, serious psychological effects. This section explores the effects of honor violence on survivors' mental and emotional health. Consequently, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the resources for rehabilitation that are accessible.

2. Emotional and Mental Health Consequences

Because of the physical and identity-related assaults, survivors of honor killings experience significant emotional distress as their connections to their community and family are severed. After an honor killing, survivors have a variety of psychological repercussions that distort their perspective of themselves, their capacity for trust, and their vision of the outside world. As shown by the validation result, survivors often feel a great sense of loss, rage, guilt, and humiliation. After enduring such tragedies, survivors often experience worry, despair, and a lack of hope for the future. Because the stigma associated with honor-based violence causes social isolation and shame, which drives survivors away from their community, survivors often experience extra emotional suffering⁸.

3. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in Survivors

Honor killing survivors may have PTSD as a result of both watching and participating in violent activities that result from honor killings. PTSD manifests in survivors as persistent memories, nightmares, hypervigilance, and a loss of emotional reactions. Because of the disruptions caused by traumatic memories, survivors have trouble focusing, sleeping, and doing everyday tasks. Along with honor killing trauma, societal presumption and manipulation hinder survivors' access to therapy and exacerbate the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Serious mental health issues, such as addiction, self-harming behavior, and suicidal thoughts, arise when PTSD is not treated.

4. Coping Mechanisms and Support Systems

In distinctive and even unanticipated ways, survivors deal with the pain of honor killing. Survivors adopt a variety of unhealthy and health-focused coping mechanisms when they are experiencing emotional anguish. Survivors might choose to isolate themselves from others and stay away from things that trigger their trauma, or they can find strength in their own psychology and religious beliefs. Because of social shame and cultural taboos, it may be difficult for survivors to get professional assistance and emotional support⁹.

Access to mental health treatments, counseling, and therapeutic systems are critical components of the road to recovery from abuse. On their road to recovery, survivors of honor-based violence who establish connections with networks of friends, family, and member groups get crucial support. When trying to utilize these resources, survivors face challenges due to cultural boundaries, fear of reprisals, and a lack of knowledge about available support services. Creating trauma-informed care services that address the social and cultural aspects of survivors' experiences in addition to mental health requirements must be the top goal for government organizations and advocacy groups¹⁰.

Survivors of honor killings often have significant psychological repercussions that persist over time as emotional and mental health issues. Such issues need a comprehensive approach that provides survivors with emotional assistance while simultaneously increasing social consciousness and putting in place protective support networks focused on restoring emotional well-being and dignity.

5. Community Perspectives on Honor Killings

Honor killings damage women and communities by influencing people's shared cultural ideas and behavior toward one another¹¹. In addition to influencing how survivors recover from trauma, societal perceptions of honor killings also influence the probability of such killings in the future. Honor killings are more common on

⁷ Wessells, M. G., & Kostelny, K. (2022). The Psychosocial Impacts of Intimate Partner Violence against Women in LMIC Contexts: Toward a Holistic Approach. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(21), 14488. <https://doi.org/10.3390/IJERPH192114488>

⁸ MURTHY, R. S., & LAKSHMINARAYANA, R. (2006). Mental health consequences of war: a brief review of research findings. *World Psychiatry*, 5(1), 25. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC1472271/>

⁹ Hosny, N., Bovey, M., Dutray, F., & Heim, E. (2023). How is trauma-related distress experienced and expressed in populations from the Greater Middle East and North Africa? A systematic review of qualitative literature. *SSM - Mental Health*, 4, 100258. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.SSMH.2023.100258>

¹⁰ Chronister, J., Fitzgerald, S., & Chou, C. C. (2020). The Meaning of Social Support for Persons with Serious Mental Illness: Family Member Perspective. *Rehabilitation Psychology*, 66(1), 87. <https://doi.org/10.1037/REPO000369>

¹¹ Patel, S., & Gadit, A. M. (2008). Karo-Kari: A Form of Honour Killing in Pakistan. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 45(4), 683–694. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461508100790>

a daily basis because of the many viewpoints that come from cultural background influences, family customs, and the larger social environment.

6. Cultural Justifications and Beliefs

A highly ingrained belief system that connects a person's honor to the behavior of their family members, particularly women, is present in many communities where honor killings take place. In these societies, "honor" is often associated with the conduct and perceived virginity of female family members. The belief that any behavior seen to be dishonoring to the family whether via premarital affairs, breaking social norms, or even experiencing sexual violence requires retribution, often leading to death, is reinforced by cultural traditions and patriarchal principles. Honor killings are thus seen as an essential measure to restore family and communal honor rather than as a criminal offense¹².

Communities that follow these customs often defend the violence by claiming that it maintains social order and protects the family's reputation. However, these defenses are firmly anchored in antiquated patriarchal standards and a narrow conception of personal freedom, especially with respect to women's rights.

7. Role of Family and Social Networks

The way that honor killings are seen and handled in a society is greatly influenced by family dynamics. Sometimes, family members—especially men—are the ones who directly commit or condone such acts of violence because they believe it would maintain the family's reputation. In other cases, family members could enable or promote the behavior in an attempt to prevent social rejection or reprisals. Sometimes the choice to carry out an honor killing is presented as a family duty rather than an individual act, with additional family members either supporting or taking part in the deed¹³.

Furthermore, social networks—such as friends, local elders, and religious leaders—can have a significant impact on the belief system that justifies honor killings. These individuals may operate as upholders of social standards in certain groups, expressing agreement or disagreement with a family's behavior. It is difficult for survivors to get assistance in these settings since social rejection or even physical reprisal often follows disagreement or resistance to honor-based violence.

8. Impact on Community Dynamics

Honor killings have a polarizing effect on society at large. Some societal groups could perceive such acts as essential to preserving order, while others would see the violence as a human rights violation and want to overthrow the current system. These divergent viewpoints often cause conflict within the group, forcing people to either confront deeply rooted cultural traditions or conform to conventional beliefs¹⁴.

Because it causes a split in shared ideals, the difference between those who support honor killings and those who oppose them may erode societal cohesiveness. Such divides may eventually lead to polarization, which makes it less difficult for communities to have candid conversations about ending destructive behaviors. As a result, survivors of honor killings may become even more isolated, which may hinder their ability to reintegrate into society or get therapeutic help.

9. Challenges in Addressing Honor-Based Violence

There are several obstacles to overcome when addressing honor-based violence in a community. The normalization of violence, when honor killings are seen as a customary or culturally appropriate reaction to perceived transgressions, is one of the main challenges. The legal and judicial systems may be hesitant to step in in these communities, often as a result of pressure from powerful community members who contend that the conduct was justifiable¹⁵.

Additionally, it's possible that social services and law enforcement in these areas lack the cultural competence necessary to adequately address the underlying reasons of honor killings. Reluctance to become involved in family or community affairs due to concern of cultural insensitivity may be seen as a violation of the community's sovereignty. Providing support services that put their safety and wellbeing first without exposing

¹² Doğan, R. (2014). Different Cultural Understandings of Honor That Inspire Killing: An Inquiry Into the Defendant's Perspective. *Homicide Studies*, 18(4), 363–388. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088767914526717>

¹³ Strid, S., Baianstovu, R., & Enelo, J. M. (2021). Inequalities, isolation, and intersectionality: A quantitative study of honour-based violence among girls and boys in metropolitan Sweden. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 88, 102518. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.WSIF.2021.102518>

¹⁴ Dr Jane Hailé. (2007). *HONOUR KILLING ITS CAUSES & CONSEQUENCES: SUGGESTED STRATEGIES FOR THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT*. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2007/385527/EXPO-JOIN_ET\(2007\)385527_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2007/385527/EXPO-JOIN_ET(2007)385527_EN.pdf)

¹⁵ Alqahtani, S. M. ; Almutairi, D. S et.al (2022). Honor Killings in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: A Narrative Review. *Healthcare*, 11(1), 74. <https://doi.org/10.3390/HEALTHCARE11010074>

them to criticism from their community is another difficulty faced by survivors of honor killings or those who are at danger.

Initiatives must include the community and survivors in a conversation about cultural change in order to successfully combat honor killings. Community attitudes may start to change toward more progressive and supportive viewpoints via education campaigns, outreach initiatives, and cooperation with local leaders that support women's rights. Participating in these processes necessitates questioning ingrained notions and offering substitute, nonviolent frameworks for comprehending honor, dignity, and family repute.

The destructive systems that support honor-based violence may be started to be dismantled by communities by cultivating a culture of awareness and respect for human rights. To confront deeply rooted cultural norms and guarantee justice for survivors of honor killings, however, this is a long-term undertaking that calls for the coordinated efforts of both grassroots groups and national governments.

10. Support Systems and Intervention Strategies

Counseling, community education, legislative changes, and support systems are all necessary components of a multifaceted strategy to address the psychological damage brought on by honor killings. Effective therapies strive for long-term healing and prevention in addition to offering survivors immediate respite. In order to assist survivors and address the larger community concerns surrounding honor killings, the following important interventions and support systems may be very helpful.

11. Role of Counseling and Mental Health Services

For survivors of honor killings, mental health and counseling services are among the most important therapies. These people often experience extreme trauma, which may lead to anxiety, depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and feelings of loneliness. In order to provide trauma-informed treatment that honors cultural sensitivity and addresses the emotional and psychological effects of survivors' experiences, mental health services should be customized to meet their specific requirements. By acknowledging the intricacy of trauma and its impact on mental health, a trauma-informed approach offers a secure environment where people may talk about their experiences without worrying about criticism or reprisal. Psychotherapy and counseling, including individual and group therapy, may help survivors process their feelings and recover from their trauma. Support groups, which allow survivors to interact with others who have gone through comparable trauma, may lessen feelings of loneliness and provide a sense of community¹⁶.

12. Community Education and Awareness Programs

Shifting public attitudes and beliefs on honor-based violence is essential to stopping honor killings and lessening their psychological effects. Programs for community education and awareness may aid in changing societal attitudes that enable or excuse this kind of assault and foster an atmosphere that is more encouraging to survivors.

- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** By making it obvious that honor-based violence is abhorrent, educating the public about the psychological and societal repercussions of honor killings helps promote a change in mindset. These initiatives may include community workshops, instructional resources, and media engagement¹⁷.

- **Cultural Sensitivity Training:** Professionals (such as social workers, healthcare providers, and law enforcement) must get training that prepares them to deal with honor-based violence in a culturally competent manner, making sure they are mindful of the community's beliefs while opposing detrimental behaviors.

- **Engagement of Religious and Community Leaders:** In many countries, local religious as well as community leaders have a big say. Talking with them and teaching them about the negative effects of honor killings might inspire them to oppose this kind of violence and provide assistance to survivors.

13. Legal Framework and Policy Implications

Honor killings need a strong judicial system that can both protect survivors and provide justice for those who have been killed. It is crucial to strengthen legal safeguards for survivors, which may include passing legislation specifically addressing honor-based violence and stiffening punishments for offenders. To ensure that offenders are held responsible and to shield survivors from reprisals, stronger legal procedures are required. Since many survivors do not have the means to handle the legal system, offering free or reasonably priced legal aid is an essential kind of support. Furthermore, as honor killings are a worldwide problem, cooperation

¹⁶ Counselling for Mental Health. (2024). *Counselling for Mental Health | The Importance Of Counselling*. <https://www.visioncounselling.com.au/counselling-for-mental-health/>

¹⁷ Beller, J., Kröger, C., & Hosser, D. (2019). Disentangling Honor-Based Violence and Religion: The Differential Influence of Individual and Social Religious Practices and Fundamentalism on Support for Honor Killings in a Cross-National Sample of Muslims. *https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260519869071*, 36(19–20), 9770–9789. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260519869071>

between governments, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations is crucial because it may result in more effective preventative measures and increased protection for those who are at danger¹⁸.

14. Community Involvement and Empowerment

Supporting survivors and combating honor killings need community empowerment and engagement. It is essential to include local communities in the creation of preventative measures for honor killings. This might include fostering gender equality, establishing safe forums for discussion, and motivating active engagement in anti-violence campaigns. The likelihood of honor-based violence may be decreased by empowering women and other marginalized communities via leadership development, economic opportunity, and education. These programs provide people the means to oppose oppressive behaviors and aid in the fight of damaging gender stereotypes. In addition to offering a more comprehensive strategy for community healing and reconciliation, restorative justice techniques, when used appropriately, may help survivors and offenders have conversations (under stringent safety precautions)¹⁹.

Conclusion

In summary, this research highlights the serious psychological harm suffered by survivors and investigates broader cultural perspectives on honor murders. Depression, social isolation, and post-traumatic stress disorder are among the severe and long-lasting impacts on survivors' emotional and mental well-being. The study emphasizes the challenges these provide to survivors and their communities, as well as the complex social and cultural factors that perpetuate honor-based violence. Effective solutions are crucial to reducing the psychological impact and fostering a culture of awareness and prevention. These consist of mental health support, legislative modifications, and community education. The results highlight the critical need for multidisciplinary intervention, in which community leaders, legal authorities, and mental health specialist's work together to provide survivors comprehensive care. Breaking the cycle of fear and silence that supports honor-based violence requires addressing the social stigmas associated with it. To prevent these crimes, governments and human rights groups must cooperate to enact stronger legislation and guarantee its enforcement. Survivors should also have access to trauma-informed treatment and culturally relevant therapy to support their long-term recovery. Campaigns for public awareness may also be very important in changing negative conventional wisdom and encouraging compassion for survivors. Ultimately, to end honor murders, assist survivors, and advance a more equitable and inclusive society, a thorough, community-driven strategy is required. To create focused solutions and evaluate how well current approaches are working to address this serious problem, further study is necessary.

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