



# Addressing Honor Killings As A Human Right Violation: A Global Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

Honor killings often justified by cultural or social norms, disproportionately affect women and marginalized groups, leading to widespread impunity for perpetrators. It represent a deeply entrenched cultural practice that tragically intersects with issue of gender, power and violence. It is defined as the murder of individuals –predominantly women- by the family members who perceive that the victim has brought dishonor upon the family, these acts are often rooted in patriarchal traditions and societal expectations. This article examines honor murders as breaches of international human rights law and outlines a variety of tactics that might be taken to achieve international responsibility for honor killings. It focuses on the positive responsibilities placed on nations by international human rights treaties, namely the right to life and the prohibition of discrimination. These rights were selected because they are disproportionately impacted by honor murders and reflect diverse perspectives on human rights abuses. It is maintained that honor murders are no longer only crimes to be prosecuted under local law, but also breaches of international human rights law.

**KEYWORDS:** Honor killings, right to life, principle of non-discrimination, positive obligations, patriarchy, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

## INTRODUCTION

Honor killings, a form of violence predominantly targeting women, are deeply rooted in cultural and social norms that prioritize family reputation over individual rights. This phenomenon transcends geographical boundaries, manifesting in diverse communities across the globe, including South Asia, the Middle East, and even Western nations. The motivations behind honor killings are complex and often intertwined with patriarchal values, where perceived dishonor—stemming from actions such as premarital relationships or defiance of traditional gender roles—can provoke familial violence as a means of restoring honor. In regions like Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan, honor killings are often justified by traditional practices and societal expectations that dictate strict codes of behavior for women. These cultural imperatives can lead to

tragic outcomes when individuals breach these norms. In Afghanistan, for example, there exist cultural traditions that require males to take extraordinary lengths to preserve their family's honour, such as abusing their female relatives if they are seen to have brought disgrace to the family. Despite laws intended to protect women's rights, caste-based and patriarchal systems continue to be prevalent in India, which contributes to the prevalence of honor killings. Another important case study for comprehending honor killings is the Eastern Mediterranean region. Here, the culture's deeply rooted views on female chastity and family honor lead to a general acceptance of violence as a way to right perceived wrongs. This cultural context not only feeds the cycle of violence but also makes it more difficult to address the problem with legislative changes and community education programs that try to alter attitudes.

## **MEANING & DEFINITION OF HONOR KILLING**

The word "honor" comes from the root word "honor," which means respectability or worthiness. Nevertheless, none of these connotations condone or justify killing someone in order to protect honor. That being said, the phrase "Honor killing" has an oxymoronic quality. The "honor" that resides in the woman who is directly under the man's control is what is considered honorable in a narrow-minded patriarchal society, not the respectability of a man. The mask of masculinity that the society has created is based primarily on the idea of women's "honor." Males bear the responsibility of safeguarding the worth of girls and women by enforcing discipline over their wives, mothers, and daughters.

Human Rights Watch defined 'honor killing' as "acts of vengeance, usually death, committed by male family members against female family members who are held to have brought dishonor upon the family which can be for several reasons such as refusing to enter into an arranged marriage, being the victim of sexual assault, committing adultery etc.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES ON HONOUR KILLING**

Killing for honour demonstrates how the values of "patriarchy" and "feudalism" are ingrained in our social structures and systems and amounts to a complete rejection of "egalitarianism," which is a pillar of the Indian Constitution. Honour killings stem from outmoded, out dated beliefs and made-up promises. Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security, according to Articles 3 and 16 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The right to marry or start a family should be granted to both men and women "of full age without any limitation due to race, nationality, or religion." When it comes to marriage and divorce, they have equal rights. Only with the willing and free consent of both participating spouses may a marriage be consummated. Since the family is the natural and fundamental social unit, both the state and society have a duty to protect it. In a similar spirit, the Constitution guarantees everyone the freedom to love and live with the person of their choosing. Thus, honor killings amount to a flagrant violation of the fundamental rights protected by the Constitution as well as the utmost disregard for human rights generally. According to a United Nations Population Fund study from 2000, up to 5,000 women and girls are slain every year by family members who feel that they have dishonored them. The "dishonor" of having been raped is a factor in numerous of the cases. These crimes for honour violates human rights, infringes the right to live with dignity as per article 21 of the Indian Constitution. It shows the lack of attributes of empathy, love, compassion, tolerance among fellow human beings, creates a crisis of credibility in the government machinery to control such killings. It undermines the integrity of institutions such as of police, judiciary etc. It infringes the right to choose and creates stress, fear and trauma among the lower. It hampers a nation of integration, solidarity, corporation etc. It hampers peace and shows a lack of rational thinking capacity and emotional intelligence. It is not a crime against any individual rather it is a crime against the whole society at large where some group of person consider them more Superior and consider themselves above law. With such kind of acts the ethical values of a society such as tolerance, respect for diversity, self-determination etc., are degraded when such acts are committed.

## RECENT TRENDS ON HONOR KILLING

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates that the annual worldwide number of honour killings is as high as 5,000 women and girls 10, though some non-governmental organization (NGOs) estimates as many as 20,000 honour killings annually worldwide. Though data is limited, studies reveal that women of various ages, religious beliefs, social classes, income levels, educational backgrounds, and geographic locations are victims of honour killings. Honor killings occur frequently in India, but the government rarely reports them because the victims' relatives often report them as suicides and destroy any evidence that might suggest otherwise. In 2018, the National Crimes Record Bureau (NCRB) documented just one case of honor killing in Delhi, India; the year before, the NCRB recorded only one case of honor killing in Surat, Gujarat. It clearly indicates that cases of honor killing are mostly remain unreported, in reality the number of cases are higher in percentage.

## INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS TO COMBAT HONOR KILLING

Honor killings have gained momentum over the past few decades, with various organizations and legal frameworks addressing this critical human rights issue. The following outlines key international initiatives and strategies aimed at eliminating honor killings globally.

**1. United Nations Resolutions and Framework** - The United Nations has played a significant role in addressing honor killings through various resolutions and recommendations:

**General Assembly Resolutions:** Resolutions such as A/RES/55/66 (2000) and subsequent resolutions have condemned honor killings as human rights violations. These resolutions call upon member states to take legislative, educational, and social measures to prevent such crimes, emphasizing the need for effective investigation and prosecution of perpetrators.

**CEDAW Committee Recommendations:** The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has issued General Recommendation No. 19, which advocates for the removal of legal defenses based on honor in cases of violence against women. This recommendation has been applied specifically to countries like Jordan and Pakistan, urging them to strengthen laws against honor killings.

**2. Regional Initiatives** - Regional bodies have also taken steps to address honor killings:

**Council of Europe Convention:** The Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women (Istanbul Convention) explicitly states that culture, custom, religion, or tradition should not be accepted as justifications for violence against women, including honor-based violence.

**Stockholm Platform for Action:** In 2004, the Stockholm Platform recommended that EU member states enhance victim support services and strengthen legal frameworks to protect individuals at risk of honor crimes.

**3. Engagement with Civil Society** - Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a crucial role in advocating for victims' rights and pushing for legal reforms:

**Advocacy and Awareness Campaigns:** NGOs work to raise awareness about the prevalence of honor killings and the need for legal reforms. They provide crucial data and reports to international bodies to inform policy decisions.

**Legal Support Services:** Many NGOs offer legal assistance to victims seeking justice, helping them navigate complex legal systems that may not adequately protect their rights[1].

**4. Data Collection and Research Initiatives** - The collection of reliable data on honor killings is essential for understanding the scope of the problem and informing policy:

**UN Reports:** The UN has called for improved data collection on honor killings to better understand their prevalence and inform legislative measures. This includes gathering information on the socio-cultural contexts that perpetuate these crimes[4].

**5. International Cooperation** - Collaboration between countries is vital in addressing cross-border issues related to honor killings:

**Asylum Provisions:** Some countries have amended their asylum laws to provide refuge for individuals fleeing honor-based violence. This includes ensuring that women at risk can obtain residence permits or asylum status if they face threats in their home countries.

## CONCLUSION

International efforts to combat honor killings involve a combination of legislative reforms, regional cooperation, civil society engagement, and enhanced data collection. While significant progress has been made, ongoing challenges remain in enforcing laws and changing cultural attitudes that condone such violence. Continued international collaboration and commitment are essential to effectively eliminate honor killings as a violation of human rights globally. Honor crimes are obviously against both national and international law, which India is obligated to respect. Thus, the necessary legal framework is in place to guarantee that the police forces take the necessary steps to guarantee that honor killings do not occur throughout the nation. In order to guarantee that the frequency of their violation is significantly reduced, these provisions must be consistently enforced. The UN's 1993 "Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women" and its 2003 "Working towards the Elimination of Crimes against Women Committed in the Name of Honor" are two documents that specifically address honor killings. It is clearly stated in these documents that "Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to discrimination against women and over them by men, as well as to the prevention of women's full advancement, and that One of the main social mechanisms that pushes women into a subordinate role in relation to men is violence against them. But the problem is not the law itself, or the law's partial enforcement. The larger issue is that communities that reside in areas where honor crimes are more common genuinely encourage criminal activity. This is the single biggest obstacle facing the force created to stop honor crimes.

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