

Honor Killing in Erbil City; Social Factors A Field Study

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ABSTRACT

Honour killing is one of oldest crime carried out in human's history, mostly by men, especially in the Middle East culture. Furthermore, honour killing is concerning issue, involve killing of individuals, typically women, by their family members due to the belief that the victim has brought shame or dishonour to their family. It is essential to identify the factor behind this crime in Kurdish society and work towards eliminating such harmful practices to ensure the safety and dignity of all individuals, regardless of their gender or cultural background. It is important for social science researchers to find out the factors behind this horrified crime, also how men see their honour and dignity in women's gender. In Kurdish society, Honour killing is social phenomenon as it has been increased in past decade. The main question in this research is how social factors effected on increasing honour killing in Kurdistan/ Erbil City? Has Honour Killing become social phenomenon in Kurdish society? This research focuses on social factors like religion, culture, family reputation and status affecting honour crimes in Kurdistan. Although prior research has addressed academic efforts to address this issue, it is still important to regularly investigate the social factors of HK as a contribution to reduction initiatives while the continuation of HK harms democratization process in general and women rights in particular. This topic is also related to Kurdish structure and social system of Kurdistan. Despite the legal progress related to women rights, the HK rate is still considerably high. Overall, all interviewees believed that cultural factors are the main causes for the continuation of HK.

KEYWORDS: Honour Killing, Social factors, Culture, Social Structure.

1. INTRODUCTION

For thousands of years, honour killing has been practiced in patriarchal societies as a means of demonstrating male dominance. In traditional societies, this has been the case for centuries. Recent attention has been focused on its operations in some Middle Eastern societies.

This research investigates how surviving an attempted honour killing affects women in Erbil City, Kurdistan.

Periodically, HK crime occurs involving everything from torture to rape. This is dreadful not only for its

violence but because it involves family members as both victims and perpetrators. Honour killing is the murdering of a female member of a family by another family member (usually a male) in the name of honour. The murderer will claim that the victim brought dishonour to the family. This is due to women usually having affairs or wanting to marry a man from another religion, clan, or because of the possibility she was practicing sex before marriage or she was seen with her boyfriend. The spilling of the blood of the victim is seen as necessary to erase the shame she has brought to her family by having an affair or sexual relationship outside marriage (Joseph and Najmabadi, 2005).

Honour Killing has gained a lot of media coverage over the years all over the world. It is a horrific crime that some communities accept as part of their tradition. However, to many in the countries of the western world it is an unthinkable crime that needs to stay in the media. This is in order to help make people especially women aware of this awful crime as well as to help establish groups to provide support for women who have escaped this awful crime. Through support groups

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and with the growing media interest Honour Killing has been established as a horrific crime that is in need of an effective resolution and punishment.

Importance of this research:

This research is crucial because it examines the impact of surviving an attempted Honour Killing (HK) on women in Erbil City, Kurdistan, shedding light on an important and sensitive issue that can inform interventions and support mechanisms.

Top of Form

This topic is related to Kurdish structure and social system of Kurdistan. According to the statistics provided by the Directorate Combating Violence Against Women (DCVAW), the prevalence of Honour killings is on the rise, despite the implementation of new laws in the Kurdistan Region Government (KRG) and ongoing developmental initiatives aimed at advancing Kurdistan and enhancing public awareness. The data further highlights that between the years 2010 and 2020, a total of 490 women lost their lives due to honor killings, while an additional 612 women resorted to self-immolation. These figures underscore the persistence of the issue, emphasizing the need for continued efforts in addressing and preventing Honour -based violence. (Ghazi, 2022).

Research objectives:

The current study examines reasons of honour killing in Erbil by identifying the causes and social factors of Honour Killing. It will identify the factors which promote and maintain honour killing. In addition, this research focuses on social factors like religion, culture, family reputation and status effecting on Honour Crimes in Kurdistan.

Research Questions:

The main research of the current research is "What are the social factors influencing Honour Killing in Erbil City?". Within the scope of this research on Honour Killing in Erbil City and its social factors, In order to explore different aspects of the overarching inquiry, specific sub-questions have been formulated:

1. How do professionals or experts identify common social factors related to honour killing?
2. What is the expert's perspective on the reasons for honour killings?
3. What do experts think considering HK cases?

Literature Review:

Recently Honour Crimes have increased especially in the Middle East. In order to rid the man/ family or communal fund of this embarrassment and to restore honour, the female offenders must be punished. Furthermore, Araji (2000) argued that feminist and other

social scientists believe the victimization of females as gender-based violence is due to females' having a lower social status in society than men do. Social institutions in societies impacted by HK support a patriarchal structure as they give men the right to control women. This is carried out at the individual, group or institutional level.

Honour killings and punishments towards women have been documented over many centuries among a wide variety of ethnic and religious groups throughout the world. Haviland, Walrath, Prins and McBride (2008:236) state that anthropologists have identified honour traditions in many parts of the world, especially in remote traditional herding and farming societies where the power of the political state is either absent or ineffective. Typically, women who are accused of having sex with someone other than their husbands are killed by their husbands when they are accused of having sex with someone other than their husbands. It is a phenomenon that occurs even in the Kurdish diaspora when a woman is killed simply because she is in love. Moreover, honour killings have been committed for thousands of years up to the present date in almost all cultures in the Middle East, in Asia and even more progressive countries such as the UK. There is one outstandingly important similarity among communities that practice honour killings. This is that women are men's property and have a direct impact on men's honour and reputation, just as the actions of a child reflect on its parents' character, so does ones wife, mother and sisters. In other words they are seen as exclusively the property of men.

History of Honour Killing:

It is important to focus on the history of honour killing and where the idea was occurred. By looking at history and background of honour killing, would be at ease to find out social factors behind it.

To begin with, Marzany (2009: 122) stated that Honour killing was mentioned in Hammurabi's Law (1750-1729 B.C). He was widely punishing women who had an affair without their husbands consent. This law indicates why for many generations honour killing has occurred in the Middle East and is still continuing at the present time.

The most common rationale used to justify the abuse and killing of women is the notion that one's honour is dependent on the behaviour of others. This conception is distinct from the notion that honour depends only on individual behaviour This concept differs from the idea that honour depends solely on an individual's actions. In order to maintain one's self-esteem and status in the community, one must pay close attention to the behaviour of others.

In Schneider's (1968:2) interpretation of honour, it is regarded as "the ideology of a power group struggling

to define, extend and protect its patrimony in a competitive environment".

Historically, this type of honour has been found in many patriarchal societies. It is the honour of the tribe, clan, or family which determines the status and acceptance of an individual in traditional societies. The honour of the tribe, clan, or family is highly affected by the behaviour of the female members. It is not the case in traditional societies that women are entitled to honour as individuals, independent of their roles within their families, clans, or tribal groups. In particular, their actions as individuals, particularly when they engage in actual or perceived sexual misconduct, only serve to discredit others. Nevertheless, it is not only sexual misconduct, but any act of misbehavior on the part of female members that can bring dishonour and shame to the male members of the community, lineage, or family (Kandiyoti, 2002:322). In order to prevent dishonour from occurring, the honour ideology is enforced through systematic control of women's social and especially sexual behavior. In traditional societies, this places women in a very dangerous position.

As far as religion factors concern, as Kurdish society majority are Muslim, in this research briefly highlighted about religion factors behind honour killing. It is established by Islamic law that when punishing the parties involved in adultery, both men and women are equally guilty and consequently suffer the same punishment as they are deemed to be guilty and punished equally by Islamic law. Islam has a very strict and straightforward stance in regards to crimes of honour. In the Holy Quran, it is stated, "Those who accuse chaste women and do not present four witnesses for their accusation will receive eighty lashes and they will not be accepted as witnesses after that" (Surat Noor: 350). As a result of these statements, Muslims cannot simply accuse others of adultery or punish them for such a crime without providing evidence to support their accusations.

Regardless of this improvement, there are millions of women who still suffer from domestic violence, forced marriages, their lives being threatened, and/ or sexual assault. As this suggests, even now there are places where women's human rights are denied (Peters and Wolper 1995:3-22). In Iraqi Kurdistan the social position of women has been improving significantly since the Kurdistan region's government changed the law about women's right. The Kurdish government offer accommodation to women whose lives have been threatened by providing them with protection from their families. Also, many Iraqi women suffer from oppressions, which affect them in all facets of their lives, including culturally, legally, socially, economically, and politically (Ahmed, 2021). Overall, women's lives have seen significant improvement across the world during

the last century. There has been a revolution of women's movements internationally. This evolution has remade history by changing women's roles.

Reform in Kurdistan's Regional Government:

Between 1991-1992 KRG has separate regional Government. Subsequently, after Kurdistan obtained their freedom, some laws were reformed and changed to suits modern society and took an action for protecting women's rights.

It is believed that there are over hundreds of women's organizations that were launched by the KRG or other Non-Government Organizations to fight against violence towards women and protect their rights. Furthermore, these organizations raise people's awareness, through activities such as campaigning and training. They also provide legal support to women and psychological help to survivors of various forms of abuse, such as from burning, killing or domestic violence. On the other hand, as a result of this reform, social, economic and cultural changes have occurred in the society (Bagikhani, 2010). Yet, these changes have had positive as well as negative impacts upon people; there has been a deviation in the behaviour of members of the community. Despite all the advantages of technology like satellites, the internet and mobiles, technology has been misused by some people, and as a result cyber-bullying has occurred. Unfortunately, actions such as capturing women's images, without their knowledge, and publishing them on YouTube or other social networks, has resulted in the killing of many innocent women. Therefore, despite the political and social progress previously mentioned there are still significant problems in Kurdistan such as honour killing as the attitudes which support honour killing still remain prevalent in such societies.

Honor killings are considered inexcusable crimes by the Kurdistan Regional Government and are categorised as acts of violence. According to the Kurdistan Parliament's Law No 3 (2015), special punishments will not be imposed against those who commit honour-related killings under article 40 of the Iraqi Penal Code, which provided for reduced penalties when these crimes are committed. As opposed to federal laws, the laws of the KRI define honour-killings as premeditated murders, which are punishable with heavy punishments, including life sentences, for those who commit them. There is a sense of solidarity between the KRG and its international counterparts, as the latter are committed to demonstrating critical democratic values and embodying good governance. In the Regional Action Plan for Human Rights (2021-2025), the KRG acknowledges there is a continuing commitment from the UK to improve the competence and capacity of judges and prosecutors within the KRG and appreciates its continued support Considering the challenges,

stability, and security of their citizens, KRG counterparts anticipate further constructive, bilateral engagement (GOV.KRD,2023). Also, KRG has provided shelters to Women whose lives are threatened by their families can find accommodation under the Kurdish government's protection program. On the other hand, Ahmed (2021) believed that despite the lack of departments to gather information, and the variety of mechanisms used to conduct honour killings, it is evident that the number of honour killings is considerable as presented. It is also impossible to track all aspects of the crimes. It is common for criminals to fabricate and misleading cases in order to escape the laws, but Iraq's/ KRI's legal system is unable to deal with this issue, so the legal system follows cultural and tradition norms in response to the situation, providing cultural justification to the perpetrators.

Methodology:

In this research, the researcher has used semi structured interviews, as it is believed to be the most suitable method for gaining information by the participants. This is because during interview extra information or more questioning will come up to add more details to the research and more beneficial for the research (Bryman, 2012). The researcher has carried out individual interview one to one (face to face). The duration of each interview was between 45-60 minutes. Verbal consents were obtained to record their voices through recorder. Then, after data collection, The researcher transcribed all the interviews interviews and archived considering ethical measurements so that the records are untraceable.

The researcher chose the research sample in Erbil city, the participants were (purposeful sampling). I have chosen this type of sample because in qualitative research depends on this type of sample (Bryman, 2012). I only interviewed nine participants because I have gained enough information to cover all the parts of this research. The participants were five male and four female. They were experts in sociology, social work (faculties at the university) and officers in Directorate combating violence against women DCVAW. The researcher has used thematic analysis (Bryman, 2012), the researcher identified most commonly repeated themes including family reputation, culture and patriarchal society.

Also transmitted documents has been used to obtain historical background about HK in Kurdistan and new HK data record in Kurdistan. However, due to the sensitivity of the subject, many victims of domestic violence do not report domestic abuse (Rafiq, 2010).

Ethical Issues:

Given the nature of the Kurdish society and the sensitivity of the topic, this research could potentially put the researcher in a dangerous position. We have carried out my research in Erbil, the capital city of Kurdistan. Erbil is a modern city where the law is more adhered to, compared to other cities in Iraq. This is due to having a greater feminist and women's groups in the city, as well as having many female MPs in Kurdistan Regions Government (KRG), who have helped establish a very positive impact on women's freedom in Erbil.

When carried out my research project, I paid attention to the following ethical issues:

Sensitivity - the issue of honour killing is a sensitive issue that needs to be treated with caution.

Data Protection - ensured the information I gather is not accessible to others and ensured the protection of participants' anonymity and confidentiality.

Safety - When carrying out research on this topic, many issues may arise that can jeopardise my safety. Lee (1993:1) stated that doing research on sensitive subjects has potential effects on the researcher's personal life and security, as they may face problems and issues during data collection, methodological, ethical or legal. I have undertaken a risk assessment, to ensure that my own safety is not compromised.

Confidentiality: As it is essential that researchers should not pass on identifiable data to anyone without participants' consent, any research carried out should guarantee anonymity and confidentiality. The researcher has kept the identities of their interviewees private. The coding process was used for example, A1, A2, A3, A4 for experts in sociology department. For social work department following code B1, B2, B3, and for officers in Directorate combating violence against women (DCVAW) C1 and C2.

Personal and Professional elements - Professional values are largely guided and maintained by the established ethical principles of a profession. In addition to this professional aspect of ethics is the personal aspect. The personal aspect, motivates decision making based on one's own conscience. Personal values can play a significant role in protecting the integrity of ones enquiries through careful data collection and analysis, as well as accurate and objective reporting of research finding. I was careful to protect the human rights of individuals when taking into consideration the women's personal experiences as they have survived honour killing.

Finding and Discussion

Q1: What are the causes and factors of Honour Killing in Kurdistan?

Based on the nine interviews the researcher has carried out with experts in Erbil, all interviewees

believed that social structures of Kurdish society encourage HK in Kurdistan. Furthermore, they believed that cultures of Kurdish society mixed with other Middle East countries culture like Iranian, Turkish and Arabic countries, Kurdish society has been affected and influenced by their culture. These countries culture encourages HK. Also, three experts believed that Some factors contributing to honour killing include refusal of an arranged marriage, seeking divorce, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics, and victims of rape and early marriage causes infidelity which leads to honour killing (A1, B1,B3). Furthermore, one (C1) of the expert added to above points, extra important points, like: having different ideologies between husband and wife could lead arguments and not finding half way of discussion that pushes women to burn herself and kill herself. Plus, this expert believes that according to research she has read about connection between burning themselves and changing hormones before, during or after menstruation. As they added more details about this, by saying according to that research which was carried out in Emergency hospital in Erbil, some women who tried to burn themselves were interviewed they have mentioned they were pre, on-period or after. So, this changing hormone leads to arguments between them and cause HK. Last interview, the interviewee highlighted some important points about factors and locations of HK in Kurdistan. He stated that since 2008 he has been working with HK cases, in the past more HK cases use to be in small towns and villages, but since 2014 due to Syrian immigrants and IDP people came to Kurdistan, HK rates has been increased in big cities (A1).

Last but not least, all experts believed that the most common methods of killing include stoning, stabbing, beating, burning, beheading, hanging, throat slashing, lethal acid attacks, shooting and strangulation. Unfortunately, one of the expert gave an example about some cases were reported as committing suicide or car accident while they were killed by their male family member (C2). Furthermore, she mentioned that some cases were forced to write a letter to admit they will commit suicide and then they were provided petrol and fire to burn themselves that to be reported as suicide while its forced Honour killing.

Q2: To what extent culture has impact upon HK in Kurdistan?

All nine experts believed that culture and social structure of Kurdish society contribute to encouraging honour killing. One of the expert (B3) believes that Kurdish culture has rapidly changed since 2003 with the further development of technology, more access to internet by majority of people in Kurdish society among different levels and ages of people. Because of this rapid social change, leaded to having different other cultures

mixed with Kurdish culture and made Kurdish patriarchal society to be reduced and having more globalization and modern ideas in Kurdistan. In their opinion, these changes made fade away slowly patriarchal activity. As a consequence, the concept of Honour killing noticeably reduced in Kurdish society especially among younger generation. In the other word, love affair is more accepted, and infidelity is more dealt with by law instead of family males taking an action.

More importantly, in the last 2 decades the culture of Kurdish society has been changed and new law set punishment for those who commit crime under the name of HK. Plus, it is important to note that culture, social norms and community pressure play a significant role in perpetuating honour killings. The failure to conform to these norms and culture can result in social ostracism, rejection, and even violence from one's own family and community. In some cases, individuals are hesitant to challenge the prevailing cultural practices because of fear of being cast out or stigmatized.

One of the expert (C2) believed that social media and mixing other cultures like Turkish series or movies or different social Media's bloggers background and culture encouraged women and girls to follow them and copy their behaviours which these not accepted by their family, these could lead to HK too.

Q3: To what extent patriarchal society in Kurdistan contribues to HK? How?

All experts/ interviewees believed that the structure of Kurdish society is patriarchal society, Gender inequality gives men all power and become decision maker at home. If female member in family love someone, or having a fair, even expressing their ideas can lead to HK. Regardless this male member is holding high qualifications or positions still not accepting opposed idea or modernity from their wife, sister or daughter. Furthermore, they believe that Family and community reputation: In some cultures, the reputation and honour of the family and community are considered of utmost importance. If any behaviour is perceived to bring shame or dishonour on the family, such as disobedience, premarital sex, extramarital affairs, or choosing a partner against family wishes, an extreme response is likely to occur in order to restore the family's honour.

Q4: Do you think family class or family status effecting HK? How?

Eight experts (A1,A2,A3,B1,B2,B3,C1,C2)believed that family class and reputation is very important in Kurdish society. Having good family status among people is making this family not accepting mistakes from their female member. Moreover, being a head of tribe or Agha in Kurdistan makes you to have a famous name among people, if one female member in family love someone outside the area or family could lead to HK. Sometime

the head of tribe or family does not want to commit this crime but he is surrounded by other males pushing him to agree to kill her. On the other hand, one of the experts believed that high class families are dealing with the situation differently, for example she knew someone regardless having a fair and love outside their marriage, but this was acceptable by partner because they were from rich family each time their partner was travelling to outside Kurdistan, was bringing expensive gifts which made her to accept this a fair. If this situation was from poor family would not be accepted and could lead to argument and divorce or HK. The last interviewee (C2) has stated that he attended one of the investigations about HK case in Erbil city in 2014, the father killed his daughter under his family's pressure to clean his honour. According to doctor's report the victim was innocent, once the investigation was carried out based on victim's statement, eyewitness and crime evidence the criminal father was informed that his daughter was innocent did not commit any adultery as she was still virgin. Once the father heard this statement, he started shouting and accusing his family and brother to push him to clean family's reputation by kill his daughter.

Q5: To what extent lack of social awareness increased rate of HK in Kurdistan?

The lack of social awareness in Kurdistan in regard of gender, is one of the reason of HK in Kurdistan. All experts believed that Kurdish society likes having boys rather than girls, this makes them to give male power and control over female. Two of experts believed that regardless of having over 300 NGO's in Kurdistan, but still the rate of HK has increased, these NGO's are not doing their job properly by delivering social awareness about gender, human's right and women's equality. However, 7 experts believed that now a days KRG's new rules and regulations for those who commits HK decreased the rate of HK in Kurdistan. Also, they believed that during the past decade, the social position of women has improved significantly in Iraqi Kurdistan since the Kurdistan region's government changed the law regarding women's rights.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, With all the information and data obtained, I have a better understanding of why honour killings continue to take place in Kurdistan and how KRG has changed people's perceptions of honour killings.

For honour killings to be effectively combated, it is essential to address these social factors through education, legal reforms, and raising awareness about gender equality and human rights. In order to eliminate honour killing, it is necessary to change social attitudes and

promote gender equality. Kurdistan regional Government's new policy against honour killing was obtained and evaluated its level of success in reducing honour killing and changing the attitudes which underpin this practice.

Many women lost their lives due to this crime (Honour killing) as male members of their families have taken it upon themselves to end their lives. To summaries, find out 'why does honour killing occur?' and 'why is it allowed to occur? In the middle east culture especially Kurdish society, the reputation and honour of the family and community are highly valued. It is possible for a family to react in an extreme manner to any behaviour believed to bring shame or dishonour upon the family, such as disobedience, premarital sex, extramarital affairs, or choosing a partner against the wishes of the family.

Moreover, honour killing is a phenomenon that has been prevalent throughout the world for many years. Numerous catalysts influence how many honour killings are carried out in each region depending on the culture, religion, and political climate, along with maleness and patriarchy. Due to the fact that their behaviour is viewed as justified, the perpetrators often do not suffer negative stigma within their communities. A traditional Kurdish social structure includes the threat of death to remove stains of dishonour, which serves as a preventive measure to prevent a woman from damaging the family's reputation. In order to wash away the dishonour, the woman is allowed to be killed by her brother, her husband, or her father.

Finally, there are a number of different types of 'honour crimes', most commonly murder, but they can also include physical abuse, confinement, control of movement, deprivation of education, forced marriage, forced suicide, and public dishonouring.

To conclude, the fight against honour killing requires some specific steps. First, Iraq must constitutionalize and nationalize the rights that have been outlined in international treaties and conventions, and it should not be permitted to normalize honour killing under the guise of cultural, religious, or traditional justifications.

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