

The issue of preventing honour killings in marginalised communities

Gender-related killing occurs in societies around the world, be it as a result of partner violence, in the name of “honour”, accusations of sorcery or witchcraft, or in the context of armed conflict. In most cases, the victims are women and girls and the killing is the final step in a continuum of violence.

Honour killing, or shame killing is the murder of an individual, either an outsider or family member, by someone seeking to protect what they believe is “honour” or “dignity” to them and their family. They are often connected to cultural belief, caste and other forms of social structure and are believed to have originated from tribal customs prevalent in all parts of the world. Especially in MENA countries and South Asian, or in immigrant communities that originate from areas where honour killings are part of societal norms. Although most prominent in rural areas, they are starting to occur in more urban areas and although these horrendous acts are condemned by the international community, we find that far too often these perpetrators are not held accountable and impunity prevails.

The United Nations Population Fund estimates that as many as 5000 women are killed annually for reasons relating to “honour” and although there is increasing international awareness of honour killings, many countries are unwilling to take steps to effectively criminalise it. In rare occasions that some countries prosecute a man for the murder, the subsequent trial would often focus on the woman’s alleged behaviour, rather than the brutal acts committed against her. When a man was found guilty, the defendant could claim that the crime had been committed to restore sullied family honour and petition the court for a reduced sentence. *In India, for example, the government enacted strict penalties for violence against women during the 1980s. However, honour killings based on inter-caste and interreligious marriages continued to take place in rural areas, where they were largely unreported to police because of direct or indirect support among village residents. Such murders were often ruled as accidents when reported. A woman beaten, burned, strangled, shot, or stabbed to death could be ruled a suicide, even if there were multiple wounds and there was no possibility the woman could have killed herself.*¹

This informs us that honour killings aren’t just a cultural issue or religious issue, but also a legislative one.

Honour killings are a serious violation of the UN declaration of human rights, and this is agreed upon within the international community.

So as the human rights council how do we enforce measure to reduce these acts of violence against women, particularly in marginalised communities.

Points to consider:

- Creating awareness in the UN – how can you get member states to take this issue more seriously?
- Cultural awareness – could you create culturally sensitive education or resources to promote gender equality?
- Accessing information – more difficult for individuals in marginalised communities
- Support and protection – create systems where women can reach out if they feel at risk of an honour killing.
- Harsher legislation – can act as a deterrent against honour killings
- Corruption within legal systems – this is something to consider, especially if corrupt legal systems are acting in the favour of the perpetrators.
- Medical assistance

Useful Links:

https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/GRK_eBook.pdf

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/honor-killing>¹

