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## Essay

# Honour killings In Pakistan: Causes and Consequences

## Outline

### I. Introduction:

#### A. Hook

#### B. Background

C. Thesis Statement: Honour killings in Pakistan are a manifestation of deep-rooted patriarchal system, distorted cultural norms, weak enforcement of law and socio-economic deprivation; despite legal reforms, weak law enforcement and societal complicity continue to perpetuate intergenerational normalization of honour killings, social marginalization of women and forced marriages.

### II. Causes of Honour Killing in Pakistan:

#### A. Deep-Rooted Patriarchal Social System:

Entrenched male dominance in the society authorizes men to act as the custodian of women's autonomy.

Case in Point - HRCP has reported women are the most affected from honour killings in Pakistan

and the major reason being their marriage choice and alleged immorality.

## B. Misinterpretation of Cultural and Tribal Norms:

Strict tribal norms and social restrictions on woman's autonomy are most prevalent among areas where tribal system continues to prevail.

Case in Point — ACER Publications and National Commission on the Status of Women have claimed in their reports that majority of honour-killings are reported in Sindh and Balochistan where strong tribal system and norms prevail.

## C. Informal Parallel Justice Systems (Panchayat and Jirga Systems):

In tribal areas, Panchayats and Jirgas continue to hold dispute resolution powers and hence play a major role in legitimizing honour-based killings in their jurisdiction.

Case in Point — National Commission on Status of Women's Report "Women, Violence and Jirgas" mentions that despite multiple Supreme Court rulings declaring jirgas as illegal, they continue to prevail among tribal areas, legitimizing honour killings.

## D. Weak enforcement of law:

Despite legal reforms, weak rule of law continues to perpetuate crimes like honour killings.

Case in Point — Pre-partition "Mea of Sudden and grave provocation", Post-partition "Islamization of PPC (1860)" and "(Criminal Law (Amendment) Act of 2004, 2016" continue to facilitate perpetrators due to their weak compliance.

## E. Legal Loopholes and Misuse of Qisas and Diyat Provisions of Pakistan Penal Code (1860):

Loopholes in provisions of Section 302, 305 and 309 of PPC allows perpetrators of honor-killing (times) to evade punishment and resolve dispute with victims or their heirs.

Case in Point — Samia Sarwar case (1999) was shot in her lawyer's office in Lahore by her parents in the name of 'honour' and her brother, being her Wali as stated by section 305 of PPC, allowed their parents to evade punishment by using diyat (blood money) provision.

## F. Illiteracy and Lack of Awareness:

Lack of access to education and awareness in tribal areas perpetuates gender-based violence.

Case in Point - UNESCO in its report on honour killing has mentioned low literacy rates being a major reason of gender based violence in socially restricted jurisdictions.

## G. Socioeconomic Disparity and Poverty:

Economic deprivation reinforces strict social norms and continues to curtail woman's ability to participate economically in the society.

Case in Point - HRCR has reported that economically deprived regions are most affected by honour-based crimes.

## H. Gender Power Imbalance in Marriage and Inheritance Rights:

Patriarchal norms and Patrilineal society creates strict gender power gaps which manifest in the form of imbalance in marriage decisions and inheritance rights.

Case in Point - UN Women in their report has cited love marriages and inheritance rights a major cause of honor killings.

### III. Consequences of Honour Killing, in Pakistan:

#### A. Psychological Threat and Social Insecurity due to Strict Social Norms; and Honour killings:

Strict tribal norms and threat of honour killing creates fear and silences the women to stand up for their rights.

Case in Point - Aurat Foundation and Human Rights Watch have reported depression, psychological trauma and forced marriages as a consequence of honour-based violence.

#### B. Erosion of Public Trust in Justice System of the State:

Weak implementation of law and inability of state to address crimes i.e honour killing, erodes the trust of public in state and its justice system.

Case in Point - Research paper published by LUMS "Honor killings in Pakistan: legal and Judicial Treatment of Cases" reports loopholes in PPC and Criminal Law (Amendment) Acts of 2004 and 2016 as a major hindrance to address public concerns on honour killing cases prevalence.

### C. Social System legitimizes Violation of Fundamental Human Rights under the guise of 'honour':

Strict tribal social system and informal justice system legitimize crimes like honour killing depriving women of their fundamental right to life.

Case in Point - Despite being a signatory of CEDAW and Constitution of Pakistan Article 9 "right to life" provision, the state fails to ensure the provision of basic fundamental right of life to women.

### D. Intergenerational Normalization of Violence against Women:

Weak law enforcement, low conviction rates and ability of perpetrators to evade punishment creates the notion of intergenerational normalization of violence resulting in a vicious cycle of violence against women which will continue to erode the society.

Case in Point - Social Sciences Research paper published in May 2024 titled as "Honour, Violence and Children" reports sons of perpetrators are likely to indulge in violence later in their life.

## E. Perpetuation of Impunity

Low conviction rates and legal loopholes enable perpetrators of honour-based crimes to evade punishment.

Case in Point — Human Rights Commission of Pakistan has reported that low conviction rates of honour killings crime is directly related to perpetuation of impunity and criminals leaving scot-free.

## F. Hindrance to Educational and Economic Participation of Women:

Threat of Honour killing silences women in marginalized areas to avail the opportunity of education or employment, resulting in Pakistan's labour force contribution by women being extremely low.

Case in Point: According to World Bank, Female Labour Force in Pakistan is less than 25%.

## G. Forced marriages and Social Marginalization:

Women under the fear of honour killing are made to marry forcefully and are deprived of their fundamental rights.

Case in Point: UN Women has reported marriages against the family's will being the major reason of honour-based killings.

## IV. Conclusion

# The Essay

Despite the provision of Article 9 in the Constitution of Pakistan which states "right to life for all citizens" and Article 25 which states "equality for all the citizens irrespective of race, gender, religion", Pakistan continues to witness a rise in honour based killings, with the number reaching 405 in 2024 alone. Many activists claim that the real number is far more than the ones being reported because most honour killing cases are buried with the victim. Honour killing, by definition, is the murder by a person within their family or social group to restore their perceived honor. However, throughout the world and especially in Pakistan women are the ones most affected by honour based violence due to the notion of 'honour' being associated with women of the family. Honour killings in Pakistan take its roots from the pre-Islamic tribal norms that associated honour of the clan with the sexuality of women and considered

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men as the custodian of women's autonomy and behaviour. Honour killings continue to prevail in the colonial period with majority of perpetrators evading punishment under legal provision of "plea of sudden and grave provocation". However, weak enforcement of law and poor rule of law in post partition Pakistan re-enforced honour killings particularly in tribal areas where strict social norms and jirga system continues to prevail. From three teenage girls being buried alive in Naseerabad Belt of Balochistan in 2008 to Noor Bano's murder which surfaced on social media in July 2025, all in the name of 'honour', Pakistan has a long history of numerous reported and silenced cases of honour killings which continue to deprive women of their basic right to life, till the date. Honour killings in Pakistan are a manifestation of deep rooted patriarchal system, distorted cultural norms, weak enforcement of law and socio-economic deprivation; despite legal reforms, legal loopholes and societal complicity continue to perpetuate the crime resulting in social marginalization and silencing of women, forced marriages and normalization of crime in the society.

The first and one of the major causes of honour killings in Pakistan is the deeply entrenched patriarchal system of society. Pakistan, being a patrilineal society, has had male dominance in all domains whether its economic, political or social. This patriarchal structure of society enables men to act as custodian of women's actions and sexuality, restricting their right to education, economic independence and mobility in society. Human rights Commission of Pakistan has reported in multiple of its reports that women are the ones majority being affected by honour-based violence in Pakistan due to patriarchal societal norms, and one of the major reasons of honour killings is their marriage choices and inheritance rights. Hence, the deep-rooted patriarchal structure of Pakistan's society continues to restrict women's autonomy, mobility and freedom in the society, any violation of which is met with violence in the form of honour killings.

Misinterpreted and distorted cultural and tribal norms continue to be a reason honour killings continue to prevail in the society. Sindh, Balochistan and South Punjab, where tribal

system continues to prevail, report the highest number of honour based killings. The reason being that these tribal norms authorize men as the controller of actions of women within their family, and if a woman violates any of the strict tribal norms, as decided by men, then the man of the family is considered to have failed to protect the honour of his family and clan. This notion provokes men to murder women who violate social norms as a way to 'restore their honour' and to 'restore the reputation of their family and clan'. ACER publications and National Commission on the Status of Women have claimed in their reports that majority of honour-killings are reported in Sindh and Balochistan where strong tribal norms guide the society and its structure. Hence, as long as strict tribal norms continue to guide and legitimize men's role as a custodian of women and their clan's honour, honour killings will continue to erode the society.

Informal parallel justice systems like Panchayats in Sindh and Punjab and Jirgas in KP and Balochistan have a major role to play in legitimizing honour based killings

in their jurisdiction. In tribal areas, the ultimate power of dispute resolution still lies with the jirgas and panchayats. This power enables them to practice laws and punishments which suit their interests and tribal codes. Being a patriarchal society, cases involving women always end with women facing strict repercussions of the crimes in which they even had no share. The power to decide the fate of those involved in or perceived to be involved in immoral actions, has enabled jirgas and panchayats to take violent actions against those they perceive as violators of tribal norms. But despite numerous social media campaigns and international pressure by human rights agencies these jirga systems continue to deprive women of their right to life in the name of 'honour'. A report published by National Commission on the Status of Women "Women, Violence and Jirgas" states that despite multiple Supreme Court rulings declaring jirga systems as "illegal", they continue to prevail and legitimize honour killings. Hence, informal and tribal norms guided justice and dispute resolution of jirgas and panchayats continues to threaten women by depriving them of their right to

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to life and freedom in the name of honour.

Despite having legal provisions against honour killing and violence against women, weak enforcement results in perpetuation of crimes against women. Several legal provisions and amendments have been made in the justice system of Pakistan to prevent honour based crimes against women but none of them have been able to protect women against this heinous crime. The existence of legal provisions but their failure to provide justice to women has been going on even before partition. In the pre-partition era "plea of sudden and grave provocation" allowed men to walk out of honour-based killings without punishment of strict nature. Similarly, post-partition Islamization of Pakistan Penal Code (1860) in 1990s continues to provide men and perpetrators of honour killings an edge in the justice system. These provisions were added in 1990 when in "Federation of Pakistan v Hassan Gul" case enabled the justice system of Pakistan to introduce the provisions of Qiyas and Diyat in the legal system. The provision of diyat enables victim or heirs of victim to accept blood money

(diyat) instead of punishment to perpetrator.

But the problem arises because in most of the honour killing cases perpetrator is himself a member of the family, allowing the criminal to walk scot-free without any serious punishment. Loopholes in Criminal Act (Amendment) 2004 and 2016 also fail to address the qisas and diyat dilemma in legal system. Hence, weak enforcement of law and its failure to address honour killing cases with justice has resulted in prevalence of honour killings of women in Pakistan till date.

Legal loopholes has allowed perpetrators to misuse diyat and qisas provisions and alter their motives in the court to evade strict punishments. The section 302 of PPC (1860) mandates fourteen years imprisonment for those involved in any kind of murder, and may also be allowed to avail qisas and diyat under section 305 and 309 from the legal heirs of victims. The perpetrators may alter their motives as not being in context of honour in the court which allows them to avail the opportunity to settle dispute with the family of victim. Since most honour based killings involves family or

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clan members themselves they can easily evade punishment. Many cases have failed to reach justice due to these loopholes in the justice system, one case being that of Samia Sarwar, who in 1990 was killed in her lawyer's office in Lahore by her own parents in the name of 'honour'. Her brother, being her wali (legal heir), allowed the parents to evade punishment by using the provision of diyat (blood money) as provided in Pakistan Penal Code. Hence, failure of legal and judicial system to address the problem of diyat provision in honour killing cases continues to be a major contributing factor of prevalence of honour killings in Pakistan.

Illiteracy and lack of awareness among tribal areas continues to present strict tribal norms as the rigid guiding principles of society. Lack of awareness of basic rights of the members of society particularly the vulnerable ones i.e. women results in them being a victim of violence and honour killings. Illiteracy and lack of awareness acts as major driver of rigid norms-controlled society, impacting autonomy of women and their access to education. UNESCO in its reports

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has repeatedly declared low literacy rates in rural areas being a major reason of violence against women in rural areas and socially marginalized areas. Hence, illiteracy, lack of access to education and awareness results in women being a victim to strict tribal norms and subject to honour based killings.

Socioeconomic disparity and poverty is considered as a breeding ground for many other social ills, honour killing being one of them. Economically impoverished and socially excluded society or faction of society creates conditions which enforces strict tribal norms as the only guiding force of behaviour for its members.

Furthermore, exclusion of women from participating economically in the society further pushes the society into poverty. In such situations any resistance shown by women to gain economic independence to improve their social situation is considered to be as a violation of social norms and is met with violence in the form of honour killing of the women. HRCP has reported a direct connection between economically deprived areas and honour based killings. Hence, poverty ~~the~~ being the driving force of many social ills also is a major driving

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Force behind honour killings

Gender power imbalance both in the choice of marriage and the right to life provokes honour killings. Patriarchal norms and patrilineal society, being male dominated, provides an edge to men in their choice to marry and inheritance rights. This widens the gaps for women to claim both of these fundamental rights. In such situations, any resistance shown by women to claim either their right to marry by choice or claim their share in inheritance is met oftenly by killing in the name of 'honour'. UN Women in their report has cited love marriages and inheritance rights as the major driving force which provokes honour killings. Hence, gender imbalance in terms of access to right of choice to marry and right to claim share in inheritance results in honour killings in tribal areas.

So far this essay has discussed the major driving forces which provokes honour based killings in Pakistan, further onwards the impacts and consequences of honour killings will be discussed and how this heinous crime erodes the society.

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Honour killings create psychological trauma and a sense of social insecurity among women in the society. Repeated cases of honour killings are a part of Pakistan's contemporary crucial problems. Every now and then horror striking cases of murder in the name of honour become a part of news and social media trends. This creates fear among women and silences their voices to demand and raise voice for their basic fundamental rights out of fear of fate as traumatizing as honour killing. NGOs, like Aurat Foundation and Human rights watch have reported increase in depression, psychological trauma and forced marriages as a consequence of increase in honour killings particularly in the tribal areas of Pakistan. Hence, not only does honour killing threaten the freedom and autonomy of women of Pakistan it also manifests itself in the form of social insecurity and psychological trauma for women.

Failure to address honour killing cases results in erosion of public trust in Justice system of Pakistan. One of the major reasons of why honour killings continue to prevail in the society is weak implementation of law and legal loopholes. They have failed to ensure protection of women, as

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a result of which public has expressed its disgruntlement towards justice system of Pakistan. For any state, erosion of public's trust in justice system is a major driving force which inculcates into public unrest and social insecurity. A research paper published by Lahore Institute of Management Sciences (LUMS) titled "Honour killings in Pakistan: Legal and Judicial Treatment of Cases" highlights how loopholes in PPC and Criminal<sup>Law</sup> (Amendment) Act of 2004 and 2016 have failed to provide justice to honour killings victims and their advocates in Pakistan. Massive public outrage in 2016 after social media influencer Qandeel Baloch's murder in the name of honour by her brother resulted in parliament passing the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2016 but due to its failure to address the qisas and diyat misuse, it has largely failed to address public concerns on justice provision in honour killings cases. Hence, public trust in justice system of Pakistan has eroded due to inefficiency of system to address honour killing cases.

The strict social system constructed under the tribal norms legitimizes the violation of fundamental human right of "right to life" under the guise of

honour. Honour killing deprives access of women to their most fundamental right of life, which is the guarantee of state to protect. Pakistan ratified Convention on the elimination of all kinds of discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1996, under which Pakistan is bound to ensure that women are being provided access to their basic fundamental rights of life, education, freedom, property. However, honour killings continue to prevail in the society, directly violating the declarations under CEDAW regarding women's protection. Similarly, Article 9 of the constitution of Pakistan provides women and every faction of society "right to life", but honour killings prevalence suggest and highlight the contradiction between constitutional ideals and social reality. Hence, honour killings continue to deprive women of their fundamental right to life in Pakistan.

Prevalence of honour killings in the society and the ability of perpetrators to evade punishment results in intergenerational normalization of violence against women, particularly honour killings. Low conviction rates and weak law enforcement presents honour killings as a socially acceptable crime in societies particularly the marginalized and strict tribal

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norms guided societies resulting in a vicious cycle of violence against women by children of perpetrators being encouraged to commit the same crime without the fear of getting punished. A research paper published in May 2024 titled "Honour, violence and children" reports sons of perpetrators being much more likely to indulge in violence later in their life especially violence in the name of 'honour' to protect the honour of family associated with women by the men. Hence, low conviction rates and poor rule of law encourages intergenerational normalization of violence against women and honour killings.

Failures of legal system and its inability to address the gaps perpetuate impunity in the society. Huge backlog of honour killing cases still a part of courts cases that remain unresolved despite years having been passed motivates the perpetrators to commit honour killings without any fear of justice system. Since justice delayed is considered justice denied, unresolved cases continue to expose the vulnerability of justice system and continues to provide impunity to murderers of honour based violence. Human rights Commission of Pakistan

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has highlighted that the problem which continues to hinder the states ability to address and curtail honour killing is the low conviction rate and failure of prosecution to properly address the case resulting in criminals leaving the court scot-free. Hence, low conviction rates and weak rule of law results in impunity perpetuation.

Fear of honour killing and social restrictions hinders women's access to education and ~~educational~~ <sup>economic</sup> opportunities and participation.

The persistent threat of honour killing creates a fear among women which silences them from seeking their right to education and right to participate economically in the society to improve their social condition.

This lack of women's access to education

and job opportunity is manifested in the low ~~conviction~~ labour force participation by women in Pakistan. According to a recent report published by world bank, 25%

of less than 25% of total workforce in the country is contributed by women.

'female labour force'. This shows how fear of honour killing restricts women's access to education and eventually the right to avail opportunity of employment, reducing

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Pakistan's female labour force to a mere 25%.

Threat of honour killing forces women to accept marital ties in which they have no choice to make, which further silences women and marginalizes their position in the society.

Forced marriages have long been a problem of Pakistan's society where women, on the violation of strict social norms are made to marry forcefully to bring them into the custody of another man. This forces women to move from their father's custody to the forceful custody of another man who will further ensure that the 'honour' of the family or clan remains preserved by curtailing, controlling women's mobility and autonomy. This vicious cycle of control by male members of family on women's access to fundamental rights of life further marginalizes their life, ~~and~~ status and voice in the society. UN Women has mentioned in its report on honour killings that marriage against the will of family is one of the major provoking force behind honour killings especially in jurisdictions where women's autonomy is controlled by male counterparts of family. Hence, threat of honour killings forces women to marry ~~at~~ <sup>against</sup> their will and further silences their voice and access to rights in society.

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Honour killing has had deep-rooted history in Pakistan and weak enforcement of law has enabled its re-enforcement time and again. However, it still remains a issue which with a collective and comprehensive approach can be addressed to ensure women in Pakistan continue to live without any threat of being killed in the name of 'honour' just for demanding access to basic fundamental rights. Collective effort by state authority, respective institutions, religious scholars, activists, judiciary, civil society and NGOs can ensure women in tribal and other marginalized areas, where they are repeatedly silenced, could get a voice and access to justice. In this regard, role of education and awareness campaigns to ~~ad~~ challenge the strict tribal norms could play a crucial role. Efforts to reduce the strong patriarchal hold of society holds the potential to break women out of the curse of a persistent threat of honour killing. Moreover, strict legal framework and its enforcement along with addressing loopholes which allow misuse of qisas and diyat provisions of PPC could ensure justice is served to victims of honour killing so that no more Noor Bano, Amandeel Baloch and other women who deserve the

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right to life, equal to those of male counterparts  
of society, could ~~be~~ be killed in the  
name of honour.