

Professionals Perspective in Portrayal of Honour Killings in Pakistani Media

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Abstract

The present study explored the perspectives of stakeholders about the role of media towards honour killings in Pakistan. Semi structured interviews were conducted with lawyers ($n= 7$), social activists ($n=6$), Journalists ($n= 5$), Religious Scholars ($n= 4$), Psychologist ($n=3$), Police officials ($n= 5$). All the participants had more than 5 years of experience in their relevant fields and have been working on honour killings in their professional capacities. The data was coded by using Grounded theory method and were analysed to extract themes from the data. The results of the study indicated that media is playing both positive and negative role towards honour killings. The major categories include sensationalism, uneducated media, business approach of media and accountability through media. Participants also highlighted few interventions for the media houses that must be adopted to play a more responsible and effective role.

Keywords: Honour Killing, Media, Qualitative study, Grounded Theory.

Introduction

The terminology of 'Honour killing' was introduced by Ane Nanta who was a Dutch scholar (who is originally from Turkish background) in 1978. The purpose of introducing this term was to separate these forms of killings from other kinds of murders and violence prevails in the families and communities (Xavier, 2015). It is the planned murder of one of the relatives of the perpetrator who is a woman in most cases, who has allegedly transgressed the honour of her family. The crime of honour killings has been prevailing throughout history across the globe in a number of communities (Daily Times, 2014). However, it tends to dominate in societies where the patriarchal structures, religious bigotry and

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stringent tribal beliefs confine individual rights (Chesler & Bloom, 2010). It has been witnessed that in honour killings women are usually victims and on suffering end whereas their murderers are often their own fathers, brothers, husbands or male relative, who killed their women for not keeping the honour of the family. They tend to be believed that their death is the only way through they can restore the lost honour of their family (Sohail, 2014). Honour killing can be triggered by many reasons may it be a woman or girl talking to a stranger male, development of sexual relations prior marriage, being a rape victim, rejecting a man decided by the family, or to do a choice marriage (Deol, 2014). A mere doubt and suspicion of the woman's committing any of these transgressions can be enough for committing the murder in the name of honour. Most of the times no in-depth justification is required for killing in the name of honour (Haile, 2007). Although, most of the time woman is killed by her father, brother or uncle, but it has also been witnessed that sometimes, other women of the family are also complicit in these killings (Deol, 2014). Shah (2002) stated that honour killing is present across provinces but with different names and it is being instigated by multiple causes in our country. In Sindh Province, it is called as *Karo-Kari*, in Baluchistan as *Siyah Kari*, In Southern Punjab as *Kala Kali* and in NWFP as *Tor Tora*. It has same meaning in every language, meaning that men and women are at disposal of their local community, and tribe whenever they found guilty of their act which tarnish the honour of the family. A Pew Survey of 2013 conducted in Pakistan for attitudes towards Honour killing in Pakistan reported that only 8% of the population considered Honour killing as an unjustifiable act. We hardly found news of such brutality in the west but these atrocities are on the rise in Pakistan. The survey identified that 83% of Pakistanis support stoning for adultery, and only 8% of the population are against it. There is a local study conducted in Islamabad to determine the attitude of men and women towards Honour killings, and they have found out that most of the men and women considered killing a member of a family for the saving Honour as a justifiable act (Sheikh et al., 2010). Another study conducted in Jordan about the attitudes of adolescents towards Honour killings, found out that 60% of adolescents believed that killing a family member who has dishonoured the family is justifiable act (Einser & Ghuniem, 2013).

Baker (1999) discussed that the system of honour may it be cultural or personal is responsible for killing of women by their male family members. There are multiple factors that are the identified as major justifications behind the killings. These factors include feeling of shame brought by the female members, external pressure of community or society to restore the honour of the family by murdering the one who is responsible for that. Lesnie (2002) stated that there are few countries in the world where state authorized the killing for adultery and their perpetrators are often pardoned officially by the state even in case of suspicion.

Although, honour crimes are ingrained in long cultural practices just to gain control over women, literature also indicates that loopholes in laws, local judicial system, misunderstanding of religion and negative role of police and media.

Giving insight on religious perspective, Shah (2002) stated that honour killings type ruthless practices are completely against Islam. Islam does not allow such brutal acts. While referring to a high court case which says that, "Nobody is allowed to take law in his hand in the name of so-called ghairat (honour)". It has been conveyed that honour killing is against both Islamic and legal code of conduct. The role of police is also highlighted in the literature and discussed that Police has been considered as a part of feudal structures who regulates and exercise their power as per feudal and tribal instructions. Feudal and tribal bodies are strong advocated of honour killing in our society. It is also important to highlight that police have also found out to be predominantly patriarchal and contain biased attitude towards women (Iqbal, 2007). Ali (2001) also endorsed that, in existing power structure of the society, police strongly supports and enforced the narrative of the influential. In tribal communities like interior parts of provinces over there police have failed to take action against the perpetrators because they also cannot afford to go against the will of the tribal leaders.

Literature also indicates that the power of Jirga (local courts) has cultural immunity and they are legitimized to use powers. Weak judicial system of the state is also a major reason behind the presence of Honour killings in the society. The jirgas leader operates on the principles of patriarchy where women are considered as a mere commodity (Iqbal, 2007).

Media has a fundamental role to play in these cases. Media highlights the number of killings but portrays women as a very submissive, oppressed creature (Lari, 2011). In the present era, the media industry is growing rapidly and considers a powerful and influential institution. It has been indicated in literature that besides being an important institution of the country, Unfortunately Pakistani media sometimes show irresponsibility while portraying news about women related issues. The media is biased against women in many areas. This bias affects images of women in the media, and in turn has a negative effect on women's development in a society (Asif, 2011). The literature highlights the role of electronic media sometimes create hype and portray exaggerated news by adding their personal opinion that causes for anarchy in the society (Ahmar, 2004). Even in Pakistani drama serials, portrayal of women is as less dependent creature, psychologically weak and emotional which further strengthens already existing stereotypes in this male chauvinist society. Furthermore, in print media pronounced gender insensitivity and weak portrayal of women is also evident (Asif, 2011).

Rationale of the Study

Present time is considered as a mass media era. All the information's are disseminated through media either print or electronic among masses. Media has become a need of the hour in present times as information and knowledge of people are dependent upon news. There are growing number of media houses in Pakistan but it has been observed that media has a lot of shortcomings specifically regarding presenting of news on sensitive issues like honour Killings and portray a submissive image of a women of our society (Lari, 2011). An abundant literature and media highlight gives an increasingly alarming percentage of honour killings in Pakistan. The media highlights number of cases but unfortunately it fails to deliver the complexities behind the issue. There is a dire need to understand the role of media towards honour killings in our society because it has been observed that media does not handle these issues with sensitivity. It is important to understand the role and responsibility of media in order to understand and confront such complicated issues in an effective manner. Honour killing is also a multifold phenomenon therefore it

was explored by taking perspectives of various professionals who belongs to different walks of life.

Method

Objectives

- To explore the role of media towards Honour Killings in Pakistan.
- To understand the perspectives of different stakeholders i.e., journalists, psychologists, police officials, lawyers, religious scholars to understand the dynamics of media towards Honour Killings.

Sample

The sample of the present study included professionals from different walks of life. Total sample comprised of 30 individuals. Sample included **lawyers** (4 male, 3 female) **social activists** (N=6 Females, social activists also included NGO workers who are working on women related issues), **Journalists** (3 male, 2 female), **Religious Scholars** (N= 4 male) **Psychologist** (3 females) **Police officials** (3 males. 2 female). All the participants had more than 5 years of experience in their relevant fields. The participants selected for the study were people who had an experience with honour related crimes and dealt with honour killing cases in their professional capacity.

Instrument

Semi structured interview technique was employed to collect the data. The interview guide was formulated based on previous literature and focus group discussions with undergraduate students. Questions in the interview guide were open ended in nature.

Data Analysis

The data drawn by interview was then analysed by using grounded theory method in order to gain an in depth understanding. Grounded theory is a systematic analysis tool which is frequently used in social sciences. Grounded theory method (GT) works in reverse manner from conventional method. It starts with collection of data instead of hypothesis. First interviews are carefully transcribed and line by line coding was done. Conceptual categories were then formulated from the codes. Categories were formulated based on shared characteristics. Similar categories were then clustered and themes were drawn out.

Results

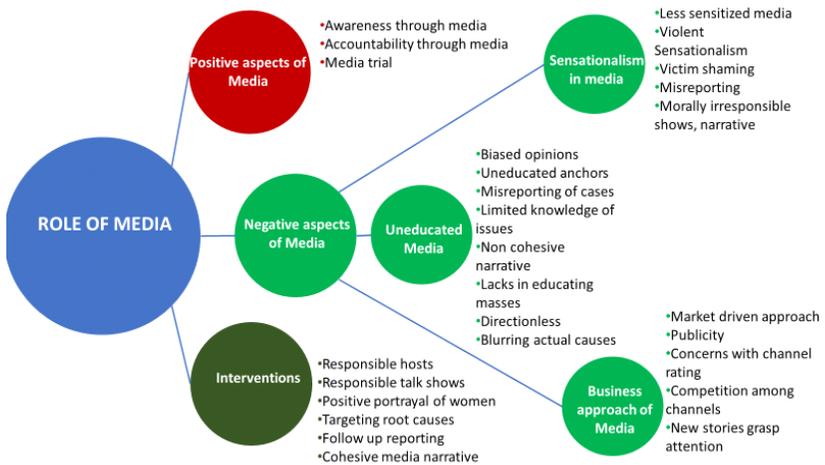


Figure 1: Illustrates the theme, its subsequent categories, and exemplary codes.

Role of Media

All the participants while being interview shed light upon the role of media and its different aspects. The role of media has also been less explored with respect to Honour killings.

There is no doubt that media has created an influential role in our society in past decades. In this research people belonging to

diverse professional groups were interviewed and the most recurrent theme emerging out of these interviews was "Role of Media". People highlighted both positive and negative aspects of media in shaping the opinions of masses which in turn contribute towards forming attitude towards any issue.

When a certain breach in honour happens, where a female decides to act on her own whims, it is often the media that projects the story which at times increases the sense of being dishonoured among the members of the family. Furthermore, if, or when someone from the family decides to take matters in their own hands, it is again the media that blows the loudest trumpet claiming that a social ill has been witnessed. Many participants in the research thought that such double standards of the media are the major cause behind the overall mishandling of Honour Killing cases, widespread increase in the cases of honour killing.

A lot of people argued that media is not fulfilling its duty with responsibility. The institution of media has flourished a lot in the past decade. It is more accessible to masses even in farfetched areas of the country. Unfortunately, it is influencing people more negatively than positively.

As one of the journalist stated that:

"media focusses more on sensationalizing the news for a time being they do not take responsibility of following it up later,"

(Kohistan case can be mentioned, even the case of Qandeel Baloch, there is no more news about it). When media does not follow up the cases then the issue dies down in hearts of people and they do not get any idea about the actual factors involved behind killings nor do they know about the investigations. Consequently, it becomes unable to educate people about the crime and its related factors. Another journalist also reported that:

"media is disinterested towards educating the masses about the problem and its related factors in a correct manner, they are only interested in reporting the case rather helping the affectedes".

In past few years a lot of private media houses have been established. Instead of taking care of the issues, the new media houses are adding to them. As there are many channels on air, the sense of competition is also rising among them and in their personal unhealthy competition they are becoming more irresponsible. Every

channel is more concerned about their ratings so they are more interested in flashing the news as opposed to a sensible and thorough depiction of the actual scenario. A journalist quoted that:

“Media is more keen about their ratings, so most of the time their irresponsible manner of coverage damages the repute of the victim and its family”.

Media personnel themselves argued that people in media are not educated as per their field so they are less sensitive while reporting and presenting the news. Honour killings or women related issues demand a certain level of sensitivity but the truth is that people in media houses are also from the same society. A journalist reported that:

“Media people are the representation of the societal mindset; they focus more on selling their stories through sensationalism rather reporting them objectively and follow it till the end”. Another journalist also quoted that “sensationalism also leads to victim’s shaming rather than helping the victim”.

Gender sensitivity in the media is also one of the serious problems. The patriarchal set up of the society is clearly visible in our media as well. Almost all the reporters, especially in the rural areas are men. Women have little or no voice in the media. Men shape the narrative carried by the media, it is therefore not surprising that women are targeted. This trend is more visible in cases where local media reported the stories of honour killing.

Local media lacks proper training as well. There is no concept of media ethics and the code of conduct, especially with regards to the local newspapers. The reporters are often semi-qualified individuals who are doing this to earn a living and score some influence with the local elite. Their reporting therefore is often biased and subjective. Furthermore, in rural areas due to lack of staff, only one reporter is dealing with all kinds of reports of that area. Therefore, he is untrained to deal with complicated social problem such as honour killing.

Media reporting of such cases is done in such a manner that it adds fuel to the fire and the would-be-murderer is pushed even further to commit a crime. Hence, Victim shaming and sensationalism lead towards violence as it recently happened with one of the social media celebrity “Qandeel Baloch”. Sensationalized

news about her ignited the fire in her family which ultimately became the cause of her murder by her own brother.

The duty and moral responsibility of media is too high that it is not fulfilling. If it acts upon it responsibly then it makes the institutions accountable. People would also get to know that it is a crime and their criminals also get executed.

The journalists who are themselves involved in reporting of such cases have a point of view that there is so much influx of the news that they are unable to follow up with the previously covered stories. The media houses are already operating on a business model approach so their focus is on money making and selling news and for that they adopt any approach.

However, the most important aspect of media is that it makes public opinion and formulates narratives so it's a responsibility of media to act upon it and to counter this problem from top to bottom. One of the journalist stated that:

"The change of narrative will also change the attitudes of people. Media, art and literature are important agents of narrative making so institutions need to be cohesive in order to tackle this issue effectively".

It is just not media personnel themselves who are highlighting the problems of media. Many other groups of individuals highlighted the negative role of media in creating more problems in this scenario. Religious scholars also condemned the role of media that rather than educating the masses about ethics and morality it is promoting evilness in young generation. The kind of values they are transferring become the cause of misguidance. One of the religious scholar stated that:

"Media is creating evilness in society by showing low standard and immoral programs".

Police officers also said that media these days just need news which they can present in a glamourized way and they are becoming less responsible. A police officer stated that:

"Media is so irresponsible and discriminatory in cases related to Honour violence. When it comes to a rape case they will do a lot of glamorization of those women and will keep on calling her in the programs but when a woman is dead nobody cares to interview the culprit or to do its public shaming"

The lawyers also claimed that media has contributed a lot in creating the sensationalism with this issue. People in our society are so immune to this phenomenon that it has made the positive perception for Honour killing. People are so infused with this phenomenon that it is no more a crime in their view. It is so negatively portrayed by the media that whenever such incidence happens, the people remain ignorant about the real cause behind the killing. One of the lawyers stated that:

“Because of lack of follow up about these cases, people tend to believe that it is a non-punishable crime. Therefore, they do not perceive it as a crime nor they have the knowledge about the undercover facts behind Honour killings”.

The role of media was also quite recurrent in the interviews of social activists who are incessantly in contact with journalist, victims, and perpetrators. They also shed light upon the shortcomings of media. One of the social activists stated that:

“Media considers that sensationalizing and scandalizing is their only job, but they have a bigger role and that’s education and follows up of such cases where woman dies without any fault.”

It has also been argued in the interviews that dramas and plays also help in changing the mindset of people. Unfortunately, in most of the dramas, the stereotype character of a woman has been played. A submissive role of a woman who is unaware about her rights and is not allowed raising voice about any atrocity or maltreatment. This is how women are portrayed in our society. The outreach of media is so extensive that even in rural areas where education is not as common, television and dramas are accessible. The women in those areas idealize more about the TV characters and they shape their opinions and attitudes from those drams. Instead of creating any awareness, these programs affect their attitudes negatively. One of the social activists stated that:

“Why not our films and dramas talk about Pakistanis being responsible citizens, talking about good practices of our society, cultural tolerance, religious pluralism, gender equality and strong women citizens etc. Why don’t we address these issues and give messages through this medium”.

Contrary to the findings of highlighting the negative role of media, few individuals also appreciate the positive role played by media. The reporting of cases through media from far fetch areas helps in drawing attention of people and law enforcement agencies. One of the respondent stated that:

“Through media, element of accountability and pressure increases on institutions. Honour killing cases were probably high in number in the past but because of limited mass media they usually went unreported”. Media can be very beneficial if it tries to understand its role and responsibility and act upon it.

However, efforts are needed to check the negative influences of the media. Media has a huge potential. It can help us uproot this social evil from our society. If proper media ethics are in place, and the media personnel are trained to report objectively and ignoring the market forces, media can be used as a medium to change the public opinion of the masses to introduce them to the heinous nature of this crime.

Discussion

Moreover, it was also identified that media as an institution has an important responsibility to play which it is not fulfilling. Its focus is more on sensationalism and non-objective reporting. It does not consider the importance and sensitivities of these issues. Media these days is major source of narrative building of the society so it is an important duty of a media to do objective reporting and do follow up of incidents they are presenting. It was also identified that media can be a good source of making the culprits accountable and by spreading awareness among masses we can bring down the number of prevalent violent issues. Previous studies also indicated that media should be sensitized to play a responsible role in terms of the content that is aired, and it should focus on promoting a positive image of women (Qaisarani, Liaqat & Khokhar, 2016). Another study also found out that the image of women has been conveyed as an oppressed, submissive and veiled by media. This description of women through media is generalized on all over the women of Pakistan and people in the external world gain the image as an oppressed (Ahmed, 2005).

Conclusion

It has been found out that in recent times media is an important institution that has excessive out reach in all over the world. The mass media industry has also developed much, so with increasing its outreach it has more responsibility as well. It has been identified that media is not playing a positive and responsible role regarding violence against women. It must do untiring efforts to bring down the number of killings and violence related cases against women by using its power and strength. Media can bring quite a positive change in society if it gets to be morally responsible and unbiased. Media needs to identify its strength and potential and to make complete use of it.

Limitations

The study has few limitations which are as follows:

- By employing a qualitative data analysis technique subjectivity of the researcher cannot be controlled.
- The findings can not be generalized as sample was small

Implications of the Study

These findings can be helpful for media houses and can create awareness among them. By working on their shortcomings in the light of these findings they can be a changing agent and ensure more accountability among different institutions. By responsible and follow up case reporting's they can make other institutions accountable as well like police and judiciary. Media can help in building a positive narrative of the masses towards women.

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