

The Making of Violent Hero: A Study of the Social Construction of Crimes in Kohat, Pakistan

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Abstract

The study explores the process of social construction of crimes, i.e. the process in which the people of a specific group/community perceive a criminal act as a heroic phenomenon. It analyzes the perception of people toward different types of crimes/criminals to understand why people glorify certain types of crimes/criminals while stigmatize other. The study was conducted in *Jungle Khel*, an area of district Kohat, which is notoriously known for high ration of crimes like drug dealing, robbery etc. Qualitative method was used in the study and data was collected from 40 participants of both genders through in-depth interviews. Thematic analysis technique was used for analyzing the collected data. The findings reveal that the phenomenon of ‘violent heroism’ exists in the community as many crimes are implicitly admired by the whole community sometimes by a specific group there. For instance, the criminals are glorified and cherished in some manners as ‘heroes’ at the local level. While Rashicertain crimes such as robbery and theft are despised as these do not match with the cultural ideal of honourable conduct.

Keywords: Social Construction, Criminals, Violence, Honor, Cultural Heroes.

1. Introduction

In the recent years, the criminologists are interested in studying crimes because of the public reaction toward it (Paulin, et al. 2003). It has been increasingly recognized that reaction toward crimes/criminals are important for understanding

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dynamics of crimes in society. As Rosenfeld (2009) has argued that behaviors may be considered crimes because of the process of social construction, e.g. one society may perceive an act criminal but another society (or a small group therein) may regard it as a heroic act. In other words, we may say that the legal status of an act lies in the social response of a particular group toward it rather than in its content itself. Presdee (2000) said that a certain deviant act may be applauded by the whole community or a specific group there which leads to violent heroism; a phenomenon where a deviant person is appraised and considered as a hero.

This study aimed to understand the process of social construction of deviance and crimes i.e. violent heroism that how society perceives and considers one act violent/ criminal while cherishes and glorify other of the same nature. A well-known community of the Kohat district was selected for the current research i.e. Jungle Khel. The selected community is notoriously known for high rates of crimes in the whole district. The researchers have found that crime rates in Pakistan are increasing since the day of its creation, e.g. 73,107 crimes were reported in 1947, but the rate increased in 1971 to 129, 679 and much more ahead (Khan et al., 2015; Government of Pakistan, 2012). But the crime survey is not published and officially recorded on annual basis in Pakistan (Waheed, 2009) and the crimes which are officially reported do not present the true rates of crimes there. Province wise crime statistics are gathered by the researcher from different sources and it is concluded that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is on the 3rd rank in this regard but when these statistics were compared with the total population of the provinces then Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was on the top of table. Moreover, crime rates vary from district to district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and among the districts having highest crime rates, Kohat is on top on the basis of the comparison of total populations of each district. *Jungle Khel* is the area of district Kohat, which is notoriously known for crimes like robbery/ theft, murders, drug dealing/ smuggling, and other minor deviant actions (DPO Kohat Report, 2018). The below table supports the former statement:

Table No 1: District Kohat's Region of High Rates of Crimes in the year 2017

Regions	Committed Crimes in the year 2017						Total
	Attempt to Murder	Murder	Theft	Miscellaneous	Against Women	Minor Crimes	
Jungle Khel Region	15	13	07	201	08	795	1039

Shaikhan Region	20	10	07	168	08	687	900
Muhammad Zai Region	05	06	06	99	07	297	420
BaniKhel Region	04	06	04	25	03	173	215

DPO (Police Office of District Kohat)

The above table represents the crime rates-wise regions of district Kohat among which Jungle Khelis on top for having high rates of crimes. Not only the above table depicts the highest crime ratio of Jungle Khel but there are also hundreds of crimes cases there which are reported in different newspapers (see Dawn, 2014; Dawn, 2016; The Express Tribune, 2016). As Jungle Khel has an infamous reputation because of having high crime rates therefore this area was selected for the study by the researcher to explore how criminal acts are socially constructed and admired to an extent that it leads to violent heroism.

1.1. Research Questions

- a) Are some crimes/ criminals cherished and others condemned in the selected area?
- b) Are there certain social values in the community which encourage certain crimes because of their socially constructed definitions of deviance?
- c) Are there certain crimes that are supported by a certain small group there in the community such as male and female?
- d) Are there some ways to reduce or fight against this evil of violent heroism?

1.2. Objectives of the Study

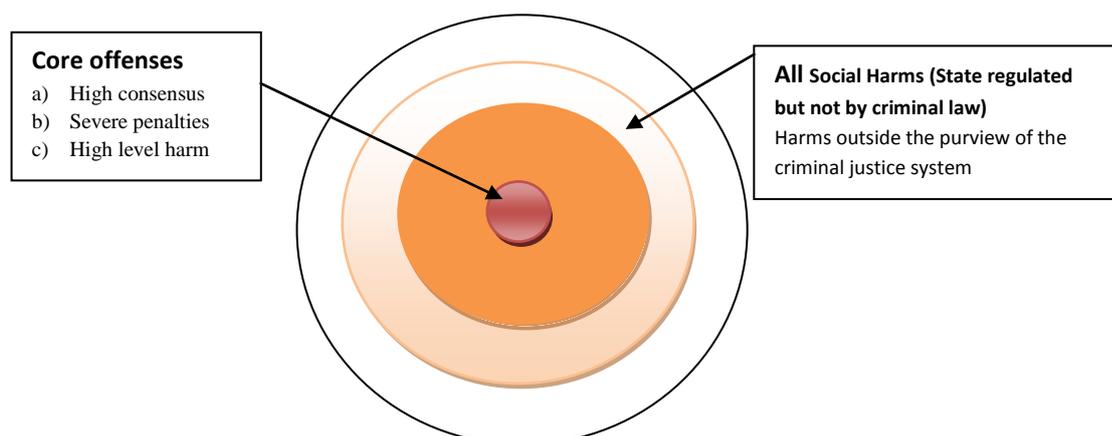
- i. Exploring the glorification process of deviance and the offensive behavior in the community.
- ii. Finding out the reasons why some criminal acts are glorified and others are stigmatized by the community.
- iii. Exploring why certain crimes are supported by a small group therein the community.
- iv. Giving suggestions at the end to deal with this evil of violent heroism.

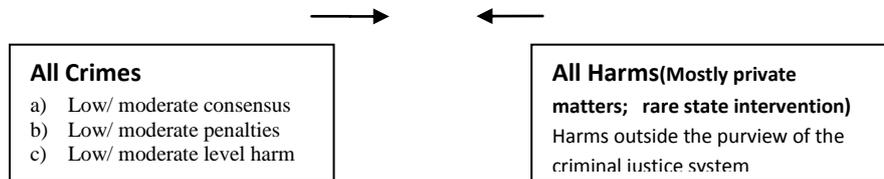
2. Literature Review

According to Henry (2009), that the concept of social construction is a wide approach of Sociology that is of the opinion that each and every process has a social reality and definition that is socially constructed by the society and it is to be perceived harmful or less harmful on the basis of that socially constructed definition. Deviance and crime, according to various sociologists are fluid construct phenomena and are constructed socially as per the present circumstances of a society. These processes may be considered morally bad in one situation or society and may be perceived neutral and positive in another one (Wolf & Zuckerman, 2012). In a study, Wolf & Zuckerman (2012) represented the positive side of deviance and discussed the term “deviant hero.” According to them, deviant heroes are those who fight and go against those rules and laws of society which are unjust and imposed on society members for social control. Many other researchers have found that though there are limits imposed by the society on the attainment of the gratification but sometimes society members may try to attain the pleasure by any way (moral or immoral) and such restrictions and imposed limits may prove to be not so effective (Lasch, 1979; Cavaglione, 2007). Such people may be sometimes stigmatized by the society but sometimes they may be regarded as violent heroes. Through the same process of social construction crimes in any community may have different definitions and people may have different reaction toward them.

A model was proposed by Walsh (2008) for representing the difference between the socially constructed crimes and the real crimes. This model is based on three kinds of parameters i.e. consensus of the public which crime is serious, the harms attached to it and how severe penalties are attached to it.

Model 4.1: Real versus Socially Constructed Crimes





In the above figure, Due to the high public agreement, severe harm and penalties of the them, some crimes are core offences or real crimes as they are universally condemned and are considered bad universally (Farrington, 2000). Whereas, other crimes of the model's other categories are socially constructed crimes, for instance some acts may not be considered criminal in one community/ society but may be crime in another one. Public consensus of considering such acts as crimes, and the level and harms and penalties attached to them may vary from category to category.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Though all the crimes theories have proved useful and for this study but some theories were more appropriate to analyze the data collected by the researcher. The most relevant theory is Merton's Social Strain Theory (1938). There is always strain upon the community members to maintain their prestige (both familial and social) therefore people in the community always get into the conflict with those who try to harm their prestige. Another theory is Cultural Heroism Theory. People in the community clearly break the laws and commits crimes such as murdering etc but still their acts are perceived heroic. They are considered heroes as they have tried to save their honor by doing this. At last "Sub-Culture Theory" by Cohen (1957) seems fit because a specific group of people exists in the selected area, which is inspired by certain offenders and develop a desire to be like them. According to the findings of the study same inspiration was found among some of the members.

3. Research Methods

The present research is carried out by using qualitative methods. Austin & Sutton (2014) said that people's experiences, their thoughts, feelings and their meanings of something may be easily accessed through qualitative researches. Because the present is based on exploring the thoughts of participants through in-depth discussions, interview guide has been adopted as a tool for collecting primary data. From June to September 2018 (three months) fieldwork was conducted. The required data was collected from the people who were living in Jungle Khel and from the known criminals of the area. Out of the total 40 interviews were conducted, e.g., 20 interviews were with community members and 20 with known criminals. Furthermore, the sample size was equally distributed among male and female. During the interviews, participants were ensured that their names would be kept confidential and it was really taken into consideration by putting pseudonyms with their statements about their area and crimes instead of their real names. Thematic analysis technique was used for analyzing the collected data. According to Flick (2006), in qualitative researches the processes of data collection and analysis are not exclusive completely from one another as sometimes analysis occurs at initial points of the research when the researcher has not collected the data yet (Sanauddin, 2015). For the present study, the interviews were taken from the participants and were recorded with the help of recorder. Then the audio recordings were transcribed into written words. At the end the data was brought into analysis by extracting themes on the basis of the research questions.

4. Data Analysis & Discussion

The study has found that the presence of deviant heroes in a society is associated with the perception of its residents towards different kinds of deviant behaviour there. In most of the cases when a crime occurs, the criminal is labelled as a "victim" at first. He/she is said to be the victim either social harm i.e. losing prestige, physical harm i.e. murdered or injured or economic harm i.e. property extortion. Then, he/she is socially pressurized for compensating the loss by

avenging the harmers. If he/ she avenges, he/she is appraised for the apparently deviant but heroic act. It is because in Jungle Khel, like elsewhere in *Pakhtun* society, the community has set some social or cultural values for each and every individual there and everyone is expected to abide by them for prestigious status there. Sanauddin (2015) has listed some *Pukhtun* practices that are said to be the values of Pakhtun people like shame (*Sharam*), honor(*Nang*), taunt (*Paighor*) and revenge(*Nang*). Because Jungle Khel is the typical Pukhtun community therefore same values have been set by the people for the maintenance of their prestige. These practices and values are so much important for the selected community's people, which is obvious by the following comment of the participant:

A member of our community gets taunted usually when they see his/ her honor is harmed by others. This kind of continuous taunting leads us to take a step against our harmers (Sadia: June 2018).

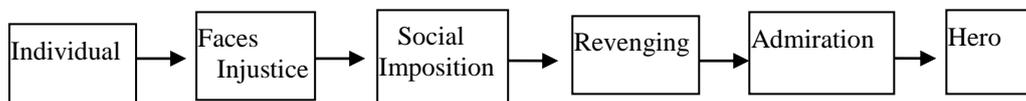
The above comment depicts that prestige is considered as a social value of the community by the participant that is associated with one's possessions. If someone harms one's honour and prestige then it is cause of shame to victimized person and then he is pressurized by the community for taking revenge by mocking and taunting them. For a one's social prestige (*ghairat*) is associated with his/her possessions i.e. *zan, zar, zameen*(women, property and land) and harmed or tried to be harmed by others it is lost. While talking about the women as a symbol of honor in community a resident stated:

We all are too much aware of maintenance of our prestige in the eyes of others. We only do care of cultural values. If one harms our prestige by killing or murdering then they are asked to give their valuable thing in compensation i.e. woman or piece of land (Ishfaq: June, 2018 interview).

The above comment depicts that the community's prestige is linked with one's women rather than his/her other possessions. Moreover, it was also found

that poor class does not get justice by the concerned formal bodies. Sometimes when they do not get justice on time they stop reporting their matters to the police when someone harms them and try to solve their matters themselves. As noticed by Kooistra (1990) dissatisfaction among the people gives rise to the emergence of violent heroes in a community. When people are disappointed by the formal administrative agencies, they try to reduce their grievances by committing unlawful acts, for instance, they themselves take revenge. The whole process of emerging of violent heroes may be represented by the way given below:

Model 4.1: How a Violent/ Criminal Hero Emerges in the Society?



The above model represents that each and every member of the society may have the opportunity to be the victim of some harm or he/she may have to face injustice by the community. In the current area, there are many deviants who are not discussed by the community members (both in private or public) but they are admired by them in different ways. **Model 4.1** was applied on the selected community. The results are represented in the following table:

Table: 4.1. Model of Glorified & Stigmatized Crimes in the Community

Characteristics of Criminal/ Violent Action	Accord to Social Values	Honourable Manner	Prior Injustice/ Victimization
Highly Glorified Violent Acts	✓	✓	✓
Medium Level Glorified Acts	✓	✓	✗
Lighter Glorified Acts	✓	✗	✗
Lighter Stigmatized Acts	✗	✓	✗
Highly Stigmatized Acts	✗	✗	✗

Crimes have been categorized into five (05) groups on three (03) perspectives i.e. prior injustice, honourable manner and socially constructed values. Socially constructed values are those practices which are developed by the society itself and are regarded good when a member of it follows them e.g. if a criminal act is a value in a society then the offender may not be stigmatized. Similarly, the honourable act in this study means when someone commits unlawful acts but not in a barbaric way like killing or injuring a person cruelly by doing desecration of killed person is a dishonorable act. While prior injustice means that the offender committed the unlawful act because he was treated by the society or any member of it with injustice. As shown in the above table, on the basis of these parameters and according to the perception of the participants, “Highly Glorified Violent Acts” Honor killing and avenging and the acts committed by women when committed in an honorable manner. Similarly, social bandits (who commit crimes for others) are included in “Medium-Level Glorified Crimes.” Whereas, the offenders who kill others who abused them publically come in the category of “Lighter Glorified Criminals” Then there are drug dealers who are “Lighter Stigmatized”. However, as discussed later, sometimes drug dealing is cherished by sub-group of people for they are attracted by them because of their luxurious lifestyles. At last in “Highly Stigmatized Criminals” rapists and the offenders who are involved in money and property extortion etc. are included. There are some socially admired violent acts in the area that are explained below in detail:

4.1. Glorified Crimes in the Community

4.1.1. The Avenger

According to Aquino et al. (2001), the person is called avenger, who harms or tries to harm others on the account that they proved to be the result of their loss (this loss may be social or physical). By taking the advantage of the victimized person’s traumatic condition, one is first socially pressurized for revenge and then he/ she is admired with words or is given high position and prestige in the society

(Wilowski et al., 2012). For instance, people may come to them to solve their conflicts with others or they may be regarded as the most brave and courageous people of the community etc. The findings of the study show that such kind of social imposition was also found among the selected incarcerated deviants. According to their statements, they were compelled socially by their neighbours to take the revenge from their harmers. There is an offender in central jail of district Kohat on the account that he killed his wife's nephew for raping his daughter. When he was narrating the cause, he stated:

I killed that person because I had a fear that my relatives and neighbour will mock me for not getting revenge (Ijaz: August 2018).

Second incarcerated male deviant stated:

All of our neighbours and relatives were mocking and taunting us that we were feared of our enemies (Majeed: August, 2018).

The above participant was in prison on the account of injuring his cousins. They had a fight with the inmate that they did not want the convict to go through their home's street. He was then mocked by the community to take revenge. These replies of the inmates depict that social pressure is exerted on the selected community members for avenging from the people who harmed them and then they are applauded for such violent acts.

4.1.2. Honour Killer

According to Paulusson (2013), maintaining honour culture is one of the social values. Through analysing the findings, the same social value was found among the socially constructed ideals in the selected community. Similar to the findings of other researches, it is found that honour is usually connected to the men, which is considered to be damaged when their women's chastity is lost due to which their men face social condemnation (Husseini, 2009; Lari, 2011; Mansur et al. 2009). Moreover, according to Abu-Lughod (2011) social pressure is always

imposed on male to maintain their social prestige and for this when they take violent steps against their harmers, they are usually considered heroes.

Such social pressure is analysed to be imposed on the selected area's men. As a male participant stated:

Men's social prestige is said to be maintained when he is successful in protecting his *Izzat* (familial prestige) (Hassan, June, 2018).

So, it may be analysed that the practice of honour killing is considered cultural value in the community. Moreover, Paulusson (2013) stated that familial prestige of man is linked with their women's chastity which is supposed to be never lost. If he remains unsuccessful in maintaining his *Izzat* (familial prestige), his *Ghairat* (social prestige) is considered to be lost (Abu-Lughod, 2011). It was found that the community's men are admired when they kill their women in honour.

4.1.3. Female Offenders

Generally, crimes committed by women are seldom represented in the formal justice institutions as they are expected to commit less professional and less serious crimes (Heidensohn, 1994). According to Worrall (2001), such gender-based differentiate perception about behaviour and actions may serve as an indicator of whether a person is considered to be criminal or not. Among all the cases of violent acts which were admired by the participants (either in direct words or indirect way), one case is of a lady offender. The most Interesting thing is that no one in the community was aware of her name as they have learnt about it by hearsay but they still recall her story. Participants stated that a young lady was in affair with a goldsmith. The goldsmith committed to marry her but then he cheated by marrying another girl. The lady killed him in the local market with a pistol when she came to know about this. Abdaal, the male participant used the following words for narrating the story:

The market people who witnessed the event were wondered at her courageous and brave act. When she was leaving a guard shot her too on the spot. After dying her eyes were still fearless. Her bravery is still recalled by us. Indeed, she was courageous woman who took her revenge (Abdaal: June 2018).

These are the words which reflect the selected community's general perception about the victimized and culprit lady. In addition, it can also be concluded from the above story that that the gender also plays role in considering her act as heroic. It may be because of the Pukhtun perception about female for being physically weak and not able to kill anyone in an open place. It can also be interpreted by the participants' words that he used for such criminal ladies that the act of avenging is cherished in the selected community.

4.1.4. The Social Bandits

People, who try to provide justice to the victims through deviant action and lawbreaking, are known as Social Bandits (Hobsbawm, 1959). They are valued and respected for their violent actions as they fight for others to be treated fairly by the community. The social bandits are either appraised by the whole community or by a small group. According to Kooistra (1990) those people support such social bandits who are not satisfied with the prevailing social and political system of their community. In addition, the group of social bandits is consisted of those people who are desperate and powerful (Hobsbawm, 1959). The finding of the present study depict that many kinds of social bandits and deviant heroes are found in the selected community. When the researcher asked the participants for narrating any recent event of a community member who fought for providing justice to others, many different stories were narrated. One of them was:

A man (Naeem) in our neighbour was famous for providing justice to poor and powerless with help of gun and status. Once a widow asked him that a neighbour was forcing her to marry him but did not

want that. She requested him to sort her matter. Naeem threatened the person by gun but poor Naeem was shot by the friends of the person. We were sad at Naeem's death (Sumaya: June, 2018).

The above words of the female participant her concern for Naeem who was killed in the fight while proving to be a social bandit for the widow resident show that she and all her neighbours supported the outlaw act of Naeem.

4.1.5. Drug Dealer

According to many researchers there are many structural causes that inspire the society members to get indulged in drug dealing. These causes include unemployment, illiteracy, poverty, racial differences and gender differences (Sommers, et al., 1996; Van Nostrand & Tewksbury, 1999). Through the replies of the residents and inmates, this study found that all of these structural causes compelled the drug dealers to be involved in this profession. Several researchers have found that the wish for gaining better economic status (Gruter & Van de Mheen, 2005) and better lifestyle encourages the people for drug dealing (Dorn et al., 2005). Many of the incarcerated drug dealers stated that:

My friends were saying it is the easiest way of earning without hard work therefore I started drug dealing and earned much better (Wazeer: August, 2018).

Many of relatives were engaged in drug dealing, they were earning much better and were happy, therefore we also started selling drugs (Mussarat: August, 2018).

The comments of the incarcerated drug dealers depict that they were attracted by the good and wealthy lifestyle of their relatives who were involved in selling drugs. Similar to Grundetjern & Sandberg (2012) the present study also found that when an individual develops the wish of having better lifestyle and he

tries to fulfill the wish by the lawful way but fails then he adopts the illegal way for his fulfillment. In addition, the drug dealers were admired not only by the incarcerated drug dealers but many of the residents also cherished them for their lifestyle. Like:

I am wondered to see the drug dealers having so much money that they fulfill all their desires in an easy way and are happy (Zain: June, 2018).

By comparing my lifestyle with them, I can say they are much better than me (Farhat: June, 2018).

As found by Jacobs (1999) and Williams (1989), this study has also found that because of their money drug dealers have the feeling of power, high status and excitement. This study interpreted that such sense is not only present among the incarcerated drug dealers but also among the residents.

4.2. Stigmatized Criminals in the Community

Society members perceive them wrongdoers as bad and labelled them as “Criminals: (MacLin & Herrera, 2006). All of the examples below tell us about those crimes/ criminals which are stigmatized by the selected community as these do not accord to their socially constructed values.

4.2.1. Rapist

Rape is an attempt of sexual intercourse by a person with a person without his/her agreement (Smith, 2004). The current study found that the community members not only consider the rapists as criminals but they also stigmatize them. Studies have found that in patriarchal societies (where men are super-ordinates of women), rape is considered crime (Lebowitz & Wigren, 2005). The selected community has also found to be patriarchal by the replies and views of the participants. It is found that money, land and women are the precious assets of

men and if someone rapes or tries to rape one's women, community members stigmatize them and the rapists face their punitive attitude. For example, there was a case of central jail of an inmate named Imtiaz, who killed his daughter's rapist and he was admired by his relatives and neighbours for this act. This shows the stigmatized attitude of the community members toward the rapist of Imtiaz's daughter. However, this was not the only rapist who was stigmatized by the community but many other stories were also told by the participants. It is also found that not only the rapists were condemned socially but those men who tease others women or look at them in a lecherous way are also stigmatized. As stated:

Once few women were walking on their house's roof and a boy snapped their pictures. This matter ended with the killing of the boy by women's brother which was a good act (Ishfaq: July, 2018).

Few robbers once entered a house and raped two girls. This event created fear among us and many of the community members were too aggressive (Sumaya: July, 2018).

The above comments of the participants about the events of the raping and the boy who ogled at the women show the stigmatized reaction of the community members.

4.2.2. Robbery/Theft

An individual is appraised when he/ she rob for the community but is condemned when they do not follow the community members (Cavaglion, 2007). According to Osswald et al. (2006), those actions are considered heroic by the people, which are according to the social values. The community people stigmatize the robbers as they go against the socially constructed values of the community and try to damage their assets i.e. land and money. The study found by the interviews with the participants that there were many cases of robbery and theft in the area and almost all of the community members considered these acts as crime and had punitive reaction toward these acts too. A question was asked from

all of the residents that if a person loots a bank as the bank authority refused to grant him loan, is his action admirable and all of them replied in negation. Some of them stated that:

It is a clear crime, he should have to work hard (Zain:
July, 2018).

Robbing others or a bank is not good act at all (Maria:
July, 2018).

The above comments about robbery/ theft show the stigmatized attitude of the community members toward such crimes. The participants were then asked that how may the robbers, be treated by the community and government? And all of them stated that they should be punished by the law and community members.

4.2.3. Money/ Property Extorter

An attempt to snatch one's property and money through violence is called "Extortion". And it is a crime as it violates the laws (Sancho, 2017). Attitude toward crime is usually measured by macro or micro views (Kuhn, 2002) where macro view is consisted of the responsibilities of formal justice authorities about prevailing criminal acts in the society while micro view is linked with the public reaction (how the local people deal with crimes). Similar different ways of dealing and reacting to the crimes are found in the findings of this study, e.g. gender-based difference was found in the perception and reaction toward different crimes. The study found that there was an old man who had enough property but his grandson killed him for being the only heir of his property. Many women showed punitive reaction toward his grandson for killing him. They stated:

May no one have such a grandson among us (Afnan:
June, 2018).

He did wrong but good news we heard that he was sentenced to death by the local court (Summaya:
June, 2018).

The above comments show the punitive and stigmatized attitude of the community members toward the property/ money extorters and condemn their violent acts which they take in the name of extortion. However, this was not the only story but many others were also told by the residents and after narrating they showed the stigmatized toward such deviants.

5. Conclusion

It is concluded that violent heroism and social constructionism of crimes exists in the selected community and they consider that maintaining social prestige (through any legal or illegal way) is a social value. A typology of glorified and stigmatized crimes/ criminals is formed e.g., the avenger, the honor killer, drug dealers and the female violators (who ever went to jail) are praised by the selected community whereas, thieves/ robbers, rapists, suicide committers, money or property extorters are stigmatized. Moreover, the study also concludes that a sub-culture (specific group) exists in the selected community which glorifies and appraises those unlawful actions which are not supported and are condemned by the whole community. These acts do not accord to their social values, e.g., drug dealers because of the living style of them.

This process is an evil as it opens ways to several dangerous crimes therefore should be prevented to occur by discouraging those laws and norms in community which lead to social inequalities (class and gender).

6. Solutions

When one community glorifies and cherishes criminal acts then it invites social disorder and many other social evils. Therefore, it is necessary to take some measures to reduce or fight against this evil of violent heroism which are:

- i.** Many community members deal the events of violence themselves and the problem increases which may be avoided by reporting the crimes on time to the police.

- ii. This process may be prevented to occur by discouraging those laws and norms in community which lead to social inequalities i.e. class and gender.
- iii. The acts of violence which lead to the fulfillment of social values e.g. honor killing and taking revenge for maintain prestige may be discouraged both by the government and community members.

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