

**Executive Summary of the Study on  
Women in a Society Dominated  
By Male Values  
Case Study of Honor Crimes  
As one of the Forms of Violence Against Women**

By Dr. Zein El Abdin Makhluf  
Prof. Dr. Mahmoud Abdel Rashid

## **Introduction**

Violence against females occurs since childhood and takes various forms; however, honor crimes represent one of the most dangerous types of violence against women who are either killed or obliged to commit suicide as a result of doubts and rumors related to their behavior. Therefore, we can consider honor crimes as a pathologic social phenomenon jeopardizing social stability and security, especially in rural and popular areas.

In our traditional culture, honor has a different meaning according to gender; thus, honor of girls is linked to a specific thing, i.e., the hymen. As for men, they remain respectable however are numerous their sexual relations. Amazingly, many girls are killed without raising a desire among their relatives to learn who perpetuated the crime. Moreover, in many cases if the sinner reappears and express his willing to marry the victim, parents still insist on killing the girl.

On the other hand, law discriminates between men and women when it comes to honor crimes although it should be considered as an ethical crime where men should receive the same punishment as women. However, law alleviates somewhat the judgments applied to male perpetrators who could be sentenced a three year of imprisonment against the death sentence for wives accused to kill their husbands for ethical crimes. Moreover, Article 17 of the penal law represents a real problem in terms of honor crimes because this article grants the tribunal the right of clemency to the maximum when honor crimes are perpetrated by men while women do not benefit from this right when they kill their husbands found in a state of adultery. Therefore, this study attempts to highlight the disequilibrium existing in the mentioned article.

Naturally, it is quite difficult to measure the exact size and occurrence of this type of crimes at the society level because many of them remain unreported, are unknown from the police due to the fear from scandal, or because parents consider the criminal as a hero who has done his duty. Consequently, the number of honor crimes reported in Egypt in 1995 amounted to 52 cases. Dr. Fakhri Saleh, Senior Forensic Medical Doctor, indicates that among 1610 killing crimes occurring in Greater Cairo during 1999 and 1793 similar crimes in the other governorates 10% could be categorized as honor crimes<sup>1</sup>. Our study seeks to focus on the scope of the phenomenon as well as its dynamics as one of the forms of violence against women.

Consequently, the topic of our study is concerned with honor crimes as an acute image of violence against women. The research will attempt to analyze a sample of honor crimes as reported in the chronicle of accidents in the newspapers besides interviews with a sample of informants in both the district and the governorate of Minya.

### **Rationale of the Study**

The importance of this study relies on the following clues:

1. Honor crimes are considered as a serious social pathological problem where women are usually killed or pushed to commit suicide as a reaction to rumors and doubts concerning their behavior. Very often, these doubts exist only in the mind of the killer who very soon discovers that the killed woman was totally innocent from the accusations addressed to her. Therefore, this phenomenon requires further investigation and identification.

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<sup>1</sup> Montasser, Khaled: Female Circumcision and Violence Against Women, pp. 193-198.

2. There is a clear double standard in our social culture that focuses on women when it comes to honor crimes. Thus, women are the subject to be punished, blamed, and killed. Unrespectable women are those who do not protect their chastity. However, men remain respectable and respected no matter is the number of their illegal relationships they are engaged in. In many cases of honor crimes, parents do not seek to identify the male who committed adultery; they would rather be happy to kill the girl without investigation or even obtaining confirmation of the facts.
3. Cultural and social inheritance continues to support killing women for the mere doubt in their behavior. Moreover, the honor of women remains related to their hymen. Consequently, people in our society might accept and even bless the killing of a woman who is surrounded by bad rumors; furthermore, they may sympathize with the killer and protect him as a hero who fights for the family's honor. Therefore, an important number of honor crimes is not reported to the police, or could be reported sometimes as a suicide committed by the victim. The study will highlight, thus, some of the obsolete cultural beliefs behind the occurrence of honor crimes in order to develop further recommendations able to contribute in the alleviation of this phenomenon.

### **Objectives of the study**

The following objectives are aimed by the study:

1. Identify the major areas where honor crimes occur, as well as disparities between rural and urban areas, popular and select areas, besides the features of perpetrators and victims.
2. Identify the impact of cultural and social background as well as rumors in these cases.

3. Reveal the differences and gender discrimination in terms of law, and social belonging in dealing with honor crimes.

### **Methodology of the study**

The following methodology and tools were used in conducting this study:

- ◀ A qualitative analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative content of the material studied as a valuable mean to deduct accurate conclusions from the publications of the media regarding honor crimes and the different actors related to these events. Content of analysis was restricted to the weekly newspaper "Akhbar El Hawadeth" specialized in crimes and scandals. Under study material covered the year 2005. The number of issues studied amounted to 52. The choice of this newspaper is due to the fact that this publication is the widest one concerned with such topics, especially with regards to honor crimes that are published on a weekly basis.
- ◀ The research followed also the anthropological approach considered as the best approach for this kind of study. However, due to the relative shortness of available time for field work, researchers had to limit themselves to a few informants from the area under study in order to learn about their vision, experiences, and knowledge about this matter.
- ◀ Interviews with the informants were conducted in five villages of Minya district including: Edmou, Sawwada, Nazlet Hussein, Hawarta, and Abu Feliou. These rural settings are located at a relatively small distance from the city of Minya on the eastern bank of the Nile. The building of a bridge linking these villages with the city of Minya has led to their development and added to the studied locations a very specific rural/urban character. In

addition, the research covered the urban popular neighborhood of Abu Hilal situated in the southern part of Minya city.

- ◀ Interviews were conducted by newly graduated youth, mainly girls, after training them. All interviewers were chosen among people living nearby the locations covered by the field survey. They undertook interviews with informants from both genders, registering events and crimes related to honor in these areas. The research team relied on their social background, as well as their personal connections to identify and select the sample of informants whose features were compatible with the standard features of informants according to the scientific methodology used in the field of anthropology, i.e., "old people", "people informed of the events occurring in their society", "having the capability to express the reality of their society", "willing to cooperate and interact with the interviewers".

However, although interviewers belonged to the communities under study, the selection of informants and the conduction of interviews was not an easy task because of the sensitivity of the topic discussed and considered as a taboo issue that should not be tackled since it related to the honor and respectability of people. It is worth mentioning that encouraging informants to recall this type of situations requires very high skills that were not always available in some of the interviews. Therefore, some obstacles prevented the provision of full data about the events, and discussions derived into debates about the problems linked to the education of girls, the definition of honor, the loss of chances and opportunities by girls and their families when they fail to preserve their honor, etc. Women appeared to be more aware of the details related to

honor and more willing to talk about these matters; therefore, the study relied mainly on older women.

## **Scope of the study**

### **A) Geographic scope**

The geographic scope of the study includes all the governorates of Egypt and was conducted through the content analysis of honor crimes in the newspaper "Akhbar El Hawadeth" during 2005. It also includes the interviews with informants from the governorate and the district of Minya. It includes in addition the content analysis of the crimes registered in criminal records found on the southern sector of the governorate of Minya.

### **B) Period covered**

The study was conducted from November 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 to the end of February 2007. In addition, the content analysis covers 2005 through the reading of "Akhbar El Hawadeth" newspaper, besides the criminal records of 2004.

### **B) Human participation**

The human dimension refers to the informants belonging to the geographical area of field research and include old persons aware of the events and willing to talk and cooperate with interviewers, as well as the victims and perpetrators mentioned in the news published during 2005, besides those found in the official criminal records of 2004.

## **Findings and recommendations of the study\***

This study is based on the assumption that there are forms of violence against women perpetrated in the name of preserving honor. This assumption relies on the idea that the Egyptian society is ruled by male values tending to grant men a better position than women in terms of opportunities, exposing women to several forms of violence used as victims allowing men to preserve their own honor, and that of the family and the society.

### **First - Findings of the theoretical analysis**

The study as a whole includes a theoretical analysis of some concepts and beliefs, beginning with the concept of "honor crimes" that we found to be inaccurately used. It also included a presentation of the attitude of legislation and law towards this phenomenon. Accordingly, the research concluded that legislation, laws, and customs rely on three referential frameworks – somehow different – in defining the meaning of honor, behaviors affecting honor, and the measures of punishment linked to this issue. Traditions and customs have appeared to represent the main reference in these cases where citizens resort to their traditional ways of classifying events and applying punishment. It was also found that women are usually the weakest party, with the stronger punishment, either as victims or perpetrators.

We also presented the cultural perspective in analyzing behaviors related to honor as an important explanation of the phenomenon in our society, especially with regards to understanding the occurrence of violence against women in such related situations.

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\* Prepared by Prof. Dr. Mahmoud Abdel Rashid.

## **Findings of the content analysis of published crimes**

The analysis of the material published in "Akhbar El Hawadeth" newspaper during 2005 that sorted, categorized and analyzed honor crimes found out 40 cases classified as follows: violations of honor such as adultery, or other forms of violations such as rape or revenge for honor, i.e., killing the person who perpetrated the violation or the victim of the violation.

According to the available information, our findings could be summarized as follows:

- ◀ The majority of honor crimes – published in the newspaper – occurred in Greater Cairo and in Lower Egypt governorates. Upper Egypt included only 12.5% of the cases.

Besides the fact that media coverage might be easier for Greater Cairo and Lower Egypt compared to Upper Egypt, the difference of percentages remains an important indicator, showing a higher occurrence of these crimes in the North of the country, and in urban areas compared to rural areas.

These differences could be due to the following reasons:

A) The South is more socially conservative with lesser contacts between genders, and a reduced mobility of women due to the low rates of females' enrollment in education, and the small contribution of Upper Egyptian women in activities outside the house. Therefore, this situation reduces the chances of being exposed to situations considered as a threat to honor.

B) Due to this conservative nature of southern governorates, people there are used to deal with such situation with lots of secrecy. And even when such crimes occur, their reasons are not explicitly exposed.

- ◀ The rates of honor crimes are relatively higher in urban areas than in rural areas. This finding is compatible with the previous one. We also note that in urban areas, honor crimes are higher in popular neighborhoods compared to other areas. This is also understandable since urban popular areas have a mixture of openness, greater mobility of women and chances of interaction with men, combined with values related to the honor of the family.
- ◀ The overall results show that women represent the majority of victims of honor crimes, with equal results between wives, sisters, and daughters. There is also an important percentage of men victims of these crimes, but they count only among husbands and lovers.
- ◀ Honor crimes are generally related to youth, and mature men and women. Therefore, the majority of the victims fall in the age bracket 15-35.
- ◀ The majority of victims had a certain level of education, with a majority of undergraduates, followed by literates. As the majority of victims were women, the level of education could be an important factor that allowed them to move and interact with others – especially in urban areas -, exposing them thus to situations where their behavior could be misinterpreted, or to commit actual behavior jeopardizing the honor of the family.
- ◀ Around quarter of the victims were housewives, followed by employees from both sex, then by artisans. As a matter of fact, the expression "housewife" is used to refer to the professional status of women who do not work outside home. Young women in this status, with a certain amount of education, are actually

totally eligible to act in a way seeming to represent a threat for the honor and respectability of the family.

- ◀ Half of the victims were married persons from both sexes, a fact that is incompatible with the idea that honor crimes are addressed towards those seeking extra marital sexual relationships.
- ◀ This indicates that some of the facts classified as honor crimes are linked to a misinterpretation of the victim's behavior, especially in the case of women.
- ◀ In some cases, these crimes are perpetrated by more than one person as it appeared by the number of murderers amounting to 49 in the studied sample, with 77.5% males among these.
- ◀ The age of perpetrators ranges from 18 to 38 years old with almost half of them under the age of 30. This result is quite understandable due to the fact that most of them are either brothers or husbands falling in an age bracket more eligible to commit this type of crimes.
- ◀ The distribution of perpetrators according to the level of education is quite similar to the relative distribution of the same indicator at the population level. Therefore, we can deduct that education does not play an important role in reducing the occurrence of these crimes.
- ◀ Artisans were found on top of list of all professions regarding the perpetrators of honor crimes, followed by employees, farmers, unemployed, workers, and peddlers. If we take in consideration the other characteristics of perpetrators, we find out that these professional occupations classify them among the poor popular category of the urban population.

- ◀ Single and married perpetrators represent very similar percentages, with singles expected to be brothers or lovers of the victim women, and husbands or wives committing these crimes against each other.
- ◀ The majority of honor crimes perpetrators undertake their crimes alone, expecting thus to hide their action and even the reasons leading to commit the crime.
- ◀ Honor crimes belong to the category of domestic violence, and the majority of their perpetrators are either members of the family of the woman or to that of her husband. Brothers occupy the first position, followed by fathers, sons, and finally some other relatives.
- ◀ While six husbands had committed this crime against their wives, we found eight wives who participated in crimes against their husband. It is important here to recall that wives' crimes are not considered as honor crimes. We also note that an important percentage of these wives commit the crime by using their lover, or with his assistance.
- ◀ Doubts concerning behavior and the dissemination of rumors represent the major incentive for honor crimes, as the crimes analyzed in this sample indicate that fourth of the cases were due to doubts and rumors.

However, doubts are not a justification for killing either from the religious or the legal perspective; moreover, they should not represent a logical reason also from the perspective of customs and habits.

Nevertheless, fifty percent of honor crimes studied here were due to the discovery of adultery in the case of wives, and the illegitimate pregnancy in the case of singles; these results deserve reflection, because they reveal

a profound imbalance threatening the family institution, as well as the family and social values.

Most attempts of revenge in the name of honor take the form of killing (80% of the cases), while a few cases are able to escape from this destiny due to different reasons. In most cases, the victim is either beaten, attacked with a sharp tool, strangled, or poisoned. The majority of perpetrators attempt to hide the traces of the crime, with a minority of them giving up and recognizing the facts (12.5%).

### **Third: Anthropological results of the study**

In the last part of this study, we present an anthropological research expressing the vision and experiences of several informants from the local communities of the governorate of Minya about issues related to honor. These testimonies show that despite the conservative nature of these Upper Egyptian settings, it was possible to find several cases related to this topic, leading us to formulate the following findings:

1. The prevailing culture in the governorate of Minya considers honor as a priority value mainly linked to women rather than men whose behavior is tolerated, even when it is not compatible with the regular standards of honor. Therefore, forgery, fraud, bribery, false testimony, alcohol and drugs addiction, adultery, weakness of religious commitment, are socially usually tolerated for men.
2. The relationship between a man and a woman is the base on which women's honor is judged more than any other kind of relations. Although we are talking here about a bilateral relationship, women assume additional responsibilities compared to men, are considered as the provoking actor in spontaneous types of relations, and condemned in all cases to interact with men, even by women themselves.

3. Since females' early childhood, families tend to inculcate them the culture of avoiding mixing with males. This occurs through confining them at home, restricting their mobility to specific tasks such as education, work, and a limited participation in social and public events. This usually takes place by sending some members of the family with the female to avoid any contacts between her and other male counterparts, or complicating the possibilities of transportation or lodging outside the private domain of the household.
4. Relationships between women and men are summarized into the mere meanings of seduction and vice; therefore, any type of social relation is surrounded by doubts and considered as a preamble to depravity. This reduction of relationships between males and females is spontaneously translated into the value of honor for the woman and the family.
5. In this context, any women's behavior is seen as a violation to the honor of the family, leading to measure the honor of the family according to its rigidity towards the woman. Accordingly, violence against women becomes a justified behavior on behalf of the family members, beginning from the father or the brother, through other relatives in the case of the single woman, reaching the husband in the case of marriage. There are general rules defining the person responsible of practicing violence, with a big deal of tolerance towards this behavior intending to protect honor as a preventive means.
6. Due to the tribal nature of the society in the governorate of Minya, the task of punishing women in order to avoid threats to honor, or in case the family honor was already spoiled, remains an inner issue inside the family. Moreover, the dominant male values in

this society confer this responsibility to the men of the family. In addition, this does not exempt the female in charge of education (generally the mother) from being blamed for her failure, and being requested to facilitate the measures of punishment and revenge.

7. The society comply with these measures and support their sustainability by various means: either through inciting them, covering them with a wall of secrecy, or blaming and punishing those who fail from practicing them. Such situations are also made easier by the police, lawyers, and judges who alleviate the consequences of these acts, especially for the benefit of the individual who committed the honor crime against a woman considered as one of his belongings, i.e., a daughter, a sister, or a wife.
8. Illegitimate pregnancy (usually for unmarried girls), and the catching in the very act, are considered irrefutable proofs requiring the revenge for the family mainly towards the sinner woman. However, problems resulting from the instances where crimes were discovered as well as the social reaction to the scandal, pushes members of the family to examine possible alternatives allowing to observe a maximum state of secrecy. In the cases of illegitimate pregnancy, families tend to recourse to abortion practiced by their own means; in very rare cases, families enter in negotiations with the counterpart male in order to arrange a marriage; finally, in exceptional cases, families report the case to the official authorities. However, what ever are the chosen solutions, families remain with a deep feeling of social entrapment. Killing the woman – usually a girl under age of marriage – remains one of the most affordable solutions, reducing the chances of social stigma even if the story becomes publicly known. This solution prevents

also any potential blackmail practiced by the counterpart of the pregnant woman. As the social culture is considering women guilty in all cases, there are little chances to think of a revenge addressed to the aggressor of the woman.

9. If a man is not catch in the very act with a woman or a girl, the society does not agree with any revenge practiced against him, and in many cases the family of this man applies a counter vendetta if such an event was to happen. However, if both parties (the woman and the man) are killed by the woman's family, or if there are substantial rumors or proofs about their relationship, the society could be more tolerant. It is worth mentioning that the family of the man does take any violent or punitive measures against him in most cases.
10. The chances of married women to avoid the revenge are greater than others because the responsibility of their status is divided between two parties: her family and her husband. On the other hand, proofs are very difficult to be found in these cases. However, women – either married or single – are more exposed than men to rumors and accusations.
11. The daily life of all the families in the governorate of Minya is full of forms of violence against girls, and to a lesser extent against wives. These practices are higher against divorced or widowed women. Usually, it is brothers, fathers, and husbands who perpetrate violence, followed by other relatives according to their degree of relationship. Although all these practices are socially accepted, they overwhelm the life of women – and mainly girls – with a quantity of stress, and lost chances to participate in life while males do not suffer the same situation inside their families.

Therefore, we can talk of clear types of discrimination against women.

12. In a society holding male values looking at women as the gravity center of honor and as an element to be protected through the limitation of all chances of mobility, relationships and behavior, women are exaggeratedly exposed to doubts and rumors, and consequently to violence. In many cases of honor crimes, there are not real reasons for that except gossips and doubts.
13. There are several cases of violence against women for the protection of honor based on the refusal of the family to accept some legitimate behavior. As an example of these behaviors is the request of the woman to marry a man she previously had an affair with, or the insistence to get engaged with a man not found suitable by her family, or the desire of a divorced or widowed woman to remarry, or the willing of a divorced woman to return back to her husband, or the engagement with a man without the knowledge of her family. We found tangible examples of these cases that ended in some instances by a crime. These are also to be considered as forms of violence and discrimination against women.
14. The study examined cases of violence against women due to acts perpetrated by men against the will of these women who still received a hard punishment. We found two cases of incest: In one case, the crime was an incest perpetrated by the father, followed by the killing of the woman who escaped in the street by the brother. The second case was perpetrated by a rich and influent cousin. In a third case, the girl who was serving in a house was raped by the son of the family head; her father married her to the guy under the status of a dependent person without any marital rights. There is also the case of the husband who divorced his wife who had

succeeded to escape from rape in the public road, leaving his sister being raped. The son of a wealthy man raped one of his employees; the father of the girl was obliged to emigrate from the village with his daughter. Public rumors say that he killed her. Another man had an affair with a girl who got pregnant from him. Her family gave her money to encourage the guy marrying her. After marriage, the man took the money and disappeared. There is also this group of drivers who took the students far from school and raped them. Perpetrators were found and imprisoned; however any further chance of marriage for these girls has disappeared. Finally, we mention the case of the husband's family who insisted on the wedding night of their son to practice the traditional penetration (with the finger) because of the beauty of the bride and her belonging to another governorate.

15. There are several forms of violence against women in the governorate of Minya linked to violations of honor that are legally considered below the level of crime; In addition, many crimes remain unreported or unrevealed. Undoubtedly, many of these crimes represent unjustified violence against women, some of them perpetrated as a preventive measure, or due to rumors and gossips, while many of them indicate an unacceptable social attitude. Therefore, there is a need for efforts in support of women to prevent them from entering in this vicious circle. Furthermore, it is important to develop widest efforts in order to promote an integrated set of values related to honor, applying to both men and women, including the refusal of discrimination or violence against women.

16. Although the content of analysis of the material published in "Akhbar El Hawadeth" indicates that several men were victims of

crimes related to marital relationships, it is rare to find men targeted by honor crimes even when these men violate the honor of other families in the governorate of Minya. It is also very exceptional that the family of a man decides to kill him as a punishment for his acts and behavior jeopardizing honor. In the exceptional cases discovered in this study, we mention that of the son killed because he raped his sister.

17. Usually, poverty represents an important element in crimes of honor perpetrated against women. In rural areas, poor women are more exposed to pressures, and their families have also a lesser capability to revenge for their honor, or efficiently negotiate to redress the mistakes committed against the victims. Rural popular areas in the governorate of Minya represent a special case regarding honor and crimes of vendetta. This is linked to a series of socio-economic factors relating to these areas. Poverty leads to a relative growth in the size of such practices though the availability of tolerance towards urban popular women is higher than in rural areas.

18. As a result of the several efforts conducted in the governorate of Minya to empower women at all levels, women attend now literacy classes as well as other forms of educational activities; they also participate in public events. These growing opportunities lead to greater chances of doubts and rumors, improving stress inside the family with additional interaction between men and women. No doubt that this new situation represents a new experience for women, families, and the society as a whole. If gender awareness was not embodied in the social values about honor and its biases, women will be then exposed to real dangers. We mention here cases of female's exposure to danger in the age of education due to

their interaction with male counterparts at the secondary or university level.

### **Main Recommendations**

- ◀ The importance of focusing the efforts of NGOs, and research centers concerned with women issues on fighting violence against women in all its forms, i.e psychological, moral, or physical. The present study having revealed that women are the primarily victims of honor crimes, as shown in the findings of the content analysis of the newspaper mentioned above for the year 2005.
- ◀ The necessity to develop an efficient program aiming at raising citizen's awareness, especially in rural and popular areas, in order to redress the concepts regarding women as well as changing the acquired cultural habits and customs encouraging killing of women on the base of mere rumors and doubts.
- ◀ Focusing on efforts geared towards youth in the awareness raising programs through meetings, conferences, and workshops in order to develop their concepts related to women in a positive way. This is mainly true with regards to the findings of our study that discovered that most of the perpetrators in honor crimes are in the age range 15-35.
- ◀ The dissemination of education and the fight for the eradication of illiteracy – especially in rural and popular areas – can play a decisive role, mainly if we consider that the majority of perpetrators of honor crimes belonged to a low educational level.

- ◀ Advocacy for additional religious meetings and seminars could also improve the religious and ethical consciousness at the level of individuals, encouraging them to follow the religious commandments regarding family stability.
- ◀ In addition, an important request is to limit the judicial authority of using the right of mercy in honor crimes, but rather having sentences compatible with the size of the crime.
- ◀ Finally, we call all forms of media to abide with objectivity in dealing with honor crimes,