



MWIA CASE STUDIES

VIOLENCE CAUSING DEATH & CULTURAL VIOLENCE

Case 11: Domestic Violence in Pakistan

Objectives

- To demonstrate that culture and religious beliefs can result in honour killings
- To show the importance of including religious authorities in preventative programmes

Narrative Case

* At the end of the case study you can find "Learning points" related to information presented in the narrative case, denoted by numbers in square brackets.

A Pakistani woman, Farzana Parveen aged 25 years, was beaten to death by members of her own family in Lahore. [1] Parveen was in love with Mohammad Iqbal, aged 45 years, for many years and had decided to marry him against her family's wishes. [2] Her father had promised her in marriage to a cousin whom she refused to marry. [3]

Parveen and Iqbal decided to go to a courthouse in Lahore to register their marriage. When they left the courthouse, her father and about 20 members [4] of her extended family awaited her. They tried to pull her away from Iqbal and when she refused to leave him, they hit her with bricks until she was dead. [5] Even though the courthouse was located on a main street in Lahore and the crime occurred in daytime, none of the onlookers tried to intervene. [6]

When Parveen's father gave himself up after the attack, he called the crime an "honour killing", saying "I killed my daughter as she had insulted all of our family by marrying a man without our consent, and I have no regrets over it" [7]. The police are still searching for the other perpetrators.

Shocked by the brutal nature of the crime the Pakistani Ulema council began to organize a summit to address honour killings. Pakistani religious leaders published a decree which called honour killings "un-Islamic". [8]

Learning Points

- [1] Although most of the reported cases of honour killings in Pakistan happen in the countryside, cases do happen in big cities as this example shows. People living in the countryside are often more conservative and have a poorer education so educating them is extremely important.
- [2] 58% of the victims of honour killings worldwide and 43 % of the victims of honour killings in the Muslim world were killed for being too "western" according to the "Middle East Quarterly" (Chesler, Phyllis, 2010). Women can be accused of this for various reasons such as being "too independent", disobeying their fathers/family's wishes and /or cultural and religious expectations. Parveen was obviously killed for being too western - she ignored her families wishes and refused to marry a cousin. Instead she tried to decide by herself which man she wanted to marry. Other victims of honour killings in the Muslim world were mostly killed for "sexual impropriety" which means for example that a victim was raped or had extra-marital affairs. It was reported that Parveen had been three-months pregnant so it is also feasible to assume that the accusation of "sexual impropriety" could have played a role, too. The aspect of the level of impunity is evident through the fact that the perpetrator is still walking around free in the community.

- [3] In Pakistan arranged marriages are common (about 77%) and occur often inside the family. Most of the women are promised to a man they only hardly know during childhood. In this case the bride was 25 years old so, she was not a minor any more but cases of arranged marriages during childhood are still common in Pakistan even though a few laws regarding this topic have been passed in the last few years. Male-dominant religions such as Islam in combination with a very strict and strong Islamic council can strengthen patriarchal structures. Due to traditional practices such as arranged marriages where women have no rights, female oppression is common. Not surprisingly, men do consider women as less valuable than men. Poverty and a poor education reinforce this view.
- [4] In about one third of honour killings in the Muslim world the father is involved. In 83% of the reported cases, however other members of the family are also involved. 42 % of cases were committed by multiple perpetrators such as this case shows (about 20 members of Parveen's family were involved in the killing). Due to the principle "Karo Kari" and a special law the family of the victim can forgive the perpetrators and no further prosecution takes place. Honour killings are still considered as a private matter and not reported to the police.
- [5] About 50% of the victims were tortured by burning, stoning, hitting to death or stabbing more than ten times and died in agony. In this case, Parveen was hit with bricks until she died.
- [6] A study from 2011 administered by the Pew research centre reports that about 40% of the Pakistani public believes that honour killings of women can be sometimes justified. As pointed out in [4] it is considered as something private. Preventive measures such as education should aim to change this way of thinking and to encourage spectators to intervene.
- [7] The father himself believes that honour killings are justified as explained in [4], he obviously feels no guilt, even though he has killed his own daughter. The fact that he surrendered directly after the incident to the police does also illustrate the point that many perpetrators are convinced they will escape justice.
- [8] As honour killings are often based on wrong and fanatical religious beliefs, it is extremely important to include religious authorities as they have been found to have more influence on the population than laws and the government. Especially in tackling the problem described in [4] and [6] the help of the religious authorities are necessary.

Background information on domestic violence

As the Human rights committee of Pakistan reports, about 869 women were killed in the name of honour in the first half of 2013, but the real number is considered as being much higher. In addition, at least 56 women were killed for giving birth to a girl because girls are still seen as being of less value than boys.

The overall situation in Pakistan for women is still very difficult. In the first half of 2013, 1204 cases of physical violence against women were reported and ¼ of the Pakistani women said that they had been subjected to violence before. Explicit laws against domestic violence or violence against women in general only exist in one province of Pakistan, in Sindh. Often crimes are not reported because the woman is also held responsible for being raped and can be sentenced to death for extramarital sex. As the council of Islamic ideology has a very strong position in Pakistan, testimonies of women have only half the value of the man's in court. In order to be able to accuse a man of being a rapist at least four female witnesses are needed. Religion hinders women also in participation in politics: during the last election a religious edict, a fatwa was published which said that female participation in the election is un-Islamic, even though about 19.5% of the politicians in Pakistan are females.

Useful Resources

- Aljazeera. (28 May 2014). *Pakistan woman stoned by family outside court*. Retrieved 24 July 2014 from: <http://www.aljazeera.com/humanrights/2014/05/pakistan-woman-stoned-family-outside-court-201452873717897513.html>
- Aljazeera. (1 June 2014). *Pakistan clerics issue stoning death decree*. Retrieved 24 July 2014 from: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2014/06/pakistan-clerics-issue-honour-killing-fatwa-201461960536332.html>
- Chelser, P. (2010). Worldwide Trends in honor killings. *The Middle East Quarterly*, 17(2), 3-11. Retrieved from: <http://www.phyllis-chesler.com/764/worldwide-trends-in-honor-killings>
- Human Rights Committee of Pakistan. (March 2014). *State of Human Rights in 2013*. Retrieved from: www.hrcp-web.org