



Evaluation of Honour Killings in Turkey

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Abstract

Honour killings are still pervasive in many societies. The aim of this study is to reveal the characteristics of the victims of honour killings and honour killers in Malatya province between 2000 and 2004, and to review the concept of honour killings in Turkey. Data are collected from the records of Malatya Higher Criminal Court. The results are discussed in the light of the data obtained from Turkish Republic Ministry of Justice. There were 36 honour killings in Malatya between 2000 and 2004. An overwhelming majority of the killers lived in the rural areas, and were employed in agriculture (n=22, 61%). Of all victims, 44% were killed with fire arms. An overwhelming majority of the victims were close relatives of their killers (n=25 %70). Sixty-seven percent of the victims were killed in their homes or workplaces. In Turkey, a total of 2736 people were murdered between 2001 and 2008, and out of 2736 victims, 511 were female. Prevention of honour killings will definitely decrease the number of murdered women.

Key Words: Forensic science, honour killing, violence against women, homicide

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Introduction

Honour killing is a problem of public health concern but published data on the phenomenon are limited and many cases likely go unrecognized [1]. Honour killings can be defined as acts of murder of women or men that have an extra marital affair who are killed by the family members. If a baby is born as a result of an extra-marital relationship, the baby is also killed. The murderer can be the victim's father, brother or brother-in-law or other male relatives. On the other hand the scope of "töre killings" is narrower. The term "töre killings" is used to describe the murder of a woman suspected of having transgressed the limits of sexual behaviour as imposed by traditions, for example engaging in a premarital relationship with someone of the opposite sex or having extra marital affairs [2]. "Töre killings" are committed by a male selected by other family members. In "töre killings", the woman who had extramarital sexual relation is killed with the consensus obtained in the "family court". Due to traditional beliefs in "honour killings", the woman with the extramarital affair and/or the man involved in the relation and/or baby are killed by one of the family members with the prosecutor's own will without the requirement of the family court's decision.

Crimes of honour are among the most common crimes committed in certain areas of the world (e.g. Asia, Africa, Brazil, Malaysia, India, Pakistan and the Middle East) [3-6.]. However, as a result of increased transportation facilities and immigrations, honour killings have started to appear among the immigrants living in the European countries such as Germany [7]. Honour killings are still very common in some societies. Hundreds of girls become the victims of honour killings in Pakistan every year. For example, 266 girls were the victims of honour killings in Lahore and 672 girls in Punjab in 2000. It is thought that many honour killings are not reported to the police [8,9]. In some countries, criminal law often provides for leniency in the punishment of individuals convicted of honour crimes [10]. In Lebanon, the perpetrator of a crime of honour will be judged guilty, but may not be imprisoned. In Israel, a murderer of a woman who is engaged in unlawful sexual relations may be released after 10–12 years in prison [6,11]. This punishment is far from being preventive and definitely unsatisfactory.

Malatya is a city with a population of almost 1 million located in the eastern part of Turkey. Honour killings are most frequently convicted in the eastern part of Turkey [12] and the

cultural features of the region is in favour of honour killings. According to the results of a study conducted in the east of Turkey, 37.4% of the participants noted that the women engaging in premarital relationships should be killed [13].

There have been many studies on the profile of the female victims of honour killings. However, in premarital relationships, male partners and babies born as a result of those 4 relationships are also killed. The aim of this study was to reveal characteristics of victims and murderers in honour killings in Malatya, Turkey, between 2000-2004 years, and to review the situation throughout the country.

Materials and Methods

Data were collected from the court records of all homicides in Malatya, Turkey, between 2000 and 2004. Approval was obtained from the Malatya Higher Court of Justice. The court records as well as the autopsy reports about the victims were reviewed and the cause of death, the type of weapon used, the location of the wounds sustained by the victims, the characteristics of the wounds and the court verdicts about the offenders were reviewed. Demographic data including age, marital status and education level of the victims and murderers were also recorded. Data of homicides in Turkey between 2001 and 2008 were obtained from Turkish Statistical Institution and all cases of honour killings from Ministry of Justice [14].

Results

According to court records belonging to 2000-2004 years, some demographic or other features of honour murderers were shown in the Table 1. As shown in table, females were involved as murderers (N=6) in the honour killings in Malatya, although the majority of the murderers (N=30) were males. The female murderers who are in fact mothers or close relatives killed the babies born as a result of extra-marital sexual relationships. All of the murderers did not have a formal education. In fact, they even did not finish the primary school; therefore, most of them had unskilled jobs. The median age of the killers was 34 years when the murder was committed. Almost all of the murderers had criminal responsibility except three them, because two of them had mental disorders and just one was drunk at the time of the murder. Of 36 victims, 24 were male (66.7%) and 12 were female (33.3%). The mean age of the victims was 33.1 ± 17.2 years.

Table 1. Characteristic Features of Honour Murderers (and Victims)

Characteristic of Murderers (N=36)	n	%
Gender		
Male	30	83.3
Female	6	16.7
Age group		
0-17	4	11.1
18-34	19	52.8
35-54	8	22.2
55+	5	13.9
Mean Age = 34 ± 15 *		
Education		
Illiterate (Male/Female)	6 (3/3)	16.7 (50/50)
Literate (Male/Female)	30 (27/3)	83.3 (90/10)
Profession		
Farmer	22	61.1
Unemployed	3	8.3
Merchant	2	5.5
Worker	2	5.5
Housewife	2	5.5
Others	8	22.1
Relationship with the victim		
Nonexistent	11	30.6
Existent	25	69.4
Type of relationship (n=25)		
Spouse of victim	9	36.0
Brother of victim	2	8.0
Parents of victim	1	4.0
Children of victim	1	4.0
First cousin of victim	3	12.0
Uncle or aunt of victim	1	4.0
Other relatives of victim **	8	32.0
Places of Murder		
Indoor environment ^Ω	24	66.6
Outdoor environment [§]	12	33.4
Type of weapon used to kill the victim		
Firearm (Gun, rifle)	16	44.4
Knife	8	22.2
Axe	1	2.8
Hard matter	11	30.6

* Standart deviation

** Second or latter degree relatives

*** included in female gender

^Ω Home, workplace

[§] Street, territory, field

All cases of homicides in Turkey between in the years of 2001 and 2008 were shown in Table 2. Totally 2736 murders were occurred in this period. 511 females had been the victims of these 2736 homicides. Total of 288 females were killed between 2001 and 2004, and 172 of them were the victims of honour killings.

Table 2. All cases of homicide in Turkey between 2001 and 2008 [14].

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Male	337	223	398	261	189	265	278	274
Female	82	58	100	48	47	53	64	59
(Females victimized for honour)*	50	48	37	37				
Total	419	281	498	309	236	318	342	333

* included in female gender

Discussion

Adultery is a voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and one who is not his or her spouse. Adultery has evolved into something considered as immoral in all societies and forbidden in all religions. The meaning attributed to adultery has varied with societies and even different communities in a society and it has evolved into a cultural phenomenon.

Honour is associated with sexual behaviour related traditions and customs. It means sexual innocence. Sexual innocence is considered as a responsibility shouldered by women. Avoidance of sexuality is considered as a responsibility to be taken by both genders. A virtuous woman protects her virginity till she gets married and she can have a sexual relationship only with her husband. All extra-marital relationships are considered immoral and cause murders. In other words, if a woman loses her sexual innocence, she is killed for honour. Men also have to fulfil certain responsibilities. They have to protect honour of all their female relatives including their wives, daughters, sisters and mothers and must not threaten other people's honour [15]. Although perceived honour varies with individuals, honour is mostly associated with female body, female sexuality and female control over her sexuality. In this respect, men are responsible for protecting the honour of their wives, sisters, mothers and other women around them. The men who keep an eye on women are not only fathers, brothers and husbands, but also other male relatives. As the number of men feeling responsible for women's honour, so does the pressure on women. This pressure is extremely

severe especially when there are strong ties of a tribe and relatives and strong social control and when face to face communication is predominant. When honour is constructed through a woman's body, it entails her daily life activities, education, work, marriage, the importance of virginity, faithfulness, ability to marry the person she chooses, elopement with the person she loves and divorce [16].

In this study, most of the murderers were male (83%), and they killed the women whom they considered unvirtuous and the men whom the unvirtuous women had a sexual relationship with. The female murderers killed the babies born as a result of extra-marital sexual relationships. Honour killings were encouraged by reduced punishment for honour murderers in the former Turkish Criminal Law. Those murderers who commit honour killings believe that their action is ethical and by performing a crime they feel that they save their honour. They are strictly convicted that they save the traditional values and protect the social and cultural values of the community. They are named as "victims of fate" by themselves and the society. They are especially respected by the arrested people in prison and the guardians. These are all promoting factors for honour killings.

There have been other studies underlining the idea of the former Turkish Criminal Law in honour killings in Turkey [3,11]. In fact, the former law required a considerable reduction in punishment for female and male honour killers. Therefore, the relevant article in law was modified in 2005 and those reductions were abolished. According to the new law, honour killers are severely punished [17].

In the present study, most of the killers lived in the rural areas and were employed in agriculture (n=22, %61). Forty-four percent of the honour victims were killed with firearms. Patriarchal family is predominant among the residents of rural areas and most of them have firearms. Honour killings are widespread in the societies where patriarchal family type and strong family ties are maintained [3,18,19]. The socio-cultural phenomenon called "tribe" encourages and supports honour killings, and protects honour killers. The killers are thought to act in accordance with religious and moral values. Therefore, their behaviour is approved by the people around. Social pressure and traditions also encourage maintenance of honour killings [4,20]. In this study, the mean age of the killers was 34 years. In fact, 64% of the killers were younger than 35 years. We think that young age decreases the resistance to social pressure.

Most of the victims were the first degree relatives of their murderers (n=25; 70%) (Table 1). Sixty-seven percent of the murders occurred in the victims' homes and workplaces. It might have been very easy for the murderers to approach their victims since they were relatives.

In Turkey, there were a total of 1507 murders between 2001 and 2004 and out of 1507 victims, 288 were female [14]. Concurrently, the courts judged that 172 females were the victims of honour killings; however, it is just an underestimation of the real situation in the country. As a result, most of the murdered females were the victims of honour killings. Prevention of honour killings will considerably decrease the number of murdered women. Actually, murder is the most severe violence against women.

Conclusion

Honour killings are encountered in many societies in the world. It indicates that all societies should act together to curb honour killings. Crime laws should require that honour killers should be punished severely. In patriarchal societies, measures directed to decrease the pressure on women should be taken. Tribal systems should be discouraged, and individual rights should be prioritized. Analysis of the socio-cultural and psychological factors associated with the honour killings can guide the development of prevention strategies. Media campaigns which religious leaders and key community leaders participate should be conducted to struggle against honour killings.

Key points

- Honour killings are the most severe violence against women.
- Honour killings are still take place in Turkey, as in many other societies.
- Honour killings seem rarely, but have destructive effect for public.
- More than half of honour killings are perpetrated in between 18-34 ages and in rural areas.
- This article highlights need for further research, systematic data collection and preventive measures in this important area of public health.

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