



Sociological Analysis of the Vulnerable Status of Afghan Women to Honor Killing: An Empirical Perspective

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Abstract

People are subjected everywhere to violence. The most vulnerable among them are women who have been subjected to violence as most of the family honor is associated with them in a traditional social structure. Violence against women is not something that is individually practiced, but it has become more publicly pronounced and has been a self-sustaining system of any social structure. The current study is also an attempt to reach to the fact that why the women are subjected to such inhuman behavior in the face of upholding the human rights worldly behaviors and posturing. The study was conducted under the framework of qualitative research design. The study area was delimited to jails in two districts i.e., District Mardan and District Malakand respectively. The qualitative tools and methods were used to select the respondents and draw information in these two jails. The study concludes that the cultural background and inability of the deprived segment of Afghan population lead them to not overcome on their aggressive and domestic violence against weak segment of society.

Keywords: violence, family honor, killing, vulnerability

1. Introduction

Wives are considered property of their husbands and that they think they have the right to inflict physical retribution on them if they show any cheating on them. They are sometimes subjected to killings based on honor. This act of honor articulated is deemed to consider the collective honor but deemed as individual loss of face (Araji, 2000). Honor related crimes are defined by the Purna Sen as 'such crimes are perpetrated because of passion, and sometimes these crimes are leniently treated in the judicial system' (Mullen, 1995). The current research is also an attempt to address the question of correlation between killing and honor among Afghan refugees turning into a ferocious behavior against women, which is yet to be explored in sociological and criminological contexts. The emphasis is particularly laid on the Afghan refugees' women in terms of vulnerabilities being led to honor killing among Afghan women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

2. The Argument

A large number of Afghan refugees have been migrated from Afghanistan to Pakistan in 1979. They are caught in a state of biculturalism on arriving at the new conditions. The young segment of the Afghan refugees come in conflict with their cultural background that which way they should go with. Particularly the young go with acquiring the new trends and patterns in life while some are left with showing content with their old cultural background. The Afghan culture is hard and stiff and there is no space for violation, neither it can be violated with its old patterns and customs, nor can it be contaminated with the introducing new trends from the foreign culture. Binding with rules and procedures of the Afghan culture is more hazardous and binding on the Afghan women. They must show respect towards their culture at any cost, showing of any disrespect for their culture might invite severe punishment for them, and they can even be killed on the pretext even if a minor disrespect is shown to the culture. The argument here is to be brought to find that whether it is the new condition that does allow the newcomers to settle in the social structure to balance the old background with new one or is it something different that Afghan refugees stick to their old culture and are ready by no means to give space to their women in foreign culture.

2.1. Objectives

1. To identify the status of women being vulnerable and exposed to honor killing among Afghan refugees
2. To explore violence being heightened to the level of killing of Afghan women

3. Methods and procedures

The qualitative research design is adopted in this study to find the facts in empirical way. The targeted population was approached conveniently in two prisons i.e., District Jail Malakand and High Security Prison Mardan. The selection of respondents was made following the three-point criteria i.e. (1) Male (2) Afghan refugees (3) convicted. While following the criterion (05) respondents were identified from each jail and selected conveniently in the light of the subject criteria. The respondents were interviewed through interview guide, whereby all the respondents were assured that the information would be kept confidential and would not be revealed. They were also assured that they might quit the interview process at any stage, if any of the question deem out of context or

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irrelevant to them. Each of the interviews was lasted for three to four hours in order to draw the relevant information about the issue. The collected information was analyzed under the framework of Braun and Clark (2006) thematic model.

3.1. Refugees and Honor Killing

Inflicting punishment upon women varies from context to context. Sometimes the culture is so lenient that the women are left without punishments when found involved in gross violation of marital life. While sometimes they are killed with a doubt for an act, even the act is not committed by them. Honor crimes are usually perpetrated for different reasons in different contexts. A woman is usually killed for when she exercises her choice for choosing spouse, seeking a divorce, or found engaged in an anti-normative behavior especially concerning the sexual conduct. At times, they are punished for such gross punishment on issues of petty nature like staying away (either for a day or night) from home without permission.

“Uzbek and Zargaran are the races who are mostly involved in criminal enterprising. They commit every kind of crime ranging from betrayal to the killing of their daughters and wives. I can tell you my story when I killed my daughter. Her marriage ceremony was decided but she eloped with another boy. I went after them and searched them but couldn't find them. After some serious and painstaking search, I got her while travelling somewhere in a bus and killed her on the spot. I had to kill her because all my community raised fingers on my valor and honor. I was stigmatized, and I was counted among the cowards; I had two options; either to commit suicide or kill her. Women (wives, mothers, or daughters) have no right to decide against the established norms; if they do not refrain, they shall be dealt accordingly.”

Economic cause may however sometimes lead to the killing of women. A woman in Afghan community is sometimes killed when she makes demands for share in inheritance or sometimes killed when on marrying with a man of different clan. The occurrence of violent crimes is perpetrated with a purpose to keep women in total subordination (Chantler & Gangoli, 2011). Although, murder/killing in any form either first or second or third degree, confronts condemnation throughout the globe because it ends in a huge and non-compensable loss, yet the second-degree murder in the study area is justified by the respondents in light of cultural, customary and normative structure. The act is not limited to refugees; rather every segment of Pakhtun society appreciates (to some extent) the acts of voluntary manslaughter at some instances. Respondents in this study were also convicted for committing the voluntary manslaughter, which had cultural basis along-with their statuses of ‘being-migrants or refugees’:

“I killed my wife and her brother, because she was involved in extramarital relations while he (cursing and abusing him in filthy and abominable words) was prosecuting her. I killed both in the court. And now I am satisfied and happy because I have restored my honor and valor. I could not let her with doing such unbearable act. Being a Pakhtun, it was unbearable for me to let off them with such act because it was a huge stigma for me to live with. Here my cultural standings, my valor, my traditions forced me to do so and my status of being a migrant is also responsible to some extent. I know, we are poor and are striving hard to survive; but it doesn't mean that our women shall indulge in such filthy acts to earn money. No and never; we'll die of hunger but can't live with disgust.”

“I have killed my nephew for having illicit relations with my daughter. Although I was not sure about such relations but had suspected him few times. Based on that, I advised and banned him at my house. One night, I heard some footsteps at my roof. I suspected that it might be him. In extreme anger and provocation, I handled my gun and went up to roof where someone (in dark night) was trying to hide. I opened an indiscriminate fire and the shot the hiding person. When the body was recovered, it was him (my nephew) whom I suspected. He compelled me to do so because I tried to make him understand to refrain from such disgusting acts but in vain and at last, he died like a mad dog. I am sentenced for twenty-five years imprisonment, and this is my fifteenth year in jail. My whole life, business, family everything is devastated because of that bastard. Even the law of this state didn't facilitate me. It was a killing in self-defense because an unknown person was moving on my rooftop, and I opened fire. If it had happened to a Pakistani; I am sure he would have been acquainted, but being a migrant, law is also heinous to me.”

As said earlier that the Afghanis strictly adhere to their cultural patterns, which they never compromise. At many instances, they have been found to take life of others or risk their own lives, when it comes to compromise on petty norms of their culture. For example, *Purdah* (a mandatory and symbolic segregation of women through veil) is strictly observed among them while violating these rules can endanger women's lives. This adherence strengthens, worsened becomes tougher when they reside in an alien and stranger territory. Being refugees in Pakistan, they follow their norms and traditions more strictly to avoid stigma and negative labels that are most often associated to people while living in a traditionally governed Pakhtun society. Besides, women should also be obedient to decisions made by the male elders where a slight violation might threaten or take their lives. As one of the excerpts from the field data reflect a poignant story of a girl's murder on a very petty issue:

“My father killed my sister for nothing. A meeting of elders was in progress at our home. My sister just peeped to count the shoes of guests to prepare food for them. My father considered it a disobedience to his orders of not

intervening in elders' matters and discussion. He even didn't let her to explain and clarify her stance. It was a cold-blooded murder; he ordered her to pray and then get ready for death. She adhered to his order and followed the instructions. We were unable even to utter a single word and ask him 'what are you doing? Have you got insane? No, if we had talked, we would also be killed. She prepared herself for death, and he killed her (the respondent wept his heart out while narrating the story). An innocent was killed in front of us, and we had to be silent until she died. Then we could prepare her for the final departure and burial."

4. Conclusion

Woman being a wife everywhere is the commodity of husband. They are being with the status whether they are daughters, sisters and wives are subjected to physical retribution on them if any cheating is shown on their part to the husbands. The inflicting of punishment while taking from showing of aggression, physical infliction to the killing of women varies from time to time and context to context. Similar type of behavior was also found among Afghan refugees in the receiving society of Pakistan. The literary information has revealed that Afghan women are subjected to similar type of attitude. With the exception sometimes some of the women go out without being received such a ferocious punishment even being found with gross violation of marital life. It was revealed that an Afghan being possessed with Pakhtun posture cannot tolerate his wife to be found in extra marital status other than with their husbands. Similarly, a woman cannot go with solemnizing her marriage without the consent of their elders. And if any one of the women being a daughter, sister or even a wife is found with any kind of violation of their culture bound, she is likely to be faced with the punishment of honor killing. An Afghan woman has no choice except to go with the following of his socio-cultural set up. It is recommended that the status of woman should take as breeding creature and must be respected in all its forms and manifestation whether she comes from any background and culture.

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