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# For the Sake of Family and Tradition: Honour Killings in India and Pakistan

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Tanya D'Lima<sup>1</sup>, Jennifer L. Solotaroff<sup>2</sup> and  
Rohini Prabha Pande<sup>3</sup>

## Abstract

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates that the annual worldwide number of honour killings is as high as 5,000 women and girls, though some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) estimate as many as 20,000 honour killings annually worldwide. Despite limited statistics, research shows that honour killings occur amongst women of different ages, religions, and social status, wealth, education, and location. The limited understanding of each country context, combined with scarce data on honour killings, has contributed to the continued hidden nature of this shocking form of violence. In this article, we seek to address this gap through a descriptive analysis of honour killings in India and Pakistan. In the absence of other data, we conduct a content analysis of media-reported honour killings in these two countries to examine key similarities and differences in the motivations, types, and other characteristics of honour killings across these countries and highlight any key risk and protective factors that emerge.

## Keywords

Honor killings, gender based violence, South Asia, India, Pakistan, women's rights

## Introduction

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates that the annual worldwide number of honour killings is as high as 5,000 women and girls,<sup>1</sup> though some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) estimate as many as 20,000 honour killings annually worldwide.<sup>2</sup> Despite limited statistics, research shows

<sup>1</sup> Social Development Analyst, the World Bank Group's Social Urban, Urban, Rural and Resilience Global Practice, Washington DC, USA.

<sup>2</sup> Senior Social Development Specialist, the World Bank's Gender Group, Washington DC, USA.

<sup>3</sup> Gender Consultant, the World Bank, Washington DC, USA.

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## Corresponding author:

Tanya D'Lima, World Bank Group's Social Urban, Urban, Rural and Resilience Global Practice, Washington DC 20433, USA.

Email: [tdlima@worldbank.org](mailto:tdlima@worldbank.org)

that honour killings occur among women of different ages, religions, social status, wealth, education and location (UNGA, 2012). Some media reports have noted a spike in honor killings in countries such as India since 2016 (Al Jazeera, 2016).

The limited understanding of each country's context, combined with scarce data on honour killings, has contributed to the continued hidden nature of this shocking form of violence. In this article, we seek to address this gap through a descriptive analysis of honour killings in India and Pakistan. In the absence of other data, we conduct a content analysis of media-reported honour killings in these two countries to examine key similarities and differences in the motivations, types and other characteristics of honour killings across the countries and highlight any key risk and protective factors that emerge.

## Background

India and Pakistan have seen marked development shifts over the past 2 decades, with robust economic growth, rising wages and significant advances over time in women and girls' health and nutrition, and girl's enrolment at the primary and secondary level (World Bank, 2019).

Other economic and social structures are changing as well, which, when mapped onto the demographic shifts favouring women and youth, are contributing to an environment ripe for improvements in women's autonomy and a weakening of gender-inegalitarian norms. Both countries have gone through recent changes such as the legal right of women to inherit land or to choose whom to marry (Chowdhry, 2010), and growing urbanization characterized by rural-to-urban migration patterns. In certain parts of India, marriage patterns are also changing towards inter-caste or cross-regional marriages, altering a long history of geographic and kinship endogamy (Mishra, 2013). Yet, patriarchal gender norms persist amid (and perhaps in reaction to) these rapid changes in economic and social structures. These rigid norms condone, and sometimes actively support, acts of gender-based violence against women and girls (Perveen 2010; Shaikh, Shaikh, Kamal, & Masood, 2010). Honour killings are one such type of gender-based violence.

The particular type of patriarchy that exists in India and Pakistan provides a continuing enabling environment for honour killings in these two countries. South Asian patriarchy can best be understood in terms of Deniz Kandiyoti's (Kandiyoti, 1988) definition of classic patriarchy, under which 'girls are given away in marriage at a very young age into households headed by their husband's father' (p. 278). Classic patriarchy creates a system in which men maintain control over women throughout their lives, as daughters, wives or daughters-in-law and sons are preferred over daughters (Das Gupta et al., 2003). Violence, then, is one form of control to maintain the patriarchal status quo (Jafri, 2008).

In this system, a 'good woman' is one who can fulfil the socially sanctioned roles of daughter, wife and mother. 'Good' women are typically expected not to actively express their sexuality, and are discouraged from expressing independent desires or making decisions (Solotaroff & Pande, 2014). They are also expected to observe certain modesty norms (Lynch, 2007) that dictate how they dress, where they go, with whom they engage, and their body language, particularly in

public. A 'good' woman is valued only to the extent that she serves the purposes of reproductive and productive labour contribution to the household (Mishra, 2013). To that end, female behaviour is guided by the rules of honour and the threat of violent enforcement, and this serves as a mechanism of social control (Jafri, 2008; Mayeda & Vijaykumar, 2016). Girls and women have to be protected under this system; but only girls and women who fulfil their roles and duties in the private space of the household have the right to protection from violence.

In parallel, South Asian men also face a construction of masculinity that rests on the notion of honour. Specifically, men's role is to maintain familial and community 'honour' by controlling the behaviour of their daughters, wives and mothers. In other words, a woman's sexual behaviour and public presence are tied to the honour of the household (and sometimes the clan or caste group) (Mandelbaum, 1988). Known as *izzat* in India and Pakistan, women bear the burden of maintaining this 'honour' by adhering to the accepted societal definition and roles of a 'good' woman. Transgressing these norms is not only detrimental to a South Asian woman's reputation, but it also tarnishes the reputation of her family and community. As Baker, Nakagami, Noronha, Potaski, and Puckart (2009) note, male honour is violated when there is an implied lack of control over women. Linked to the lack of control is the feeling of shame among men that can only be redressed through a punitive response towards women (Mayeda & Vijaykumar, 2016).

Thus, as Chowdhry (2010) notes, both women and men are responsible for upholding honour. However, community honour is located within a woman's body. A woman who exercises agency<sup>3</sup> over herself is seen as violating honour, as it implies that her male guardians have been unable to control her behaviour and make decisions for her that best elevate their status among other men in the community. Honour, then, is redeemable by destroying the body of the woman who caused the dishonour. This system thus directly lays the groundwork for justifying honour crimes and killing (Mayeda & Vijaykumar, 2016).

The concept of 'honour' is also invoked and used to justify any type of perceived familial or individual transgression by women. This includes a range of issues, such as solving property disputes and resolving feuds between families, (Lari, 2011) or preventing women from choosing a marital or sexual partner without the family's consent (Siddiqi, Manisha, Awasthi, & Chickerur, 2012; Alexander, Garda, Kanade, Jejeebhoy, & Ganatra, 2006). Siddiqi notes that, '...ideologies of protection and victimhood' (Siddiqi et al., 2012, p. 164) ensure that women's own narratives about their sexual agency are considered taboo; older men usually take up this space, declaring young women who have made consensual choices with their partners to be victims of rape or kidnapping (Solotaroff & Pande, 2014). As Baxi, Rai, and Ali (2006) note, this politics of honour is normalized both in communities and in the law in both India and Pakistan, whereby women are not treated as equal citizens relative to men and are subjected to 'competing ideas of rights, legality and justice' (Baxi et al., 2006, p. 1240; Kapur, 2013).

The behaviour that merits an honour-redeeming response varies between the two countries and between Hindu and Muslim communities. For instance, in the caste system in India, marrying outside of one's caste is considered culturally forbidden, as are romantic and sexual relations with members of the same sub-caste (*gotra*); both are transgressions punishable with honour killings. In contrast,

in Pakistan and Afghanistan, first-cousin marriage is widely accepted and not considered a punishable offence. In honor killings in Hindu communities in India, not just women but also men are more likely to be killed if involved in unsanctioned romantic relationships, while men tend to be punished less in honour killings in Pakistan (Chesler & Bloom, 2012).

However, though these social norms are particular to South Asia, honour killings are not, and have been known to predate all written religions (Doğan, 2011). They have also been documented over the last 20 years in some countries in the Middle East (including Israel), North Africa, South Asia and more recently, among immigrant communities in USA, Canada and Europe (Madek, 2005; Feldman, 2010; Terman, 2010). Despite limited statistics, research shows that honour killings occur among women of different ages, religions, social status, wealth, education and location (Amnesty International, 1999). A study on women's autonomy by Jejeebhoy and Sathar (2001) find the influence of religion and nationality to be less consistent and powerful than region.

Despite the recognition of the role played by underlying social norms in honour killings in South Asia, research about socioeconomic individual or household-level risk factors, motivations and patterns is limited (Solotaroff & Pande, 2014). This article addresses these gaps through a content analysis that elucidates key motivations, perpetrators and victims of honour killings in recent years in Pakistan and India. We also discuss how the spread of modern communication and technology, with an alternate portrayal of 'modern' women and men, has influenced the dynamics of honour killings.

## Data and Methodology

Definitions of 'honour crime' vary throughout the region (Kirti, Kumar, & Yadav, 2013; Sen, 2003). We use Welchman and Hossain's definition of 'honor crime', namely:

[A] variety of manifestations of violence against women, including 'honor killings,' assault, confinement or imprisonment, and interference with choice in marriage, where the publicly articulated 'justification' is attributed to a social order claimed to require the preservation of a concept of 'honor' vested in male (family and/or conjugal) control over women and specifically women's sexual conduct: actual, suspected or potential. (Welchman & Hossain, 2005)

Because of data limitations, we analyze only honour killings (versus the spectrum of honour crimes), defined as a premeditated crime with the intention to take the life of a woman, and/or those associated with her, bringing shame to the family or community. We conduct a detailed media content analysis of 200 cases of honour killings from India and Pakistan as reported in various English language media outlets and select media repositories from 2005–2017.

Content analysis is a well-established qualitative methodology that may be used to infer from symbolic data 'what would be too obtrusive by the use of other

data' (Krippendorff, 1980), and is useful for examining trends and patterns in documents. Scholars working on types of gender-based violence for which survey-type data are particularly difficult to find—such as dowry-related violence in South Asia (Prasad, 1994) and honour killings (Chesler & Bloom, 2012; Lari, 2011; Parasar, Gopal, & Baskar, 2016)—have also found the most detailed and reliable information to be found in media reports. Critical reports using content analysis in Pakistan (Asif, 2011 and the Uks Media Foundation, 2011) find that local news content on violence against women is often insensitive or bombastic. We took note of this issue and sought to balance this by looking for a collection of articles on the same case and picking the one with the most accurate and professional reporting, where possible.

We identified English-language news articles from national and regional newspapers through online searches using the Google Search engine. We translated key words into Urdu, Hindi and, in some cases, regional or provincial languages (using Latin script). To ensure consistency, we cross-checked reporting from editorials or opinion pieces with other online news sources. We counted a case as an honour killing case based on the intention to kill, even if the victim escaped and survived at the time of reporting.

In order to address the study questions, we included only those cases of honour killings where the relevant details were available in media reports. Specifically, these include the following: location (by state/province and district); date of the killing; motivation for committing honour killing; religion; age of woman (if applicable); age of man (if applicable); man's relationship to woman; whether victim was killed, that is, whether the attempted killing succeeded; who were the perpetrators; and the method of killing. We used emergent coding to code information for categories of interest from the selected media reports for both countries. These categories were cross-checked for consistency by two researchers on the team. We complemented and cross-verified our analysis with existing literature on these themes. The paucity of detailed information on reported honour killings meant that we had to sift through 1500 articles to select 100 from each country.

We recognize that such a media analysis is likely to be a severe underestimate of the true prevalence of honour killings, and is likely to disproportionately include the most extreme cases, as well as only cases of potential interest to English-speaking populations and an international audience. However, the goal of this study is not to estimate prevalence; instead, we seek to add to the scant knowledge on the typology of this crime across the region and provide important and detailed insight into victims, perpetrators, causes of honour killings and any protective factors.

## **Findings**

### *Sample Size and Geographic Distribution*

In this study, 201 cases were selected as 'eligible'. These included 100 cases from Pakistan and 101 cases from India. Eligible cases were those that had information

from reputed news sources on the selected dimensions of honour crimes (location [by state/province and district]; date of the killing; motivation for committing honour killing; religion; age of woman and age of man; man's relationship to woman; whether victim was killed [i.e., whether the attempted killing succeeded]; who were the perpetrators; and the method of killing). The eligible news articles from Pakistan cover the period 2008–2017; those from India span the period from 2003–2017. The majority of cases in Pakistan were reported from 2016, and most cases recorded for India were after 2010.

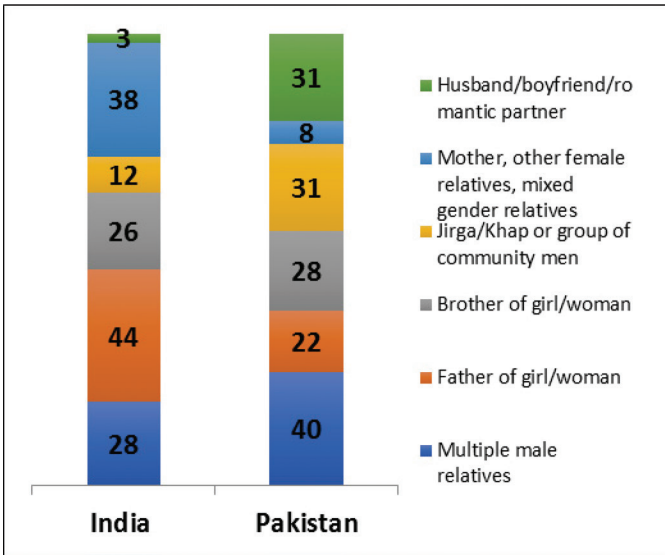
In Pakistan, consistent with previous research (Nasrullah, Haqqi, & Cummings, 2009), most of the eligible reported cases (close to 40 per cent) included in our study were reported in the Punjab province, with the remaining scattered across other provinces. The distribution of eligible cases across provinces is likely to reflect, at least in part, the range of openness to report and recognize honour killings as an illegal act of violence, rather than as a socially accepted practice. Thus, it is possible that in more rural or tribal areas, or in conflict zones, under-established news networks and with rigid or tightly knit community allegiances contribute to limited—if any—reporting of honour crimes.

In India, eligible cases reviewed for this article span across 14 of India's 29 states as well as the national capital territory of New Delhi. The largest proportion was reported from Haryana (22.2 per cent). Tamil Nadu had the second highest number (16 per cent), consistent with recent news articles noting that although the Tamil Nadu government often does not officially report honour killings, the number of such cases has been increasing in the last few years. The third highest occurrence of eligible cases was in Uttar Pradesh (15.1 per cent), consistent with previous research (Parasar et al., 2016). Since 2014, at least 60 per cent of honour killings were reported from Uttar Pradesh,<sup>4</sup> possibly reflecting increased interest in violence against women, and thus increased reporting after a brutal rape case in Delhi that caused a national outrage in 2012. Probably because of under-reporting, we were only able to find 8 per cent of eligible cases from Punjab, despite previous literature indicating otherwise. The majority of eligible cases overall were from rural areas and smaller towns.

### *Demographic Characteristics of Victims*

Most of the victims in both India and Pakistan were women (79 out of 100 in India, 91 out of 101 in Pakistan). Given the predominance of Muslims in the population, almost all (98 per cent) of the eligible Pakistani cases were Muslim. Similarly, following overall population distributions, in India, 83 per cent of the victims were Hindu, followed by 14 percent of Muslim victims, two percent of Sikh victims and one Christian.

Age reporting was incomplete in the Pakistani news reports accessed for this article, but among the 65 articles that did so, the majority were between 16 and 18 years of age. In the Indian cases for which age information was available, close to one-third of the women victims were 19 or 20 years of age, while a quarter of the male victims were young, between the ages of 20–25 years.



**Figure 1.** Main Perpetrators of Honour Killings

Source: The authors.

*Background of the Perpetrators*

In eligible cases from both the countries, men overwhelmingly committed honour killings, either alone or collectively (Figure 1). While in Pakistan, male relatives, typically fathers, brothers or uncles, were the single largest group of identified perpetrators, in India, fathers of girls and women tended to be the most likely to commit honour killings. In Pakistan, jirgas and community members were most often involved in the murder of women when they transgressed some norm around modernity (through speech, mobility, dress, etc.). In India, news articles were much less likely to explicitly reference the *khap* panchayats as playing a role in murder, but in the cases where men in the community (often in larger crowds) partook in an honour killing, it was more frequently documented. In the Pakistan sample, many of the reported honour killings were motivated by suspicion of adultery and were perpetrated by the husbands of the victims, whereas only three such cases were reported in India.

In our sample, women were reportedly more likely to be involved in honour killings in India than in Pakistan. Yet, the details in the case study reports indicate that women—and not just men—in both countries considered their daughters to have violated family honour and expressed a sense of anger and injustice and justified the killing of their daughters. Neither was there any indication in the news reports we analyzed that women were more or less violent than men in the killings themselves. These findings differ from Chesler’s (2015) analysis of 26 case studies worldwide, which noted that women tended to play less violent roles than men in the killing when they were involved in murdering their female relatives. The intensity of women’s reactions in India and Pakistan—if indeed as



widespread as our media analysis suggests—possibly arises from the South Asian patriarchy, where elder women also gain status from reinforcing younger women's allegiance to the strict codes of gendered behaviour dictated by this system (Das Gupta, 1996).

### *Methods of Killing*

The methods of killing varied across the countries, possibly because of differences in the ease of access to various murder weapons. However, in both countries, honour killings were horrifically brutal. They involved torture and physical abuse, and were intended to provide a cautionary tale about transgressions that would not be tolerated.

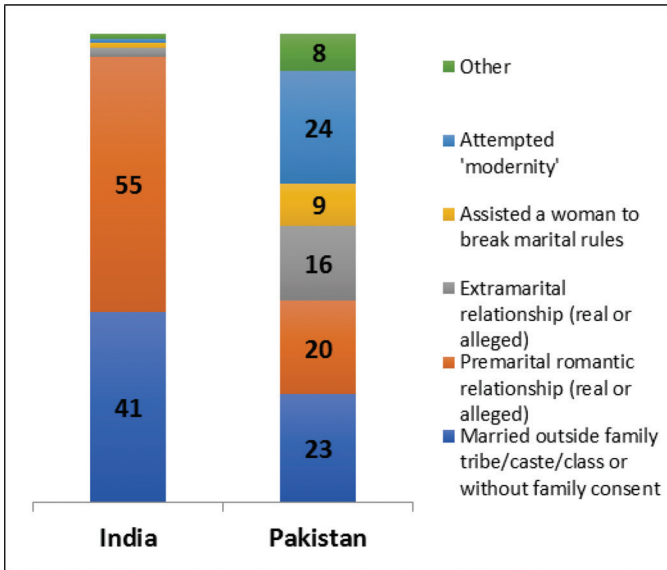
In Pakistan, in most cases, victims of honour killing crimes were shot at point blank range in the face, chest or head, often after physical abuse such as beating, punching, kicking or drugging. Unique to, or more widespread in, India were hacking to death with various instruments and electrocution. Methods common to both countries included strangling, stabbing, setting on fire, beheading and stoning to death. In male or couple honour killings, the abuse and murder took on an aspect of public performance and shaming, and included parading the victims naked, forcing their heads to be shaved, public beheading or burning. In one particularly gruesome case of male honour killing in Dera Ghazi Khan (in Punjab, Pakistan), the perpetrators chopped off the male victim's nose, lips and arms. He died of bleeding and injuries.<sup>5</sup>

### *Control over Women's Sexuality as a Motivation for Honour Killing*

Consistent with the literature reviewed above, honour killings in our sample were primarily used as 'punishment' for women and girls who manifested sexual agency by engaging in premarital romantic relationships, extramarital relationships, marrying without family consent or outside of familial and socially accepted norms or assisting other women who did any of the above (Figure 2). In India, almost 83 per cent of the cases involved an upper caste Hindu woman who had been romantically involved with, or married to a lower-caste or Dalit man, or a couple from the same sub-caste (*gotra*) who were romantically involved or married without parental consent. In Pakistan, cases were more likely to involve a woman's refusal to take permission for marriage from the family or acquiesce to an arranged marriage, rather than caste, ethnic or tribal intermarriage or romantic relationships.

### *Marrying Without Consent, or Marrying Outside Family Tribe, Caste or Class*

This motivation was reported as a significant reason for honour killings in both India ( $n = 41$ ) and Pakistan ( $n = 23$ ). Our eligible media cases in Pakistan for such killings were predominantly in Punjab province; in India, they were from Tamil



**Figure 2.** Reported Motivations for Honour Killings

**Source:** The authors.

Nadu, Haryana and Punjab. Women were predominantly the victims in both countries; several were killed while pregnant and some had children. Most in both countries were between 18 and 20 years of age.

Families of the murdered women played a key role. In both countries, brothers and fathers were usually the key perpetrators. Also, common across both countries was the particularly cruel violence involved in honour killings motivated by unsanctioned marriage. In one particularly violent case from India, parents strangled the female victim, cut her body into 11 pieces and then skinned her face to avoid recognition.<sup>6</sup>

Cases from both countries reported that most of these killings occurred when women returned to their natal home after the fact. Married couples that transgress societal laws are aware of the danger to their lives and often flee once the relationship or marriage is discovered. They typically had to be lured back home by parents, who either used family's ill health as an excuse or convinced the couple that their marriage has been accepted.<sup>7</sup> These discussions took time, so honour killings sometimes occurred years after the trigger event. For instance, in one of the cases from India, a woman was burnt alive in public in her natal village almost 8 years after she had married a man from another caste. Such long time gaps between the alleged 'crime' and the 'punishment' are testament to the intensity with which marriage norms are adhered to and defended.

Another notable theme running across all our cases of honour killings that occurred because couples married without family consent, was an elevated sense of vindication and righteousness, as expressed in the unrepentant statements, on record in the press, by perpetrators. In some cases, the honour killing itself was something of a social performance intended to restore lost honour. In one of the

cases, a couple in Sialkot, Pakistan, was murdered by the woman's male relatives in the family courtyard and children were forced to watch.

Someone said the children should be sent away but Mrs Akram's father told them to stay and watch, said Mr Quresh\*<sup>8</sup> "He said they should learn what would happen to them if they married someone of their own choice," he explained, adding many in the town—where 15 girls had eloped in the past year—supported the murders.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, in Multan (also in Pakistan), a father (who remained unrepentant for the attempted murder of his daughter) noted that he had started receiving better marriage prospects for his younger daughters after his attempt to 'punish' his older daughter who had married without his consent, as nobody could doubt the emphasis he placed on honour.<sup>10</sup>

In another widely publicized case, a 24-year-old man killed his 18-year-old sister who had married a Christian man so that his reputation would be intact among his co-workers and friends.

They would say: 'Can't you do anything? What is the matter with you? You are not a man...' Iqbal\* continued: ... "I told her I would have no face to show at the mill, to show to my neighbours, so don't do it. Don't do it." But she wouldn't listen. I could not let it go. It was all I could think about.<sup>11</sup>

The reporting in our media case studies also exposes the impunity with which perpetrators break the law. One such example is the murder in the state of Haryana, India, of a pregnant Jat woman and her husband, who were strangled to death by her mother and father. After the murder, the father reportedly laid the corpses outside his house and was, 'accompanied by applauding villagers to the police station to declare the murders'. The reporter noted that the village 'stands united behind the act, proud, defiant, almost to a man'.<sup>12</sup> In another example, also from Haryana, a police escort meant to keep a married couple safe passed on information about their whereabouts to a *khap* panchayat that then ordered their killings. When the courts pronounced a punishment and implicated the *khaps*, they launched protests to demand the government to ban marriages within the same sub-caste, keeping with their local norms.

Overall, these cases vividly illustrate how honour killings likely continue because the community condones and supports the perpetrators as victims who acted to restore their honour, and who 'taught a lesson' to other young women and men about appropriate gender roles. This is consistent with Baker et al.'s (1999) theory that the concept of honour involves not just control over women and feelings of shame among men, but also a third dimension which is the community's role in responding to perceived violation of the honour code.

### *Romantic Relations (Real or Alleged) Before Marriage*

Here again, perpetrators are male family members and thus known to the accused couple. However, in India—but not Pakistan—in almost 20 per cent of the cases,

mothers and some female relatives participated in the act of killing, including beating, stoning, strangling, setting the victim on fire, poisoning and asphyxiating.

In Pakistan, 15 of the 20 victims were fatally shot; some were severely beaten and disfigured before being shot, others were buried alive after being shot. In India, victims were killed in myriad ways including strangling, slitting throat, hanging, beheading, succumbing to axe, sickle and knife wounds, beating and three cases of poisoning.<sup>13</sup>

In India, our data shows that male honour killings were especially violent and had an element of revenge and performance to them. In addition to this, honour killings in India that were motivated by a woman's intention to marry a lower-caste man or an unapproved couple trying to escape fuelled spectacular, drawn out torture followed by death. For example, a mob of 200 people, including several relatives of the girl in this case, stoned a young couple to death in Uttar Pradesh.<sup>14</sup> In New Delhi, a couple was tortured all night, electrocuted and burnt, before having their throats slit. In another case from Bihar, a 15-year-old boy had written a love letter to a girl of a lower caste. As punishment, the male relatives of the girl kidnapped him, forced him to parade naked on the streets with his head shaved, beat him and then threw him under a train.<sup>15</sup> As with honour killings justified by unsanctioned marriage, tacit community support enabled these killings as well.

### *Challenging Modernity as a Motivation for Honour Killings*<sup>16</sup>

Only one of the cases in our study from India concerns an honour killing arising out of a woman's attempts to be 'modern', but there are more than 20 such cases out of the 110 we found for Pakistan (Figure 2). Some of the behaviours that we have coded as 'challenging modernity' involved using cell phones, being filmed on videos dancing, singing, clapping or being out in public spaces and being employed in certain professions. Jirgas tended to take positions and condemn the girl or woman to an honour killing in many of these cases. All those killed were women, some as young as 11 years old. The accused were typically killed by the Jirga or a group of community men, and were either shot, strangled (accompanied by beating, physical abuse, drugging, burning and drowning) or beaten and set on fire.

One particular case gained national notoriety. In a village in Kohistan, two men were filmed dancing in the same room as five young girls. The girls were killed but the men managed to escape. However, three of the men's older brothers have been killed by the girls' families as 'revenge' for tarnishing the girls' honour. As the case reached the Supreme Court, the entire village rallied around the perpetrators to present journalists and others with 'fake girls' as proof that the girls had not been killed.<sup>17</sup>

Though these are small samples, they are likely indicative of things to come. As social media and cell phones continue to spread among the youth in both India and Pakistan, the guardians of patriarchy are likely to feel increasingly threatened by its equalizing force and may resort to honour killings as a way to justify tamping down on girls' ability to express themselves via these media.

## Discussion

Our media analysis suggests that two broad types of motivation underlie honour killings in India and Pakistan. The first overarching motivation that also finds mention in almost all the literature on honour killings is control over women's sexuality and reproduction. Lari (2011) notes that women in Pakistan are considered the property of men, rooted in an 'obsession with patrilineage' (p. 19), assets who bring reproductive capability to continue that lineage and availability to fulfil sexual desire. Marriage, then, is viewed as the socially legitimate means to harness these 'assets', through an 'alliance between two families and kin groups involving a series of material transactions, and counter transactions' (Chowdhry, 2010, p. 12). Marriage is also used for other social and economic ends. In both countries, marriage systems—whether endogamous or exogamous—have at their core, maintaining male control of property. In Pakistan, marriage can be a means to negotiate exchange of women to end a dispute between two families or clans. Within the Hindu caste system in India—with its limited space for upward mobility—marriage is a vehicle to thwart caste rigidity and move up in the caste hierarchy; thus, women's bodies are the vehicles for this mobility. Consequently, hypergamy is always encouraged for women, (Chowdhry, 2010) and marriage to a lower caste violently discouraged.

Reproduction and sexual relations (both approved within marriage only) are thus a social rather than an individual act. Consequently, any attempts to reproduce or express sexual desire outside of marriage—or in ways that are perceived to undermine the social institution of marriage—threaten the patriarchal order and its ownership rights to a woman's body. Lari (2011) and Chowdhry (2010) note that the benefits of this commodification of women continue throughout married life, providing yet more incentives to control how, whom and when a woman marries.

Women themselves may participate in efforts to control female sexuality and reproduction. The few examples in the reviewed media reports suggest that women internalize patriarchal understandings of family honour, and that older women specifically see themselves as powerful enough to restore the honour of the men in their spousal family. This display of agency and power (through killing their own daughters) might gain for women a higher unassailable credibility of honour among their spousal family and community. It might also be possible that these women see their daughters' honour as a direct reflection of their own honour. In this case, killing their daughters is an act of social and physical preservation for their own bodies. Women in a village also tend to monitor other women's behaviour and make the culturally defined version of 'shame' public, as Glazer and Abu Ras (1994) found in their ethnographic study of an honour killing of an Arab Israeli woman in Israel. Finally, as Das Gupta (1996) and others have noted, older women find 'status' in controlling younger women in a system where little else gives them power.

The second motivation, which is closely intertwined with the control of women's sexuality, is anxiety over women's and girls' exposure to 'modernity'. In the rapidly developing societies of both India and Pakistan, digital technology

and communication have spread at an astonishing pace across urban and rural areas. As of 2006, India was one of the fastest growing cell phone markets in the world, with six million additional phone subscriptions per month (Rai, 2006). Mobile cellular subscription went from 29 per cent of the population in 2008 to 85.2 per cent 8 years later in 2016. In Pakistan, the pace has been somewhat slower but starting at a higher level, at 53.8 per cent in 2008 and 70.6 per cent by 2016.<sup>18</sup> The consequent opening wide of communication has contributed to shifting social norms, opportunity and attitudes among young women and men. In particular, when women's physical mobility is restricted and scrutinized, a cell phone allows women to have existential mobility, to express themselves, initiate and continue romantic relationships with men, and have agency in a digital space which is less controlled than their physical one.

Thus, it is no surprise that women's families and communities have attempted to crack down on access to digital freedom as it directly challenges patriarchal control over women's sexuality and reproduction by offering them ways to make their own choices; many examples abound. In 2016, a village panchayat in Gujarat in India introduced a fine for women talking on cell phones on the pretext that young women on cell phones can 'break families and ruin relationships'.<sup>19</sup> Similar bans have followed in Aligarh village in Agra and in Barmer in Rajasthan, both also in India. In 2013, a young mother in Dera Ghazi Khan in Pakistan was stoned to death on a panchayat's orders when she was found using a cell phone.

This growth of technology among young people has also been used against them in other ways. For instance, digital technologies provide families and communities new ways to infringe on women's and girls' privacy, whether by taking pictures or videos without consent or threatening them with broadcasting via this medium, actual or manufactured romantic relationships. Several gruesome honour killings are captured on cell phone video footage by neighbours and onlookers and then shared widely over the internet in Pakistan, in part to serve as a 'lesson' to others, and to advertise the restoration of honour. For instance, a man in rural Pakistan forced his two wives to make a cell phone video stating that they had committed adultery shortly before he killed them. This was a way to inoculate and raise him in the eyes of the community.

## Conclusion

We have used a modest data set gleaned from intensive perusal of media reports to tease out some detail on the dynamics of honour killings. Our analysis supports the limited literature on this subject by highlighting the patriarchal motivations for honour killings and sheds light on some inner workings, including motivations and the use of public performance.

Clearly, more systematically collected data is essential to better understand which characteristics and actions put women at risk of an honour killing so that efforts can focus on prevention. There are, indeed, several notable efforts to create databases on honour killings. The Aurat Foundation in Pakistan conducts a regular in-depth study of the prevalence of honour killings per district. Amnesty

International and Oxfam International conduct similar data-collecting activities. While these are excellent databases, they often do not provide demographic details, or adequate detail on motivation and perpetrators. This makes it difficult to assess at-risk populations or understand more deeply the tipping points that lead to honour killings. As urbanization continues in these countries, future research could also examine its effect on notions of honour, like whether honour killing is a reinforcement of village ties in a complex and often confusing urban context.

Finally, we know almost nothing about what efforts might work in preventing honour killings. It might be instructive here to examine interventions that have succeeded in addressing other types of gender-based violence. In particular, policymakers need to look to interventions that change men's attitudes and behaviour. Here, evaluated, successful interventions engaging men and boys against bullying, sexual harassment and intimate partner violence, and pushing them towards a more positive masculinity (Solotaroff & Pande, 2014) are worth investigating as models to change the notion of 'honour' among men. Given the central role of the community and the role of violence as social performance, successful behaviour change interventions to prevent female genital mutilation may also provide helpful insight for future interventions (McChesney, 2015).

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### **Notes**

1. Amnesty International Fact Sheet 2012; UN 2012; <http://hbv-awareness.com/>
2. See, Kiener (2011) and Basu (2013).
3. Agency is the ability to make decisions about one's own life and act on them to achieve a desired outcome, free of violence, retribution or fear. The ability to make those choices is often called empowerment (World Bank, 2014).
4. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/12/india-sees-huge-spike-honour-killings-161207153333597.html>
5. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1144917/man-killed-honour-affair-dera-ghazi-khan/>
6. <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/Parents-get-life-term-for-daughters-murder/articleshow/3222696.cms>
7. <http://www.dawn.com/news/1308798>; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/29/pakistan-police-seek-samia-shahid-mother-and-sister-over-her-death>; <http://www.cnn.com/2014/06/28/world/asia/pakistan-honor-murders/>
8. Names have been changed to protect privacy of the case.
9. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/pakistan/10933481/Children-forced-to-watch-as-Pakistani-couple-who-married-for-love-were-murdered-as-an-example.html>

10. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/31/opinion/sunday/her-father-shot-her-in-the-head-as-an-honor-killing.html> <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/feb/14/sharmeen-obaid-chinoy-interview-saba-qaiser-honour-killing-documentary-girl-river-oscar-nomination>
11. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/pakistan-honor-killing-explained-interview-man-kills-sister/>
12. <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/3IbsGCZX9YfwKnn5Jh7CUN/Why-the-honour-killing-Bill-won8217t-work.html>
13. We found poisoning as a method of killing to be unique to India. Death by poisoning often helped families pass off a murder as an attempted suicide.
14. BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) News India. (2013). *India honour killings: Paying the price for falling in love*. BBC. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-24170866>.
15. <https://www.dawn.com/news/429509/boy-thrown-under-train-for-writing-love-letter>
16. Reported crimes in our sample from India are not directly motivated by these actions. Several news articles do nonetheless theorize that in the face of modernity, shifting aspirations of youth, and large scale rural–urban migrations, honour killings are employed as a strategy to preserve an older way of life where young people were dependent on the ancestral village for a sense of community, livelihood and a future (Chowdhry, 2010). Still, as our data are mostly from Pakistan, we focus only on Pakistan in this section.
17. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/in-pakistan-five-girls-were-killed-for-having-fun-then-the-story-took-an-even-darker-twist/2016/12/16/f2adb5e-c13a-11e6-92e8-c07f4f671da4\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/in-pakistan-five-girls-were-killed-for-having-fun-then-the-story-took-an-even-darker-twist/2016/12/16/f2adb5e-c13a-11e6-92e8-c07f4f671da4_story.html)
18. World Development Indicators, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.CEL.SETS.P2>
19. <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-this-village-in-gujarat-bans-single-women-from-owning-mobile-phones-2181256>

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## Authors’ Bio-sketch

**Tanya D’Lima** is a Social Development Analyst in the World Bank Group’s Social Urban, Urban, Rural and Resilience Global Practice. She assists research initiatives and projects related to youth inclusion, gender-based violence and women’s economic empowerment. Tanya has also consulted with UN Women on the promotion of gender inclusive cities. Prior to this, she worked for the Asia division of Search For Common Ground—an international conflict resolution organization based in Washington DC. She holds an MA degree in International Development and Social Change from Clark University, Massachusetts.

**Jennifer L. Solotaroff** is a Senior Social Development Specialist with the World Bank’s Gender Group and previously with its South Asia Region Social Development unit. She has led the South Asia Gender Innovation Lab and the South Asia Regional Gender Action Plan 2016–2021, and is the lead author of the book, *Violence against Women and Girls: Lessons from South Asia* (2014). Her research interests include gender and labor markets, gender-based violence,

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and social stratification in South Asia and East Asia. Solotaroff has a doctorate in sociology and masters' degrees in economics and East Asian studies from Stanford University.

**Rohini Prabha Pande** is a gender consultant at the World Bank with more than 20 years of research and program experience in gender and development. She currently works on gender issues in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nigeria. Dr. Pande has previously worked at the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, Care International and other NGOs in South Asia and West Africa on a range of gender issues. She has a Sc.D. from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and an MPA from Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs.