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Inside Iran's Epidemic Of 'Honor' Killings: One Woman Killed Every Two Days



According to an analysis by RFE/RL's Radio Farda, at least 133 women and girls were killed in the last year by their husbands or male relatives.

Iran was still reeling from news in late January that a 17-year-old girl was fatally stabbed by her father in the country's northwest when news broke that another 17-year-old was shot by her father and brother while holding her infant in her arms.

The two women, Kani Abdollahi and Atefeh Zaghobi, are the latest victims in a year that has seen rising violence against women committed by their own family members across Iran.

According to [an analysis by RFE/RL's Radio Farda](#), at least 133 women and girls were killed in the last year for "honor" or other reasons by their husbands, fathers, and brothers – meaning that every two days one female becomes a victim of femicide in the country.

The review of reported cases in Iran within the last year of the Iranian calendar, which consists of 318 days, shows that only three murders of women were committed by individuals outside the victim's family, with motives such as theft or sexual assault for those cases. Only one case involved a foreign national.

Femicide is described by rights advocates as killing with a gender-related motive and typically corresponds with preventing or punishing girls and women for acts deemed socially unacceptable for their gender in more conservative societies.

Stop Femicide Iran, an NGO based in New York, says that a majority of femicide cases in Iran are excused as "honor" killings or family disputes where a female member is targeted for acts that allegedly go against societal traditions, religious demands, or the family's reputation.

In the case of Abdollahi, she was reportedly killed on January 25 due to her friendship with a young man. Iranian media reported that Zaghobi's January 29 death at the hands of her father and brother came after she had eloped two years ago.

Femicide By The Numbers

There are no official statistics on domestic murders in Iran, and according to the NGO Iran Human Rights, murders of women are often not reported or are falsely reported as suicides or accidents.

The Iranian newspaper Shargh reported that at least 165 women between 2021 and 2023 were killed by male family members. The one year total of 133 for 2024 found by RFE/RL indicates an increase in cases.

Apart from the issue of family murders, a review by RFE/RL of official Iranian government statistics also shows that more than 74,000 women visited forensic centers for physical examinations due to spousal abuse. Estimates by researchers and rights activists also put the actual number of domestic violence cases in the country far higher, with some estimates saying it could be up to 100 times larger than the official number of reported instances.

A breakdown of the 133 family murder cases in 2024 also shows that 51 of them were categorized as "family disputes," something that rights groups say fits a broader trend in Iran of authorities looking to hide honor killings from official statistics by misreporting them. A similar trend occurs with rapes, which are often categorized as "harassment" in state-run media and police reports.

Iranian law is based on Islamic Shari'a rules and practices. Those rules often give fathers and husbands the power to decide if and how people who kill women in their family should pay for the crime, allowing for lenient sentences if those deciding on the punishment have been involved in or condone the killing.

Article 630 of Iran's Penal Code also states that "whenever a man sees his wife committing adultery with a man and knows that the wife has consented to it, he can kill both of them at the same time, and if the woman is innocent, he can only kill the man."

Honor Killings On The Rise?

Lawyer and human rights expert Saeed Dehghan told RFE/RL that this article often leads to judges handing down lenient sentences in honor-killing cases, often choosing not to impose the maximum 10 years.

Added to this, he says, is a lack of legal protections for women in the country. A bill looking to provide safeguards for women has sat on the shelves of Iran's parliament since it was introduced in 2013, and it has not moved forward despite the growing number of cases of violence against women.

In recent years, several recent murders of women claimed as honor killings have galvanized the Iranian public.

One was 14-year-old Romina Ashrafi, who was killed by her father in 2020 after she eloped with a 28-year-old man. Her family opposed the union and Ashrafi's father arranged for the couple's arrest. Despite expressing fears for her safety, she was returned to her family and was killed while she slept by her father using a sickle.

Another prominent recent case was 17-year-old Mona Heydari, who was beheaded by her husband after she had fled the abusive relationship to Turkey and then returned. Footage of the husband parading her head around their city circulated online and was published by some media.

Ashrafi's father and Heydari's husband were arrested and tried, but both men were handed sentences of less than 10 years for the murders.