

Does Killing Restore Honor? Perspectives of Male University Students of Punjab

Abstract

This study focuses on the perceptions of male university students in Punjab, Pakistan towards honor killing and explores the possibility of using social media to resolve the centuries old practice. Both qualitative and quantitative research techniques were adopted. Online questionnaires were distributed through snowball sampling and 68 university students out of 125 filled these questionnaires with 16 students agreeing to interviews. Data obtained from questionnaires and statistically analyzed through content analysis showed that the educated males of Punjab considered Honor killing unlawful and shameful since it aggravates shame instead of mitigating it. They believed that educating the next generation can help eradicate honor killing by portraying Honor killing as taboo rather than the act of 'restoring Honor.' Social media is ubiquitous and can reach the rural population of Pakistan, therefore this tool should be employed to teach the next generation that there is no Honor in Honor killing.

Keywords: Honor killing, gender-based violence, social media, educated males

INTRODUCTION

Honor killings have long prevailed in the Indian sub-continent and continue to do so in the modern-day countries of India and Pakistan. According to Malik (2014), Honor killing can be defined as 'the murder of a family member or a relative in a tribe/clan for the sake of maintaining and protecting the Honor of one's own family'. It usually occurs within the immediate household, with female relatives such as daughters, wives or sisters being predominant victims of these violent actions. According to a report by the United Nations Population Fund Program (UNFPA, 2000), around 5000 Honor killings take place every year worldwide. Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in the form of Honor killings is acknowledged as a violation of human rights, including the right to liberty, the right to equal protection under the law, the right to life, the right to equality, the right to just and favorable conditions, the right not to be subjected to torture, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment, the right to security, the right to the highest achievable level of physical and mental health, and the right to be free from all forms of discrimination.

Honor plays an essential role in the lives of Pakistanis, and often causes people to go to great lengths to preserve it. With regards to its predominance in the Muslim-majority Pakistani society, it finds its justification in the misinterpretation of Islamic beliefs, which asserts men's superiority over women. Honor killings have left a cultural imprint upon the minds of Pakistanis; the phenomenon has become deeply integrated to the extent that oftentimes the act is praised by the society to defend one's honor and the issue goes unaddressed.

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Traditions are an integral part of one's culture and renders the service of a regulator of values of the respective society. Any act performed in contradiction to these unsaid laws is considered a breach, an anomaly and taboo for which the punishment can be extremely severe, leading even to death (Hussain, 2006).

Bhanbhro et al. (2013) state that Honor killing related incidents are observed to show an increasing trend in upper Sindh, making up for around a quarter of the total documented cases of Honor killings in Pakistan while also exclusively highlighting the fact that most incidents are made to be covered by the perpetrators in order to resolve their dissensions with opposing tribes, whose objectives were observed to be markedly different from solely restoring family Honor. The statistical data for Honor killings is an arduous task with the risks of inaccuracy owing to under-reporting; the reasons include unwillingness of victims' kin to address the issue; and the social and cultural disregard for the nature of the crime owing to a considerable degree of support in Pakistani society in general and rural society in particular. Honor killings are further camouflaged as suicides and accidents with the government showing negligible concern to document such cases.

Pakistan as a third world country has undergone considerable modernization that is prominent in the urban areas. In the age of modernity, society is evolving rapidly as a result of technological innovations, such as the introduction of the Internet and social media. Information technology has led to an explosion of information paving the way for cross-cultural influences.

Purpose of the Study

The current research aims to explore the perspective of male university students regarding Honor killings while focusing on the influence of social media on the perspectives of these students. This research will help in creating awareness among people about the atrocities being committed in the name of Honor within Pakistan whilst motivating the readers to further increase their understanding of the topic and find ways to eliminate it. Furthermore, the study will help to diagnose the factors that incite people to form their perspective of honor crimes. It is assumed that it will provide people with an additional reference with regards to the study of young male adults' perspectives on Honor crimes for future research. The following research objectives were taken into consideration for the current study:

1. Exploring possible reasons that contribute to the prevalence of Honor killings in Pakistan.
2. Investigating Pakistani male university students' opinions with respect to Honor killing.
3. Identifying a possible correlation between the use of social media by students and their perspectives on Honor crimes.

Research Questions

1. What reasons do the urban male university students of Punjab attribute to the prevalence of Honor killings in Pakistan?
2. What are the Pakistani male university students' opinions with respect to Honor killing?
3. What is the correlation between the use of social media by students and their perspectives on Honor crimes?

Significance of Research

Owing to the highly sensitive nature of the topic at hand, a considerable number of researchers deploy a risk-averse approach where they rely solely upon secondary resources while avoiding actual fieldwork in order to not risk tampering with the cultural norms and traditions being followed in these areas (Bhanbhro et al., 2013). The current study, albeit a small one, is unique because it gathers primary data through primary data collection methods: questionnaires and interviews. Although numerous research papers have been published about Honor killings in Pakistan, the perspectives of male students regarding Honor killings have not been explored before. In addition to this, a connection between Honor killing and social media has not been studied in previous research related to Honor killings in the Pakistani context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Jaraysah (2011) states, “A woman can be targeted by individuals within her family for a variety of reasons, including: refusing to enter into an arranged marriage, being the victim of a sexual assault, seeking a divorce or being disloyal.” The reasons behind killings range from women practicing their right to select a spouse, seeking a divorce, performing any type of behavior which contradicts established family and community norms especially regarding sexual conduct, alongside trivial matters such as not being present at home. In such cases, it is commonly alleged that the woman has engaged in sexual intercourse or similar acts while she was away from home. Subjection to sexual abuse, inclusive of rape, may be considered a justified rationale for the family to kill a woman.

Malik (2014) provides a basic interpretation of the various attitudes adopted by people leading to Honor killings. ‘Karo-Kari’ can literally be defined as ‘black male’ and ‘black female’, the connotation being the condemnation of two people of the opposite sex found engaging in promiscuous behavior which justifies their death at the expense of the disHonor brought about to their respective families, especially that of the woman involved. Nasir (2018) found that the killers considered themselves to be the victims who were compelled to act in the name of Honor by the person they murdered and they ‘rationalized their actions through their language and discourse.’

Patriarchy

Females are held responsible for sustaining the Honor of the family. The importance that is instilled in the different elements of sexual control, patriarchy, or property, that generally lead to “Honor crimes”, varies depending on the context in which the crimes occur. Women are also excessively commodified in the current Pakistani society, being allotted the status of an asset to be transferred from fathers to husbands in the best condition possible. As stated by Lari (2011) “A man will be considered respectable if he is able to control the sexual behavior of his wife, daughters, and sisters. This is only possible if he is able to control their movements, limit their mobility, and thereby reduce their interaction with strange men with whom they threaten to sully the family’s Honor.” Research shows that Honor killings are oftentimes committed by the men to achieve authority over women (Michaud, 1975).

Religious Misinterpretation

Goldstein (2002) states that Islamic law (*shariah*) requires that a wife must be subservient towards her husband, and failure to do so may be justified as a means for engaging in physical aggression, even to the extent of killing. A legal scholarly defense derived from this principle, which protects reputational interests and preserves family Honor, is currently available to husbands in twenty or more Middle Eastern countries.

Bhattacharya (2014) elaborates this claim's misinterpretation that there has been a failure to distinguish the Arab customary laws that seeped into the *Shariah* (Islamic law). Islamic law provides equal rights for men and women but owing to a lack of clarification on the issue, the majority of Muslims believe these culturally derived customs to be divinely ordained and obligatory upon them. The cultural norms in Pakistan do not allow women to practice their legal and religious rights protected by the law and provided by Islam. For example, the right to divorce is provided to a woman under the Islamic Shariah law but the Pakistani courts make the process of divorce difficult thereby discouraging women to seek divorce.

Traditions and Customs

According to Bangash's (2017) study on Honor killing in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan, inhabitants in tribal areas strictly observe their local traditions, laws, and practices regarding Honor killing, while placing immense emphasis on the chastity and virginity of their women. Conflicting behaviors observed in the face of these values would inevitably invoke negative social sanctions in the form of social exile or death.

Imtiaz et al (2019) found that "the violence embedded in our Punjabi society, predisposed by bigotry and bias, bestowed by historic traditions and feudalism gets reinforced through our socio-cultural institutions of lawmakers, for example, politicians who require women to be disciplined and controlled."

Impact of Social Media on Social Issues

There is no denying that 'the rapid proliferation of social media has greatly affected us and almost every aspect of human society' (Xe et al, 2020) and this is proven by the fact that 'a quarter of the world's citizens have a social media profile' (Acar, 2014). One-third of Pakistan's population is below the age of thirty and has access to social media such as Facebook, Instagram and other apps which can 'reframe our understanding and experience of heritage' (Giaccardi, 2012).

Xe et al (2020) suggested that, 'an in-depth analysis and visualization of the specific groups can promote social equity among different groups.' Social media, according to them, can create social awareness of the whereabouts of underrepresented societies and class groups that in turn can enable the government to tackle the issues of these groups.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample

The research population that was considered for the current study comprised urban male university students of Punjab, Pakistan. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 27

years. A sample of 68 respondents from five private universities in Punjab was selected through snowball sampling as part of the population. The survey questionnaire was distributed online to the university students but out of 125 students only 68 students responded to the questionnaires, with 16 students agreeing for an in-depth interview. The results were over-represented by the middle and upper middle class because students from private universities were selected for interviews and for filling the questionnaire.

Research Design

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were adopted for the research: close-ended online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The purpose of using close-ended questionnaires was to ensure collection of quantitative data from participants so that it could be measured and graphed. The questionnaire in the form of a Google Form was made available online as a cost-efficient, time-saving method of data collection. Ethical considerations were valued, and participants' consent was taken before sharing the questionnaire. The online questionnaire ensured the anonymity of respondents and was devoid of any experimenter effect, as the questionnaire was not filled out in the presence of the researcher. Hence, the data recorded is more reliable. A total of 28 questions were included in the questionnaire for which the link was provided through social media platforms and a total of 68 responses obtained. When the questionnaires were emailed, students were asked if they would also like to be interviewed. Only 16 students agreed for the interviews and these online interviews were mediated through instant messaging platforms. Interviewees' consent was obtained before starting the interview and they were assured that their identity would not be disclosed. The data retrieved and compiled was analyzed quantitatively as well as qualitatively and close-ended questionnaires were statistically analyzed by creating pie charts. Ordinal scales were provided in the questionnaire survey; the ordinal Likert scale had 5 degrees ranging from 1 i.e. 'Strongly Disagree', 2 is 'Disagree', 3 is 'Neutral' and 4 represents 'Agree' to 5 which is 'Strongly Agree'.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The online questionnaire survey consisted of 28 questions aimed at deriving information from the university male students in Punjab to formulate a generalized perception, regarding their understanding with relevance to their perspective on Honor killings. The following themes were derived from the data obtained from interviews and questionnaires.

Reasons for Honor Killings

The respondents believed patriarchy, religious misinterpretation, customs and traditions, lack of laws and their implementation are the major causes contributing to the prevalence of Honor killings in Pakistan.

Patriarchy

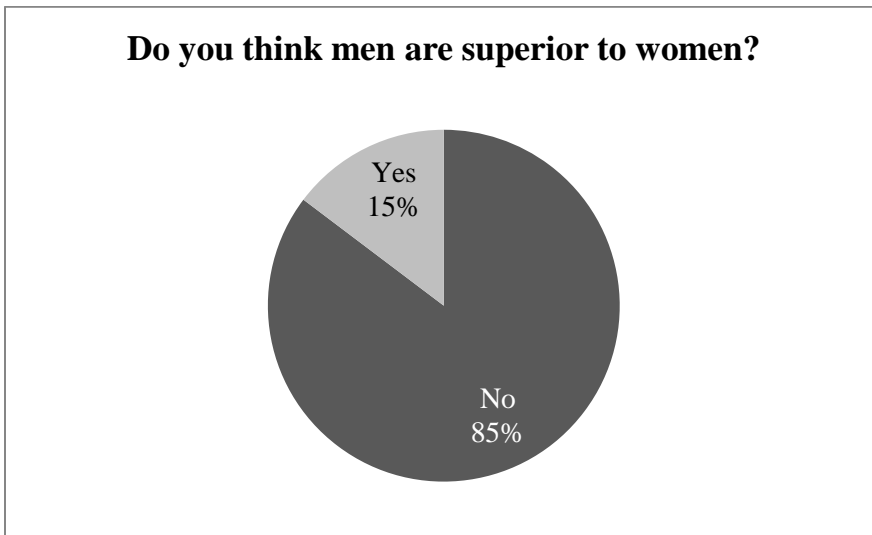
One of the interviewees believed that Honor is a cultural construct, and it takes different forms in different societies. According to this interviewee, Pakistani society has a myopic view as far as Honor is concerned. Some societies might emphasize Honor in terms of financial prosperity and material possessions, some might correlate Honor with age and

seniority, and yet others might correlate Honor with the extent to which their inhabitants observe traditional dogmas and practices.

Table 1: Reasons for Honor Killing

Reasons for Honor Killing	Percentage of Men who agreed
Patriarchy	43%
Religious Misinterpretation	64%

According to 43% of the respondents, patriarchy promotes Honor killings. This is supported by Lari's (2011) statement that men are only considered respectable in societies that idolize Honor on the condition that they can restrict and coerce the sexual behaviors of their female relatives. This is considered possible if they can manipulate their movements, mobility and reduce exposure to unrelated men. During the interview a student stated that often Honor killings are not about Honor itself, but about controlling women; men murder women to 'quench their anger' or to 'take revenge' for disobedience. Jaraysah's (2011) study states that the notion of loss of control of the woman's sexuality brings about disHonor to the family and further justifies Honor killings.

Figure 1: Prevalence of Patriarchy

Although a huge majority of men did not believe that men are superior, 15% of the university students believed that men are superior to women. Patriarchy is pervasive even among the more progressive young men in university settings. According to an interviewee, 'The perpetuation of extreme forms of patriarchy generations after generations have incessantly fed men's chauvinistic instincts and reduced the position of women to a mere object.' In the patriarchal Pakistani society, men believe women are their property and must follow their orders. Male students also admitted that in Pakistani society women are considered to have no aspirations, or desires and that their will must remain subjected to the will of a certain man - father, brother, husband, or even some distant male relative in certain cases.

Religious misinterpretation

Students also associated Honor killings in Pakistan with misinterpretation of Islamic teachings. Sixty-four percent of respondents believed that religious misinterpretation, among other factors, leads to Honor killings. Bhattacharya (2014) states that the Islamization of certain cultural elements from the Arab lands renders a role that is not to be ignored. People are misguided and the lines between culture and religion are blurred. They believe that killing the people involved in adultery is the only way of restoring Honor. One interviewee explained:

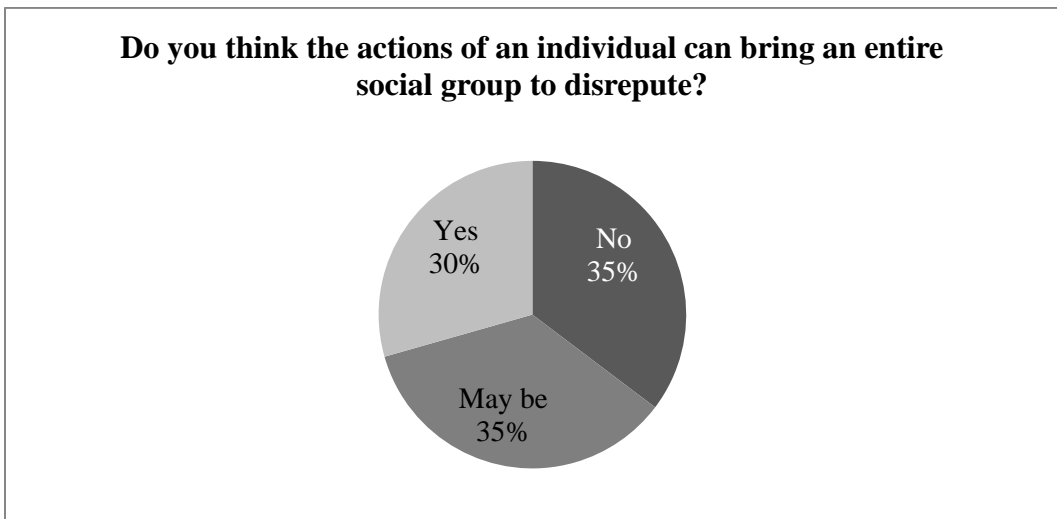
In societies like ours where religious orthodoxy is the very essence of social fabric, the (mis)interpretation and dissemination of Islamic religious text by self-declared clerics and evangelizers have portrayed women as property of men - much similar to a man's pets, cars, and the like.

According to some students, religious scholars should play a role to remove ambiguity about Honor killing and draw a line between the cultural practices and religious practices to get rid of the misconception that perpetuate Honor killing.

Justification for Honor Killings

The following three questions were derived from Jaraysah's (2011) research study which put forth some defined variables responsible for provoking Honor killing. A huge majority of urban male respondents (90.6%) believed that flirtatious and sexual behavior does not justify Honor killings. A majority (96%) of the respondents stated that past sexual abuse is not a rational justification for Honor killing and 94% of respondents strongly believed that women's refusal to marry according to their parents' wishes (arranged marriages), does not merit Honor killing. In the last case the remaining 6%, who were unsure, should not be ignored since some of them felt that a woman's refusal to marry according to parents' choice does validate Honor killing.

Figure 2: Individual Action and Social Disrepute



In order to further elaborate the perspective regarding Honor killings, it was inquired whether an individual's actions could bring about a bad reputation to their respective social group. As seen in Figure 2, the results were split almost equally in three parts; 38% believed one individual cannot bring bad reputation, followed by the second largest proportion of respondents who chose to remain neutral and comprised 35.8% of the entire responses. The last group comprised those who believed that Honor is at risk because of one person's deeds; this group made up 26.4% of the sample respondents. Although many respondents (26.4%) believed that one person can bring disHonor to the entire family, 88.7% people responded that restoration of Honor and removal of shame to the family is not possible after killing an individual. An interviewee stated that it was 'absurd' to consider the proposition as logical while adding, 'the murder of a single human is equivalent to the murder of the whole of humanity', referring to a *Hadith*. On the contrary, he added, murdering would only add to the shame compounded with feelings of guilt.

Students believed that society had a role to play in encouraging Honor killing. Support from society makes it easier for men to commit this act. A student said, "Eventually it depends on

how the family feels after killing the woman and how society reacts toward that particular action. Normally killing a woman who does something that is considered to be vulgar or licentious seems to be appreciated, consciously or subconsciously.’

Glorification of Honor: Then and Now

Approximately half of the respondents strongly agreed that Pakistanis place great emphasis on Honor. Student A stated that notions and traditions are transferred from the older generation to the younger one with the younger generation acquiring the traditions without resistance. He stated:

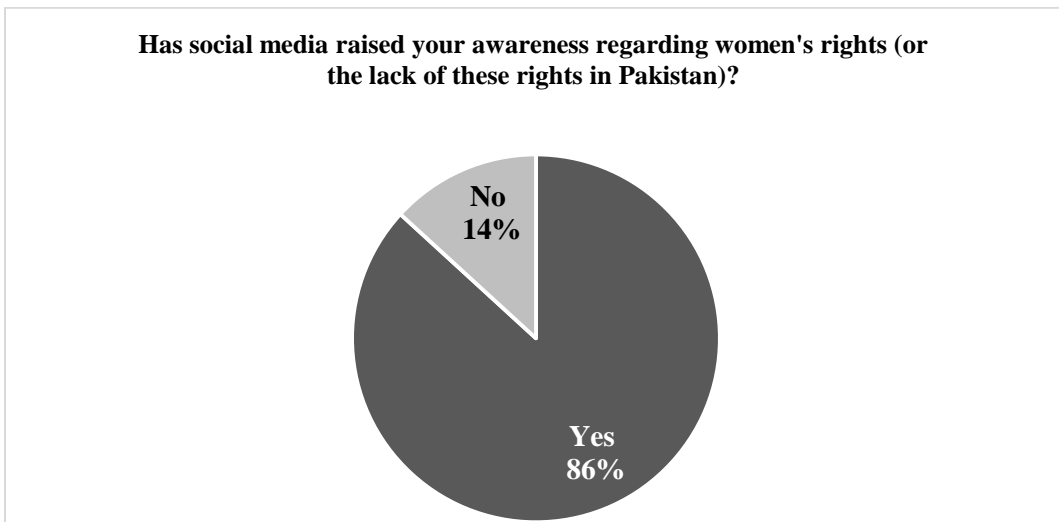
Essentially, the inability to question transferred 'wisdom' stems from lack of education and intellectual development. It is hard to believe that a person possessing modern education would be comfortable with the idea of smothering the potentialities of women related to him, let alone kill them for their actions.

The interviewees from various universities added that Pakistani society is making a slow transition to individualism and that the concept of Honor should not be idolized to the extent that it currently enjoys. The younger generation believes that glorification of Honor should ideally be done in a more constructive way and that women should be given their deserved right to get education, to get jobs and to let them have control over their own lives.

Role of Social Media and Honor Killing Awareness

According to the quantitative results, 96% of the respondents use social media and 85% believe it led to an increase in their awareness regarding the lack of women’s rights in Pakistan:

Figure 3: Social Media and Women’s Rights



Student B stated that social media is a trendsetter. He added:

Whenever issues, such as Honor killing, take place, social media is often exhausted with condemnation of the act (although it depends on the dominant strata of society you have in your friends' list/followers). At the very least, there is debate. This dialectical process is fundamental to the evolution of society - and being one member of it, social media has indeed contributed to my understanding of the issue.

According to Student C, social media has highlighted this issue to a considerable degree. Previously, Honor killings were committed but people, specifically in the remote areas of Pakistan, would lack awareness. Social media raises awareness regarding Honor killings taking place and the reason for why they occur allows people to collectively understand what it would take to resolve this issue.

Student D claimed that social media allowed for greater exposure to related incidents in Pakistan regarding Honor killings while following celebrities such as Jibran Nasir and Hamza Ali Abbasi on social media, hence shaping their views.

Student D believed that if a nationwide campaign is run via social media; includes enlightened religious leaders and is also backed by the state, it could go a long way in letting people understand that there is no Honor in taking anyone's life; that it is a social issue and would require a social change – and social changes are inherently long term. In other words, a continuous campaign in a vocabulary that our society understands can do well.

Whether social media can help reduce Honor killing is difficult to extrapolate. However, what social media has most certainly done is bring awareness to the masses and put pressure on authorities to take the most stern action against the perpetrators. Social media has proven to be an invaluable tool for registering people's mood and opinions as individuals as well as collectively. A student added that 'if authorities do actually take prompt and stern action against Honor killing then that might prove to be an extremely important deterrent for potential killers. Unfortunately, however, our law enforcement agencies or judiciary often let the perpetrators get away scot-free as the public's anger subsides.'

According to most of the interviewees, social media has the power to give voice to the voiceless. 'Without social media, the cases would be simply sidelined.' Social media is a great tool to shape the youth's mind and can be used to make Honor killing a taboo.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the research results recorded above, it can be concluded that the majority of male university going students of Punjab believed patriarchy, religious misinterpretation, lack of laws and their implementation are the major causes that contribute to the prevalence of Honor killings in Pakistan. Most students did not support the glorification of Honor the way it is observed in Pakistani society. Most students also condemned justification for Honor killings in varying situations and contexts. It can therefore be concluded that most university students

did not agree with the rationale for Honor killing such as rape, violation of norms concerning sexual conduct and refusal to enter arranged marriages. In fact, they expressed vehement disagreement with the idea and believed murdering the girl or boy for Honor was a shameful act that tarnished Honor rather than restoring it. Although, a third of respondents believed that a person's act could bring shame or disHonor to the family they believed that killing the person did not redeem Honor.

In conclusion, the majority of the university students made it clear that social media has played a huge role in raising awareness regarding both Honor killing as well as the violation of basic rights of women in Pakistan. Although, in many situations social media has made women, especially from the marginalized and stigmatized groups more vulnerable, if used properly it can play a significant role in creating awareness among the uneducated class of Pakistan. Social media helps to diffuse information on the Internet making it accessible to people and can, therefore, be used to achieve social equity in general and reduce Honor killings in specific.

Social media has been successful in raising awareness about social issues like mental health (Livingston et al, 2013) and the like. It can also be adopted for creating awareness about Honor killing and educating the youth about Honor killing. Students suggested that social media could be used to create a negative image of Honor killing and portray it as a taboo. Most interviewees believed social media could have an impact on people who think Honor killing is justified, consequently reducing Honor killing. Through social media, especially YouTube, organizations, institutions, and governments can portray Honor killing as a taboo so that the society does not accept it as a norm. However, the media should be sensitive towards the issue and the people involved in this act.

The data collected through interviews and questionnaires revealed that students are aware that people who commit the crime are misguided because they have incomplete information about Islam, and they misinterpret the teachings of the Quran. The perpetrators hide behind the veil of religion and exploit the ignorant. As stated by the students themselves, education can help eradicate the issue because people will be able to distinguish right from wrong. This research also provides strong support to the finding that educated male students find Honor killing to be a horrendous act and one that they can never support or consider justified. Primarily, it should be noted that there is a need to further increase awareness regarding Honor killings in Pakistan. This can be done through social media. The use of social media has already led to greater awareness of the issue, but there is a further need for the government to set forth initiatives to try documenting these cases to prevent under reporting. It is essential to encourage open-mindedness and critical thinking among the Pakistani people so that they can discern what is right and what is wrong. Findings of this research support the fact that education is the remedy to the nuisance of Honor killing that still has its roots in Pakistan society.

Limitation: This research was on a small scale; therefore, the results cannot be applied to the entire society. This research can, however, serve as a point of departure for future research carried out on a larger scale.

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