

Belief that honour killings are 'justified' still prevalent among Jordan's next generation, study shows

June 20 2013



Jordanian women in Amman. Credit: Craig Finlay

New research into attitudes of 15-year-olds in Middle Eastern nation shows that the practice of brutal vigilante justice, predominantly against young women, for perceived slights against family 'honour' still holds sway for significant proportions of the adolescent population.

A study into the attitude of teenagers in Jordan's capital city of Amman reveals that almost half of boys and one in five girls believe that killing a daughter, sister or wife who has 'dishonoured' or shamed the family is

justified. A third of all teenagers involved in the research advocated honour killing.

Importantly, the study found that these disturbing attitudes were not connected to [religious beliefs](#). The research is published in the journal *Aggressive Behavior*.

Researchers surveyed over 850 students, and found that attitudes in support of honour killing are far more likely in [adolescent boys](#) with low education backgrounds.

After analysing the data, researchers concluded that religion and intensity of religious belief were not associated with support for honour killing. Instead, the main factors include patriarchal and traditional worldviews, emphasis placed on female 'virtue', and a more general belief that violence against others is morally justified.

The researchers, from Cambridge University's Institute of Criminology, say the study is one of the first to attempt to gauge cultural attitudes to honour killings in the region. To assess these attitudes they developed the honour killing attitudes (HKA) scale - devised specifically for this study.

The study suggests a large proportion of teenagers in Jordan believe that killing a woman deemed to have 'dishonoured' her family is "morally right", and the findings reveal "risk factors" for attitudes in support of the vigilante murder of women as justifiable punishment in instances of perceived dishonour.

"While we found the main demographic in support of HKA to be boys in traditional families with low levels of education, we noted substantial minorities of girls, well-educated and even irreligious teenagers who consider honour killing morally right, suggesting a persisting society-wide support for the tradition," said Professor Manuel Eisner, who

conducted the study with his Cambridge graduate student Lana Ghuneim.

"Any meaningful attempt to reduce attitudes in support of such practices requires a broader societal commitment, including coherent messages against honour-related violence from political and religious elites, and decisive action by the criminal justice system."

The researchers sampled a total of 856 ninth graders - average age of 15 - from a range of secondary schools across Amman - including private and state, mixed-sex and single gender.

Participants completed a questionnaire based on researchers' newly-developed sliding scale of attitudes towards honour killing, asking teenagers to place themselves on the scale in relation to different situations where it may be justified to kill a person. The participants were not allowed to confer while they filled out the surveys.

In total, 33.4% of all respondents either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with situations depicting honour killings. Boys were more than twice as likely to support honour killings: 46.1% of boys and 22.1% of girls agreed with at least two honour killing situations in the questionnaire.

61% of teenagers from the lowest level of educational background showed supportive attitudes towards honour killing, as opposed to only 21.1% where at least one family member has a university degree.

41.5% of teenagers with a large number of siblings endorsed at least two honour-killing situations, while this was only the case for 26.7% of teens from smaller families.

Jordan, like some other countries in the Middle East and Asia, has an old tradition of honour killings and a poor record when it comes to

criminalising such violence against women. Right up until 2001, an article of the Jordanian Penal Code stated that a man who "catches his wife, or one of his female close relatives committing adultery with another, and he kills wounds or injures one or both of them, is exempt from any penalty."

The government of Jordan has increasingly criminalized honour killings, and in 2009 a special court for prosecuting honour crimes was established. Researchers were therefore able to examine the extent to which a change in attitudes could also be found amongst young people more generally.

While stricter legislation has been introduced - despite conservative fears - cultural support for violence against women who are seen as breaking norms has remained widespread - even as Jordan is considered by many to be "modern by Middle Eastern standards", say researchers.

The authors hope that their research will help governments to take firm action against [attitudes](#) that condone honour killing, and patriarchal violence against women more broadly.

Provided by University of Cambridge

Citation: Belief that honour killings are 'justified' still prevalent among Jordan's next generation, study shows (2013, June 20) retrieved 16 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-06-belief-honour-prevalent-jordan.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--