

Review of violence against women (domestic violence and honour crimes) in Iran in comparison with other countries

By: Iran-Other Countries Friendship Association Supreme Council Network

Summary

1. Violence against women is a very important issue and concern in the world, something that includes all cultural, social, economic, racial, and ethnic levels and classes. Terrible acts of violence are also observed in European countries where women are parliamentarians and even in North American countries that claim to democracy. In other words we have witnessed acts of violence that have resulted in the murder of wives and girlfriends by husbands and boyfriends, something that should be deliberated. In different countries that economically, socially and geographically are different from one another these types of murders which have close links to ethnic, traditional and official views towards their own women and girls. According to various surveys women are not immune against honour killings and domestic violence. Honour killings occur in south-eastern parts of Turkey, Iraq's Kurdish region, parts of Jordan and even in Iran's Kurdistan and Khuzistan provinces, Afghanistan and Pakistan. These killings occur in such ways that because of honour-phobias women are killed by brothers, fathers or husbands.

About Association

2. The Iran-Other Countries Friendship Associations Supreme Council was registered (No. 18347) in Tehran in 2005. The Network is non-profit and was established with the aim of establishing friendships between countries with attention to historical and cultural histories and the necessity for the establishment of compassion and cementing of relationships among nations, and establishment of proportionate communication among friendly nations and the continuation of lastingness and belief in dialogue among civilisations. With amicable and good relations between friendship associations and establishing links between them and by holding different cultural, scientific and technical conferences and seminars for the promotion and advancement in Iran and invitation of ambassadors of different countries, are all efforts that the Network has made towards the establishment of friendships. And in view of the Network's mission for the establishment of peace and friendship, in view of the social status of women and for the promotion of cultural, economic and social growth of Iran with other countries, we have prepared this report for the improvement of women's conditions.

Existing issue

3. There are various definitions for "spouse abuse" and violence. The Resolution on the Elimination of Violence Against Women adopted by UN General Assembly in 1993, the following definition is brought in article 1: "For the purposes of this Declaration, the term "violence against women" means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." Violence against women is a hidden matter, because most women in various societies refrain from revealing these acts due to reasons such as harsh punishments or lack of legal support and protection. Violence against women does not recognise boundaries, and is not restricted to underdeveloped societies. All over the world women are more or less subjected to

various forms of physical, sexual and verbal abuse. In patriarchal societies these abuses are seen as masculine nature and try to make women accept this. Violence against women is practically found in all social, economic, racial, age and geographic classes and distinctions, although this phenomenon may be more common among some groups than others. The main factor in violence against women can be found in a discrimination that prevents men and women from equality in all levels of life. Violence has both roots in discrimination and also escalates it.

4. What is violence in the family? When within the framework of a close relationship between two individuals, the behaviour of the man towards the woman is violent and domineering, the result will be domestic violence. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional or mental. Financial exploitation and restricting the individual is also included in the other categories of domestic violence. According to an Amnesty International report in the European women's 16 to 44 age groups domestic violence takes more lives than cancer or road traffic accidents, or maims each year. According to global figures, in the United States between 30 and 35 percent of women are subjected to physical abuse by their husbands and 15 to 25 percent of them are assaulted and battered during pregnancy. The medical treatment cost of these women is in excess of 12.6 billion dollars a year.

5. Sixty-three percent of women in Chile are subjected to physical abuse. Forty-one percent of women in India commit suicide because of physical abuse from their husbands. In Bangladesh over 50% of murders are committed by men. Referring to violence against women in traditional (orthodox) societies, Amnesty International recently said that in a country such as Afghanistan that has feudal traditional living is deeply rooted, women are looked at a property and the violation of their rights goes unpunished. Hundreds of women fall victims to domestic violence and honour violence each year in Pakistan. The traditional mentality in these countries has resulted in documented figures for domestic violence levels not to be available.

6. Unfortunately as for Iran no clear and accurate figures for domestic violence have not been published. Plenty of studies and researches have been conducted on the subject by experts in the field, the findings of which can be seen in different libraries (Interior Ministry and universities), which are rarely made available to the general public. According to the investigation of Dr. Ghazi Tabatabaee (the project implementer) of the National Project which was conducted by the Interior Ministry and the Presidency's Centre for Women and the Family Affairs, he broke down types of violence into 8 categories: 1 – Verbal abuse (insults, belittlement, curses), 2 – Mental, 3 – Physical (assault and battery, beating), 4 – Legal (includes non-payment of maintenance and housekeep), 5 – Sexual abuse, 6 – Economic (smashing things in the house, prevention from financial independence), 7 – Thought, and 8 – Educational and dangers. Throughout their lives women may experience four forms of violence and abuse: physical, mental, economic and sexual. The most common abuse in Iran is mental abuse which makes up 95% of domestic violence cases. This abuse includes bullying behaviour towards the woman to belittle her, threat to abuse and or killing her or members of her family, cursing, making fun of her, preventing her from meeting her friends, and imprisoning her in the house. This type of abuse results in the appearance of a hollow spirit and or self-destructiveness, avoiding social participation and stress. Physical abuse includes assault and battery, hair pulling, burning, shoving, and this type of abuse and violence can occur against all women regardless of education, race and family situation. Non-payment of maintenance, financial exploitation of women, and damaging and breaking her favourite items are all seen as economic abuse. In many countries the women's workforce is unpaid and

without an income, and this factor facilitates economic abuse against them to take place in such way that women do not even have a right to their own spending or ownership of their property. Forcing into unconventional marital relations, failure to use and or preventing the use of contraceptives, ignoring the sexual needs of the woman, are all examples of sexual abuse against women.

7. With a reference to sexual abuse cases in the work place in most countries are in high figures such as: Britain where seven out of ten women experience sexual abuse at work, according to studies conducted on 100 women in 28 provinces in 2001, the first year of marriage, financial difficulties periods, birth of children and the middle ages, are the most violent periods of the lives of women in Iran. Honour crimes are the main violations of the human rights of women and the most brutal form of domestic violence in the world. These types of murders are committed as a result of honour phobias that include the woman's father, brother, husband and or the relatives being suspicious. Honour crimes or killings are referred to acts of violence that lead to the murder of women by male members of their families. These women are punished because of bringing shame to the family's honour and dignity. This shame includes various instances in different cultures such as refusing to forced marriage with an individual that the father, brother or male members of the family have chosen for the woman; the victim is a rape victim; divorce even on justifiable grounds; affair with the opposite sex, etc. are all seen as cases of honour crimes which are deemed violence against women.

8. According to UNFPA statistics, approximately 5000 women fall victim to honour killings each year. Most of them live in West Asia, North Africa, and parts of South Asia. According to the report of the Women's Human Rights International Group, most of these murders are committed in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Bangladesh, Morocco, Syria, Turkey, Iran, Brazil, Iraq, and also in Sweden, Ecuador, Canada, Uganda, United States and Britain. Unfortunately there are no accurate figures for these types of murders, and only those that are discovered by the police are either investigated or mentioned.

9. In Iran these types of murders are committed mainly in the Kurdistan, West Azerbaijan (among the ethnic Kurd population), Sistan and Baluchistan, and Khuzistan provinces, which are all in particular geographic locations. In a sitting the director of Khuzistan Justice Department said that these types of murders are committed in the province in the most horrendous ways, and these types of murders in Khuzistan have roots and are institutionalised in the culture and customs of the people. He also said that until such time when some people think they can kill others and not be punished, not even judges can hand out the severest of sentences, because no one files a complaint.

10. In Tehran the half year figures for honour killings for 2008 was at 35%. In Pakistan in 1999, at least 1000 women were killed in honour killings. According to Russian government calculations it is likely that 14,000 women were killed in Russia in 1999 by their relatives. Despite being one of the most modern countries in the Middle East, in Lebanon on average one woman is killed every month by her relatives on the excuse of bringing shame to the family. This is while the aforementioned statistics and figures are only limited to cases that have gone to courts, and legal experts believe the real figures of honour crimes are much higher. Although it is hard to find accurate figures for honour killings that take place in Egypt each year, but according to a report based on a 1995 census in Egypt out of a total of 819 murders that had been committed, 52 of them were honour killings, and 79% of these murders

were solely based on suspicions only. 41% of the murderers were the victims husbands, 34% the fathers, 18% brothers, and 7% other relatives of the victims.

11. In South Africa the number of women that are killed by firearms at home is higher than those that are killed outside of the home and by strangers. Studies at Inono University show that there were 300 honour killings case files for a seven year period in Turkey. Most of these killings took place in the Kurd populated regions of the country. The study also showed that with increasing the punishment for honour crimes, most women were forced to commit suicide by their relatives. Most of the murderers are young men in the family who receive lighter sentences if caught. The researches of the Education and Counselling Centre of Diarbekr, which is one of the most impoverished provinces of Turkey showed that approximately 57% of women from the lesser developed south-eastern region of Turkey are subjected to violence and abuse in their families. These include domestic violence (severe assault and battery), and or honour killings, that even despite their reports and EU and UNICEF pressures, honour killings changed form and resulted in women and girls committing suicide under pressure of the men of the family. One of the problems is that the region borders Iraqi Kurdistan region, where these types of killings are customary to the regions in question.

12. In American and European countries most of the murders are committed by men who suspect their wives are having affairs, or want a divorce for various reasons. In most countries one in every few cases is legally documented, but the UN names Germany, Sweden, and Britain in Europe, and Canada and the United States in the American continent as the most vulnerable countries.

Methodology

13. The Association's research has been conducted through library, media and articles review studies.

Laws

14. Despite laws in Turkey giving equality between men and women, the society is still patriarchal. Article 340 of the Jordanian Criminal Code does not punish individuals who kill their female relatives in honour killings. Article 17 of the Egyptian Criminal Code, authorises the judge to give out minimum sentences for the murderer depending on his [the judge] interpretation of the crime.

Obstacles and weaknesses

15. Women who had been killed at the hands of their relatives, were subjected to rape or domestic violence, and men who committed these crimes often faced the justice system's soft approach; Iraq, Turkey and Jordan are such countries. One of the problems that exists in Iran is the lack of accurate information and having no access to this type of information on domestic violence and honour killings, because the women and girls who are the main victims of these abuses often because of fear of losing dignity and or lack of police support and sympathy, see these problems as private, and without trying to get help ultimately they are subjected to the severest of abuses (domestic violence and or murder), something that the society has to pay dearly for.

Improvements

16. Family therapy, setting up of safe houses, legal support and protection of women with regards to violence and abuse, participation in pre-marriage education classes, marriage counselling, increasing men and women's awareness through education

courses and emphasis on religious teachings have all been effective in prevention of violence against women in Iran over the last few decades. And with the non-stop efforts of the authorities and nongovernmental women and children support organizations, and the tireless efforts of the Presidency's Centre for Women and Family Affairs for the promotion and development of women and children and also the government giving importance to the family institution and legislation of laws for the improvement of women's conditions and even amending or adding clauses to laws, need due appreciation.

17. Following the strong protests of the people and women's associations, President Bashir Asad of Syria issued a decree that changed honour killing crimes punishment to a minimum of no less than 2 years prison sentence, due to a rise in the number of women being killed by their husbands. The new Syrian act states, "A man who kills his wife, sister, daughter or mother in the act of betrayal of unacceptable sexual relationship, and inadvertently kills one of them and or hurts one of them, can have his sentence reduced only after spending a minimum of 2 years in prison." But some countries with the help of International Human Rights Defending Organization have made new initiatives for the control of this process. For example recently the Spanish government adopted policies to combat domestic violence that was based on the collection of the views of women victims. More powers have been allocated in the new laws for the Spanish Police and Welfare Organization, so that men's violent and abusive behaviour is prevented before it gets to dangerous levels.

Concerns

18. Since many women and girls are not prepared to report domestic violence to the police or the justice department of some countries, and therefore make no complaints that see it as a private matter. Domestic violence statistics do not cast an accurate reflection of the realities. Women that are subjected to abuse by their husbands are five times more likely to suffer from mental disorders. Children that witness parents' violence against each other, learn to be just the same when they grow up, therefore violence is handed down through generations. This is called the violence cycle, which is formed through the learning process and can become more extensive in the future which causes numerous disorders and heavy costs.

Conclusion

19. With a renewed emphasis on the commitments of all governments towards the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms that include, the right to life, personal freedom and security, as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Convention on the Rights of the Child, also with attention to UN resolution 58/185 of 22 December 2003, and resolution 57/190 of 18 December 2002, considering the obligations of government to seriously pursue investigation and apprehension of those that commit crimes in the name of honour against women and girls, with the tireless efforts of women's NGOs, the UN and UNICEF the figures for these crimes have somewhat reduced. But the necessity to end honour killings and tragic domestic violence cases, it is necessary to legislate effective and coordinated laws that are in proportion to the religions and cultures of different of countries, and also measures to raise women and men's awareness and to empower them.

Recommendations to the government

The importance of the empowerment of women and their effective participation in the decision making processes as one of the main mechanisms for the prevention and elimination of honour crimes against women and girls can be the stimulus for the advancement of society's goals. To this aim by the establishment of an education centre and informing women of their main and lawful rights, and also the establishment of economic basis for job creation for women for their financial independence, are measures that can be taken towards their own maturity and society's.

Recommendations to the Human Rights Council

Measures such as projects that UN bodies and agencies such as UNFPA, UNICEF, and UNIFEM can have underway on honour crimes against women, and these bodies support and backing for women's NGOs for example to increase public awareness of these crimes, can be effective towards the eradication of these types of crimes from society.

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