

ANALYZING HONOR KILLINGS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND MIDDLE EASTERN DIASPORAS

by

Bella\_Nowroozi

Signature Work Product, in partial fulfillment of the Duke Kunshan University Undergraduate  
Degree Program

March 7, 2024

Signature Work Program

Duke Kunshan University

APPROVALS

---

Mentor: Rasoul, Namazi, Division of Social Sciences

---

Marcia B. France, Dean of Undergraduate Studies

## **ABSTRACT**

The experiences of women and children in the Middle East reflect a complex interconnection of sociocultural and gender dynamics. Patriarchal societies are globalized and exist to some extent in every country in the world, and of course, the Middle East is no exception to this. In the Middle East, persisting gender roles may cause males in the household to take on the role of establishing dominance in some extreme cases. Due to this power dynamic, social advancements have halted and moved backward in some Middle Eastern countries. To note an example, in few Middle Eastern cultural contexts, women are even viewed as less knowledgeable and valuable than their sons. The reality of the situation is that a great deal of women in the Middle East are confined to their homes, and this expectation is instilled in women and girls from a young age. This is a region where women have high college attendance rates in many countries (some even higher in some countries than men), have made significant advancements in technological advancements and startups, and have pushed for large-scale social change. To draw upon an example, in Iran women make up 60 percent of university graduates and higher education degree holders (Literacy in Iran – Women, and Girls Make up Two-Thirds of Illiterates 2021). Despite this, Iranian women (and other Middle Eastern women) are entirely exempt when it comes to decision-making, even for policies that directly impact their demographic. Not only that but there are many double standards to extreme levels of gender roles and expectations, and one such example is the role of relationships in the Middle East. In some Middle Eastern countries, it is permissible for men to have multiple wives and to take part in temporary marriages. Temporary marriage and polyamory are widely rejected by women in the Middle East because they feel that it allows their husbands to be unfaithful to them, but unfortunately many women do not have a

say in this matter. On the other end of the extreme, even just suspected adultery can cost a woman her life in the Middle East.

Honor killings are punishments brought upon individuals who violate social or religious norms in which an individual is killed by a family member or a member of their community to save face or erase the shame that that individual has brought to the community or family (Singh & Dailey, 2016). Because the act of honor killings is permissible in some understandings and interpretations of Sharia law, some predominantly Muslim countries, particularly in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia have allowed men and women to get away with the act of committing honor killings. This is increasingly becoming a problem because honor killings have manifested themselves as a form of domestic violence within these regions. The most common victims of honor killings are women who are killed by their male relatives or husbands. In modern times, honor killings are typically regarded as a way for male leaders in the household to establish their masculine dominance over the more vulnerable members of the family.

As part of an effort to make research findings more accessible to a larger audience, a podcast was created for this project titled “Honor Killings Podcast” It can be accessed via the following link for the website created for this project, or on Spotify.  
<https://honorkillingspodcast.com>

This podcast contains multiple episodes. It is structured by country, and has various multi-part series about the following countries and regions- Iran, Jordan, the West (and Middle Eastern Diasporas in the West). Each episode discusses cases, the specific laws in each country related to honor killings, and contains interviews from communities affected by honor killings. The total listen time is approximately three hours, and the podcast currently contains seven total episodes. The transcriptions for each episode are included in Part II of this project.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Firstly, I would like to thank Professor Rasoul Namazi who not only pushed me to my fullest potential during this process, but also took a personal interest and passion in the topic I have chosen. Special thanks to Keyanoush Namjoupanah for designing the website for the podcast for this project, Rana Hussein for her advocacy work related to honor killings in the Middle East and agreeing to an interview, Jasvinder Sangehera who runs a hotline in the UK for victims of honor killings and was in touch with me throughout this project, and Khadijeh Raki who was a friend of Gelareh Bagherzadeh and her family and discussed the Bagherzadeh case with me for my podcast. This project is dedicated to Romina Ashrafi, Gelareh Bagherzadeh, Coty Beavers, Noor Almaleki, Rona Amir Mohammad, Zainab Shafia, Sahar Shafia, Geeti Shafia, and all other victims of honor killings and honor-based abuse.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

ABSTRACT .....2

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....4

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....5

LIST OF TABLES.....6

INTRODUCTION.....7

*Part 1- UNCOVERING THE RISE OF HONOR KILLINGS IN THE MIDDLE EAST*

BACKGROUND INFORMATION.....10

THE ORIGIN OF HONOR KILLINGS.....12

ANALYZING DATA FROM COUNTRIES WITH THE HIGHEST RATE OF HONOR KILLINGS.....14

DOES PERPETUATING AN HONOR KILLING RESTORE HONOR WITHIN A FAMILY?.....18

PROPOSED SOLUTION.....20

*Part 2- PODCAST TRANSCRIPTIONS*

EPIISODE 1: WHAT IS AN HONOR KILLING.....22

EPIISODE 2: HONOR KILLINGS IN JORDAN.....26

EPIISODE 3: HONOR KILLINGS IN JORDAN PART 2.....35

EPIISODE 4: HONOR KILLINGS IN JORDAN PART 3.....46

EPIISODE 5: HONOR KILLINGS IN THE WEST AND THE SHAFIA KILLINGS IN CANADA.....52

EPIISODE 6: HONOR KILLINGS IN THE WEST (ALI IRSAN, NASIM IRSAN, NESREEN IRSAN, GELAREH BAGHERZADEH, COTY BEAVERS, AND NOOR ALMALEKI).....62

EPIISODE 7: HONOR KILLINGS IN IRAN.....72

## **LIST OF TABLES**

Figure 1 Explaining the Prevalence of Honor Killings

18

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout this project, I examined approximately 65 cases of honor killings to understand the nature of these crimes, what they have in common, and how I can publicize cases that have very little media attention or have been forgotten about. Most people do not know what honor killings are, and the purpose of this project is to raise awareness to this issue, evaluating the laws that allow for these killers to not face the necessary repercussions for their actions, and understanding the magnitude of these crimes. The primary methodology for this project is a comprehensive literature review, quantitative and qualitative newspaper analysis, qualitative documentary analysis, data analysis, and the conducting of two interviews which will be published on the website for this project, through which I produced a podcast.

Additionally, I have been in contact with human rights activist and author of the book *Murder in the Name of Honor*, Rana Husseini. Ms. Husseini has been awarded many high profile local and international awards including: a medal from Jordan's King Abdullah II in 2007, the Ida B. Wells award for Bravery in Journalism in 2003, the Human Rights Watch Award in 2000, Arab Woman of the Year in 2019, and many others. Thanks to Ms. Husseini's book, the National Jordanian Committee to Eliminate the So-called Crimes of Honor was established in 1998. This committee has advocated for stricter punishments for offenders and garnered thousands of signatures in support. Additionally, Ms. Husseini's influence led to the issuance of a fatwa (a ruling by a recognized religious authority on a point of Islamic law) in 2007 in Jordan, declaring honor killings as contrary to religious law. In response to her advocacy, the Jordanian government implemented significant legal and judicial reforms. Most notably, in 2017, amendments to the Penal Code were enacted, enhancing the rights of women and people with

disabilities (*Rana Hussein Website*, n.d.). Ms. Hussein has agreed to be interviewed for my podcast.

In 2022, a Netflix docuseries titled "I Am a Killer " aired an episode about Ali Irsan and Nasim Irsan. A Jordanian-American father and son who are incarcerated for committing an honor killing in Houston, Texas against an Iranian woman, Gelareh Bagherzadeh and an American man, Coty Beavers. Ali Irsan currently sits on death row, while Nasim Irsan faces a 40 year sentence. This was one of the most high profile cases in Houston history. Shortly following her death, a \$200,000 award was posted for information leading to Bagherzadeh's death. This is still the highest reward in Houston history. The magnitude of this crime was intense because originally, the theory surrounding Bagherzadeh's mysterious death was that she was murdered by the Iranian government due to her activism against the government, but it was later found to be an honor killing perpetuated by someone she hardly knew, her best friend's parent (Arnold & Nguyen, 2023). I had the opportunity to interview a family friend of Gelareh Bagherzadeh's to understand how her honor killing affected the Iranian diaspora in Houston. This family friend, Khadijeh Raki, claims that she visited Bagherzadeh's family home just a day after Gelareh's murder to pay her respects. She claimed to have known Gelareh Bagherzadeh personally, and attended multiple candlelight vigils and ceremonies for her after she had passed. Raki is still in contact with Bagherzadeh's family to this day. This interview is available on my website. Lastly, I reached out to Karma Nirvana, a UK-based specialist charity founded by Dr Jasvinder Sanghera after she escaped a forced marriage at 15 and lost her sister to suicide by immolation as a result of honor-based abuse. Sanghera's organization helped lobby to end forced marriage in the UK. Her organization also rehomes victims of honor abuse through a helpline. She was also



featured on NBC's 48 hour mystery episode about Noor Almaleki (a victim of honor killings) which is where I first learned about her organization (*Karma Nirvana*, 2024).

To note a prominent example highlighted as part of my research, each year, hundreds of women in Iran are killed by their male relatives for "bringing shame onto their families" even though the concept of bringing shame based on societal norms is subjective by nature. Due to the discrepancies in the law and the brutality of the crimes, these women are being subjected to murder at the hands of their governments, family members, and community members. Currently in Iran, there are protests surrounding women's rights due to the harsh practices the government has historically imposed against women. Honor killings have recently been at the forefront of these protests in the past decade due to the government's lack of action against those who are carrying out honor killings. The Islamic Republic of Iran has allowed men to get away with the act of honor killings. This proves that the laws surrounding honor killings are utilized as a power mechanism for men to control the actions of women, but for themselves to not be held accountable in the same ways.

I want to further explore this topic because I believe that the women of Iran and other women around the world who are subjected to such a brutal and unjust fate deserve their struggles to be made aware of. Honor killings are used as a tool by men to control women to become subservient and into submission to them. Through my research, my goal is to shed light on an issue that has extremely low media coverage and global recognition. The goal is to convey the historical context of honor killings, how widespread honor killings are within this region of the world, what exactly is leading to honor killings, whether or not they are increasing in recent times, the brutality of the killings themselves, in which country honor killings are most prevalent in, and what actions can be taken to help women who are victims of honor killings. I would also

like to discuss what global organizations have previously done to help in contrast to the preventative steps they can take in the future.

The primary goal of this project is to raise awareness of the issue of honor killings amongst the general public and to capture the main reason why they are still occurring in the Middle East. The other goal is to prove the urgency and prevalence of the number of honor killings, the countries most affected, and what this means for both women and men in those affected regions. Additionally, I would like to explore how the outside world can best be able to help those who are subjected to such brutal fates. Domestic violence itself is an incredibly difficult topic to tackle, and it takes a great deal of internal support to assist those who are victims of domestic violence and abuse. Supporting women during times of domestic violence is incredibly challenging because speaking out against it can put them in imminent danger. Figuring out which systems can help women, men, children, etc who are victims of honor killings will be of the utmost importance to this project.

I will refer to the Middle East with the consideration of Pakistan as part of the Middle East. Pakistan has conferred on the board of the Middle East Council for the United Nations thus far, and many scholars loosely consider it as part of the Middle East (“Middle East | United Nations Security Council,” n.d.).

Part One : Uncovering the Rise of Honor Killings in the Middle East

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Honor killings are typically staged by male family members, and result in the murder of female family members at the hands of male family members. This is because a woman’s

chastity and purity are perceived to be the responsibility of the household at large. In the case of honor killings, the victims are seen as having brought shame to the family's name and the household. The woman's actions are watched over by both her family and her husband's family. It is important to note that there are several examples of instances in which women have been subjected to honor killings. These include losing their virginity before getting married, unfaithfulness to their husbands, and if they become victims of rape or sexual assault. Other examples can include leaving a marriage, a domestic violence situation, or refusing to enter an arranged marriage. There have been several cases in which women have become subjected to honor killings over mere suspicions of immoral behavior that could lead to the family name becoming tarnished. Usually, these acts are carried out by other men in the household including the woman's husband, brother, father, son, or other relative. There are even instances in which women in the household take part in defending or perpetrating honor killings too (Mains 2009). The fact that in some cases, women are partaking in killing their daughters shows that the issue of honor killings is deeply rooted in internalized misogyny. Women killing their daughters just comes to show that there is some cultural value instilled in the general population of these countries that causes this issue to happen. It is also important to note and further emphasize that according to the excerpt from the Encyclopedia of Gender and Society, there have been cases of women succumbing to honor killings as a result of suspected dishonorable behavior. Women are not the only victims of honor killings. In many countries, children have been murdered for their ideologies. It is also important to note that honor killings do not just occur in Middle Eastern countries, and occur in significant numbers in the Western world as well. The UN estimates 5000 women are being killed each year in the name of 'honor' and this number includes data historically from the US as well (Amnesty International 2012). Contrary to preconceived notions,

these killings occur in Western, democratic, and secular states. This phenomenon is also not particular to any religion. Honor killings have also occurred among other non-Muslim religious groups throughout the world. “Honor killings have been documented in Bangladesh, Brazil, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan, Sweden, Turkey, Uganda, the UK, and others (Meetoo and Mirza 2007). While more than 100 women are killed by their partners in England and Wales every year, the Metropolitan Police estimates that in 2003 there were approximately 12 honor killings across Sikh, Muslim, and Christian communities ”(Meetoo and Mirza 2007).

Lastly, it is important to understand that each country in the Middle East has different laws in place related to honor killings. Some countries in the Middle East have criminalized honor killings, while others do not harshly punish perpetrators of honor killings. For example, Jordan, arguably a relatively progressive country in the Middle East in comparison to others, has criminalized the act of honor killings. Despite this, they still occur within the country, and the country did not outlaw honor killings until the 2010s. Iran, a country that has an extensive track record of human rights violations, very loosely punishes perpetrators of honor killings. Although this phenomenon occurs almost only in rural parts of Iran and has been protested by the general population, lawmakers in Iran need to harshly condemn the act of honor killings to save every potential victim. But based on the example that Jordan has set, simply outlawing the act of honor killings will not stop them from occurring. Society at large needs to stop normalizing this act to set a standard to follow.

## **THE ORIGIN OF HONOR KILLINGS**

Though the intent behind honor killings is changing in the Middle East as time goes on, the act of honor killings is still prevalent. Due to this, it is important to understand the specific

origins of why many Middle Eastern countries may excuse honor killings. Yotam Feldner, a director for the Middle East Media Institute wrote for the Middle East Daily explaining why the perpetrators of honor killings get let off without much punishment, and victims do not receive the justice they deserve. He starts by describing the fact that in Arab society, there are two distinctions for the word 'honor.' There is Sharaf, which is the honor of a collective such as a family or a tribe. So if one member of the collective fails to demonstrate honor at a larger scale, it leads to the weakening of the collective or social unit. The concept of Sharaf can go both ways, meaning that a collective can also work together to increase their Sharaf by demonstrating their positive attributes in society at large (Feldner 2000).

The other attribute that a woman's honor must follow is the concept of 'ird. The rough translation could be understood as a woman's "purity or chastity." A woman has no way to increase her "purity" but there are ways in which she can present herself in a way that diminishes her 'ird. A woman has strong social pressures in Arab society to protect her purity, and it is also the responsibility of the family to take action against the woman if her purity is violated. Feldner then goes on to quote a Jordanian tribal leader, Tarrad Fayiz, who makes an analogy between women and olive trees. He states specifically, "A woman is like an olive tree. When its branch catches woodworm, it has to be chopped off so that society stays clean and pure."(Feldner 2000) Like-minded ideologies with similar intent perpetuate patriotic beliefs amongst both men and women alike when normalized.

Through analysis of Feldner's findings, we can understand that the root of honor killings in the Arab world could possibly be derived from social concepts that are prevalent in the Arab language. These social concepts relating to collectivist morality and the morality of an individual woman provide stark contrasts to one another and create a convoluted set of expectations and

boundaries for which a woman and society at large are set to follow. This relates to the concept of saving face that is so prevalent in Eastern societies that cannot necessarily be understood from the same lens as in Western societies. Some members of society may feel so driven and motivated by the idea of how they are perceived by others, that it causes them to take extreme actions against more vulnerable members of the collectivist to selfishly save face.

## **ANALYZING DATA FROM COUNTRIES WITH THE HIGHEST RATE OF HONOR KILLINGS**

Firstly, understanding the general attitudes towards honor killings in the Middle East can clarify the reasoning behind which countries have the highest rates of honor killings and whether or not the attitudes of the overall populations in the Middle East and North Africa can influence the rate at which honor killings are occurring within each country. The Statista Research department carried out a survey titled, “Share of Arab Respondents who Believe ‘Honor Killings’ are Acceptable Across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) as of 2019.” The findings of this survey illustrate that 27 percent of Algerians, 25 percent of Moroccans, 21 percent of Jordanians, 14 percent of Sudanese, 8 percent of Tunisians, 8 percent of Lebanese, and 8 percent of Palestinian respondents to the survey believe that honor killings are acceptable across the Middle East and North Africa. This survey gathered results from 25,407 people who were aged 18 years and older by interviewing them face to face. They interviewed approximately 2,400 people from each country listed. The results gathered from this study seem to indicate that Algerians, Moroccans, and Jordanians seem to have more agreeable attitudes in favor of honor killings, as a significant portion of respondents seem to believe that honor killings are acceptable. (Statista 2020) Subsequently, the attitudes of people from these countries may indicate a correlation between the number of honor killings occurring in those countries due to cultural

normalization, and the acceptance of honor killings as a practice. To determine this correlation, the statistics of the number of honor killings must be examined.

Data gathered about honor killings in the Eastern Mediterranean region further outline these results. Firstly, according to the World Health Organization in 2012, they estimate that around 5000 honor killings occur each year worldwide. Of course, this study goes on to debunk this claim as the statistics from the Middle East alone indicate a much higher number of reported honor killings (World Health Organization 2012). According to the data gathered by Healthcare Basel, the study demonstrates that honor killings are widely underreported in many countries around the world, especially in the Middle East. The data is not reported regularly and may not be entirely reliable due to the attempts of governments to contribute to the erasure of honor killing victims. However, from what the study was able to gather, they were able to find some numbers from the late 1990s to the early 2000s. They state, “In Jordan, 50 HKs were reported between the years 2000 and 2010. In 1997, 52 cases took place in Egypt, and in Yemen, 400 women were victims of HK in the same year. In Lebanon, 38 cases of HK were reported between 1996 and 1998. In Palestine, 27 cases in 2014 and 15 cases in 2015 were reported by the Women’s Center for Legal Aid and Counseling. However, these small numbers can be an underestimation of the problem”(AlQahtani et al. 2022). They then go on to indicate that Iran has a problem with honor killings in the rural cities but not so much in the urban areas. They state that there were around 8000 honor killings from the year 2010 to 2014. They also stated that most honor killings occur in the city of Khuzestan stating that 54 occurred in the year 2004 in Khuzestan alone. It is also emphasized that the COVID-19 pandemic led to a rise in honor killings in Iran and around the world as a whole. The reason potentially being the mental exhaustion due to lockdowns, isolation, and financial insecurity. In Iran, it has been found that in

areas with increased rates of honor killings, there is also a parallel in unemployment and poverty (AlQahtani et al. 2022). It seems that this conclusion has not been observed or reported in other countries in the Middle East. Therefore, it seems that honor killings are the result of a class divide in Iran specifically. Secondly, Afghanistan is noted to have seen a total of around 243 honor killings from March 2011 to April 2013. The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission also offered more detailed insight into who exactly is carrying out these honor killings. They state, “Of those cases, only 56% of perpetrators were identified. The majority (39%) were husbands, 15% were brothers, 9% were fathers, 6% were brothers-in-law, 5% were other family members, and the remaining 26% were relatives”(United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, n.d.). Of all of the listed countries, the one with the highest rate of honor killings is thought to be Pakistan. Between the years 1998 and 2003, the Pakistan Ministry of Interior reported a total of 4101 cases of honor killings(AlQahtani et al. 2022). There was also a steady increase reported in the number of honor killings per year over multiple years. Over the span of four years, in 1957 women were killed over allegations of infidelity. Only 88 percent of those women were married. 18 percent of those killed were minors (AlQahtani et al. 2022).

The data seems to indicate that the country with the highest total number of honor killings seems to be Iran. The second country with the highest total number of honor killings seems to be Pakistan as a result of the data gathered. Secondly, it is important to note that compared to countries where a higher total number of respondents seemed to indicate that they are in favor of honor killings, the number of total honor killings in those countries seems to correlate with the percentage of those who are in favor. For example, Jordan has a higher total number of honor killings compared to Palestine and Lebanon, and more Jordanians than



Palestinians and Lebanese demonstrate an agreeable attitude towards honor killings. In this sense, the correlation seems to be positive.

The data about total global numbers of honor killings seems to be inaccurate and in line with global organizations. According to the United Nations Population Fund, nearly 5,000 honor killings occur annually on a global scale, but many non-government organizations (NGOs) estimate the number to be much higher. They estimate that 20,000 honor killings occur on a global scale. Further validating their claim, we can conclude that 5,000 honor killings on average per year do not seem to be entirely accurate based on statistics previously analyzed and reported by world organizations such as the United Nations. According to a study published in the *Indian Journal of Women and Social Change*, perhaps the most notorious country that perpetuates one of the largest numbers of honor killings is the country of Pakistan. In the case of Pakistan, the majority of honor killing perpetrators identify as Muslim. This conclusion was brought about by a case study of 100 cases of honor killings in Pakistan. 98 percent of the perpetrators identified as Muslim. Similarly, in India, a majority of the 101 cases of honor killings conducted identified as Hindu. Perhaps, honor killings seem to be conducted in a ritualistic and religious manner according to the findings from this study. A notable aspect is that 83 percent of the victims in India were Hindu and in Pakistan almost all victims were Muslim. Victims of honor killings are usually buried in unmarked graves, records of their existence may be erased, and their killers are usually let off the hook. (D'Lima, Solotaroff, and Pande 2020).

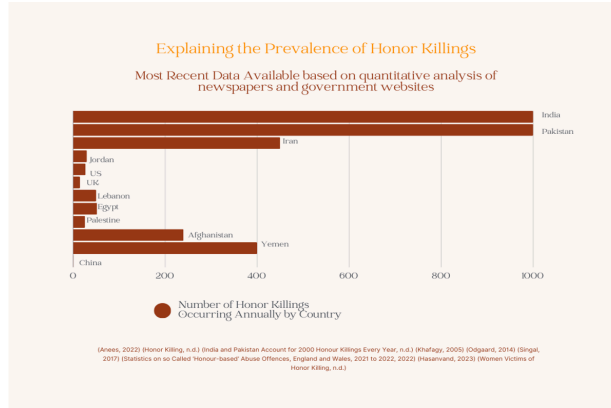


Figure 1 Explaining the Prevalence of Honor Killings

Figure 1 shows data from just 12 countries mapping out the number of honor killings per year according to the most recent data I could find.

## DOES PERPETUATING AN HONOR KILLING RESTORE HONOR WITHIN A FAMILY?

According to Healthcare Basel, “studies have reported that commonly used methods in honor crimes include strangulation, stabbing, burning, acid burning, stone throwing, being buried alive, and forcing a female to throw herself from a window or forcing her to take poison. Sometimes, weapons are used, such as axes, firearms, and edged tools”(AlQahtani et al. 2022). In most countries, the methods for honor killings are typically extremely brutal. This is typically because honor killings are carried out in a fit of rage, and the male perpetrators typically feel as though the victims are their property to do as they please. For example, Pakistan and India demonstrate significant brutality in conjunction with honor killings. “In Pakistan, in most cases, victims of honor 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 honor killings, the abuse and murder took on an aspect of public performance and shaming which included parading the victims naked, forcing their heads to be shaved, public beheading, or burning. In one particularly gruesome case of male honor 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" (D'Lima, Solotaroff, and Pande 2020). This indicates a high level of violence when it comes to carrying on honor killings. Honor killings also require validation from the community at large, but if the majority of the population is opposed to honor killings, one must question where this validation comes from if any. According to the data gathered about Arab countries' attitudes towards honor killings, while a significant portion of those populations support honor killings, the overwhelming majority of respondents in that survey in every one of those countries indicated that they are against honor killings. It is made evident that honor killings and the violence as a result of these killings do not seem to be perceived in an honorable sense by the majority of people in most countries in the Middle East. In proportion to the population of these countries, they are occurring in very small numbers. Additionally, in some countries, they seem to be most prevalent among communities whose members have placed low emphasis on education. However, there are societies in the Middle East in which families are encouraged by members of their community to cause harm through violent means to their daughters if they bring shame to the family. This herd mentality leads to pressure from the family to perpetuate violence to a greater degree due to the normalization of this violence within their close-knit communities. However, in most cases, the aftermath when it comes to honor killings is not beneficial for the family's reputation. It has proven to be quite the opposite. According to the findings of a Palestinian study using grounded theory to investigate honor killings on the social impact of the families of 23 family members of murdered women. In

communities where honor killings are uncommon, committing an honor killing did not bring honor to that family's name, but rather it led to greater isolation and stigmatization from members within those communities. In Palestine for example, people partake in mourning rituals where they offer support to those who are mourning the loss of their loved ones by performing tasks like cooking and cleaning for them while they mourn the loss of their family members. However, they do not participate in these mourning rituals for family members who carry out honor killings. They go so far as to reject them as a whole. Over time, many families of the victims of honor killings end up regretting their actions and start to feel a sense of guilt (AlQahtani et al. 2022).

## **PROPOSED SOLUTION**

Muslim leaders in the MENA region stress that honor killings have no religious backing, but very little has been done to combat this issue. The first course of action that needs to be taken is the nullification, or at the minimum, the amendment of the following laws:

Algeria's 1991 Penal Code Article 279

Egypt's 1937 Penal Code no. 58 Article 237

Iraq's 1966 Penal Code Article 409

Jordan's 1960 Penal Code no. 16 Article 340

Morocco's 1963 amended Penal Code Article 418

Kuwait's Penal Code Article 153

Libya's Penal Code Article 375

Oman's Penal Code Article 252

Syria's 1953 amended 1949 Penal Code Article 548

United Arab Emirate's law no.3/1978 Article 334

Yemen's law no. 12/1994 Article 232

Iran's law Article 630 and Article 301

These laws allow for the perpetrators of honor killings to get away with a slap on the wrist and face disproportionate consequences to the magnitude and severity of the irreparable damages that their crimes cause.

Secondly, one way to facilitate change is for governments to establish organizations similar to Karma Nirvana in the UK which would provide shelters for women who face the threat of being honor killed, investigate honor killings, collect data on these killings, as well as . At the peak of honor crimes in Jordan, the government of Jordan used to imprison women for being potential victims of honor crimes because they did not have sanctuaries for them. The Jordanian government eventually went on to implement the strategy of creating these organizations and shelters with locations disclosed from the public to protect victims. Following this, Jordan saw a sharp decline in the number of honor killings.

Raising awareness on this issue is also necessary. Many people are unaware of the idea of honor killings and what constitutes an honor killing. For example, the only known East Asian case happened on April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2017 in which Ma Ruibao, a Hui Muslim in China killed his daughter, her boyfriend, and their taxi driver because he was not satisfied with his daughter's boyfriend. Many suspected this to be a case of honor killing, but the police officer from the bureau that handled this case said that he didn't know what an honor killing is or why it had anything to do with this case (朱燚晨, n.d.). Raising awareness on what honor killings are can help investigators, governments, and international organizations appropriately assess the issue both on an international and global scale.

Part of my research in the podcast segment also uncovers how the framing of honor crimes in the media has led to alienating this issue as purely and strictly Middle Eastern and Muslim. Many scholars argue that in order to combat potential discrimination, the term “honor killing” should no longer be used. I argue that the term should be expanded, and the dictionary definition be changed. Firstly, our current understanding of honor killings should also be expanded to include those who have committed suicide as a result of the stress of potentially being honor killed or facing honor-based abuse. This could be referred to as an “indirect honor killing.” People like Dr. Jasvinder Sanghera’s sister would fall into this category. A broadened definition would also account for the discrepancy of individual-based societies and actions versus collectivist societies. For example, killing a spouse could also protect one’s internal sense of honor. There are many instances in Western countries of non-Muslims killing their spouses, which could arise from an individual sense of honor.

Part Two : Podcast Transcriptions

## **EPISODE 1: WHAT IS AN HONOR KILLING?**

Hello everyone and welcome to the first episode of the Honor Killings Podcast. My name is Bella Nowroozi and I am really happy that you're here to listen to how we can all help women in the world who are victims of honor killings. I'd like to emphasize that many people think that honor killings are just something that happens in the Middle East or in South Asia. You know, there's a stigma around it that a lot of people think this is something that only happens in developing countries, but it's actually not true. It also happens in the Western world, and it's happened for a really long time. Together, I believe we can finally put our resources and our

voices to use to try and end it once and for all. This is my first time ever doing a podcast, and I am really excited to go along on this journey to see if I can be of any assistance to bringing awareness to this issue because it's really important, and it's affecting the lives of so many people around the world. Not just the victims, but their families, their communities, the country, everyone, everything. It's affecting the aspects of so many people's lives, and I believe that if people listen to this, we can find a way together to put an end to this issue. All right. So let me give you guys a brief introduction about myself. So, right now I'm an undergraduate student studying in China. I go to Duke University and Duke Kunshan University. So I'm a dual degree student right now, and I decided to make this podcast as part of my research project. My final capstone project in order to graduate. I decided to focus it on the Middle East and South Asia, just because there's more information about these regions and statistically honor killings are actually more prevalent within South Asia and the Middle East. So it made sense to focus on these two regions, also just to narrow down my research. I also will be briefly discussing honor killings within the Western world because that's important to note too.

I just wanted to add that another reason I was inspired to make this podcast is because my parents come from Iran and I have taken trips to Iran throughout my life. Even though I grew up in the United States, I traveled to Iran frequently from childhood to early adulthood. And I've witnessed violence against women firsthand. I've been stopped by the morality police myself. I was just really inspired by the women life freedom revolution that recently happened in Iran. I know that these issues, especially honor killings, they've been at the forefront of protests and issues within Iran. So a lot of Iranian women have included honor killings within their advocacy work in national protests. I just couldn't wrap my mind around the fact that someone's own

parents would kill their children that they brought into the world in the first place over things that are minuscule to us, especially in the Western world where these things may not be considered taboo to us, but in traditional societies, they can be. So moving on, let me give you a brief overview of what this podcast is going to look like. Every week, I'm going to have an episode about a country, either in South Asia or the Middle East. And we're going to talk about cases of honor killings that have caused nationwide outrage in those countries that have caused protests or lack thereof. And I'm going to be discussing specific laws within those countries, measures that those countries have taken to prevent or to stop and eradicate honor killings. And I'm also going to interview people who are experts in the field, maybe not for every episode, but for some of the episodes, there will be interviews from people who have either firsthand experience of honor killings as in they've been through honor killings or just experts in the field who have done research and know about honor killing specifically and have talked to victims of honor killings. You may be wondering what exactly counts as an honor killing or what exactly is an honor killing. Let me give you an explanation for that. According to Britannica, honor killings can be best understood as punishments brought upon individuals who violate social or religious norms in which an individual is killed by a family member or a member of their own community in order to save face or erase the shame that individual has brought to the community. In many countries around the world, honor killings are occurring due to a lot of different reasons. Honor killings can be carried out for religious reasons, spiritual reasons, ritualistic reasons, social reasons, and so on and so forth (Singh & Dailey, 2016).

Because the act of honor killings are permissible in some understandings and interpretations of Sharia Law, some predominantly Muslim countries, particularly in the Middle East, North Africa



and South Asia have allowed for men to get away with the act of committing honor killings. This is becoming a problem because honor killings have become a form of domestic violence within these regions and the most common victim of honor killings are women who are killed by their male relatives or husbands. A pretty big misconception that a lot of people have about honor killings that I've noticed is that people think that they only happen to women, but that's not true. They also happen to men. They also happen to little boys, just children overall. They can happen to anyone and they have happened to everyone to all different kinds of groups of people. As I'm sure you can imagine, one of the biggest demographics of victims of honor killings are members of the LGBTQ community. Obviously, this is because being LGBTQ in traditional cultures is very taboo. So people don't know how to handle that when they see it. In recent times, honor killings are seen as a way for male leaders in the household to establish their masculine dominance over the more vulnerable members of the family. Because this is an issue that is important to the women of Iran. I also feel that I'm compelled to share about honor killings. The other motivation I have for starting this podcast is because this issue does not have much global recognition. And I just want my podcast to serve as a tool to remember some of the victims of honor killings and to memorialize their lives. I also hope to bring about any kind of change to this issue. Hopefully large-scale change, but anything is good. If there's anything I can do as an individual, anything to bring awareness to this issue and just potentially save the lives of women in the Middle East and around the world. I feel it is my duty to do so. As I mentioned earlier, each week I will release a new episode about a country in the Middle East or South Asia. And in each episode I will investigate various cases within each country. Some may be more recent cases and others may be cases from the past. I'll also give more details about how each country's overall population views the issue of honor killings in general.

Additionally, I'll discuss how the governments of these countries handle honor killings and whether or not the countries have enacted laws or preventative programs in order to tackle the issue of honor killings. Each episode I discuss will shed light on different cases and the content will be extremely sensitive. Viewer discretion is advised for this podcast. In the end, this is a battle for the people of these regions and we just have to be there to support them. Countless Middle Eastern activists and South Asian activists are working hard to fight this issue. Women in the region are fighting so hard to resolve this issue, to bring about some kind of awareness or change. And it is up to us to do something about this. Thank you so much. And I am excited to start this journey together. If you want more information about this podcast, you can visit the website [www.honorkillingspodcast.com](http://www.honorkillingspodcast.com). There will be more information up there shortly. Thank you so much.

## **EPISODE 2: HONOR KILLINGS IN JORDAN**

Hi everyone. And welcome back to the honor killings podcast. This is going to be the first official episode where we actually get into discussing cases. And we're going to start off with discussing the country of Jordan. My name is Bella Nowroozi. I'm hosting this podcast and I'm happy to be sharing with you the information of what I've learned from researching honor killings in Jordan. With that being said, there's a lot of information about honor killings in Jordan. So this is going to be a multi-part series. Please tune into the other parts about Jordan. So, what I've learned about researching honor killings in Jordan is that it's been very messy. There have been a lot of efforts to try to control honor killings, to try to stop them from happening. However, what they've done in the past has only made the issue worse. And what I

mean, when I say this is they quite literally locked women up in prison in order to quote on quote, keep them safe from honor killings to try to prevent them from getting into trouble with their families. And this problem is made even worse because they would lock women up in prison. And a lot of women were in there for a very, very long time, multiple years. And this would cause them to become depressed. So there were many cases of suicide, which in turn adds more cases of honor killings, but they're indirect. They're not directly cases of honor killings. They were as a result of the government's so on preventative measures. Instead of locking up the people who were actually trying to carry out honor killings, the country of Jordan thought that it would be a good idea to lock up the victims. That's crazy. That's insane. Had they instead locked up the perpetrators, I would like to think that honor killings would be way less prevalent in Jordan, throughout history and in the modern time. I mean, they have gone down significantly. That's true. That is factual. But they are still happening. They're still happening in Jordan, despite being one of the most progressive countries in the Middle East. Now personally, I don't understand who thought it would be a good idea to lock up victims of honor killings. And what I mean, when I say. Women who are victims of honor killings, what I mean by that is basically women whose families or members of their community have tried to honor kill them, but ended up not succeeding in that. And just this year alone, there were multiple cases of honor killings in Jordan. There was a case this summer related to a father who burned his 19 year old daughter to death while she was asleep. Thankfully, he was found guilty and charged by prosecutors. According to the Library of Congress, just this year on July 7th, a prosecutor charged a man with murder for repeatedly stabbing his 15 year old daughter when he saw her talking with someone on her cell phone. The perpetrator confessed to the crime after turning himself in and told the police that the phone call had made him suspect that his daughter was having an affair (Sadek,

2023). These are just two examples, but sadly, there are so many more cases than this. And just to mention, these are the two most recent examples of honor killings in Jordan. Firstly to understand more about the unbearable fates of these young women in Jordan, I will provide some background knowledge on Jordan's actions against honor killings, the specific laws, and how this influenced these cases. When conducting my research for my undergraduate final project about honor killings in the Middle East, I noticed that Jordan has had an extensive history related to honor killings.

Jordan seems to be brought up over and over when it comes to articles and conversations about honor killings. But keep in mind, this doesn't necessarily mean that Jordan is a country with the most cases of honor killings. As I will discuss in later episodes, this really isn't the case. And there are countries where honor killings are much more widespread and prevalent than Jordan. It does mean that Jordan is one of the few countries in the region that actually publicizes and reports these cases of honor killings. What I've also found is that Jordan has a lot of women's and human rights activists in the country who are fighting to bring awareness to the issue and to keep the memories of the victims alive. One of the main activists that I will be discussing is Rana Husseini. Rana is a senior reporter for the Jordan times. And she has worked tirelessly to bring awareness to this issue of honor killings in Jordan. She has traveled to neighborhoods in Jordan to speak with local residents about specific cases of honor killings and reported this information to Al-Jazeera. We will get into her findings throughout this episode. This past summer, I myself had the privilege of visiting Jordan and found it to be one of the more progressive countries in the Middle East, just based on my own personal experience.

I felt pretty safe there as a woman. I've had the privilege of traveling to nearly half of the countries in the Middle East, and I found Jordan to be one of the ones I felt safer in. Just coming from personal experience. I know that not everyone has the same experience and that's totally valid, but this is just how I feel. As someone who has had the opportunity and privilege to travel quite frequently, I have found Jordan to be one of my favorite countries in the Middle East and actually in the world. And whenever my family has asked me for travel recommendations, I always tell them that Jordan is a must-see for everyone. After visiting Jordan without doing much research about the country, I really fell in love with the country's culture, its people and its food. So the reason I'm a bit shocked by the lack of awareness when it comes to honor killings and why it's brought up over and over again in relation to Jordan. This is mainly because of my own personal experiences. So just to share a personal story from visiting Jordan. I was in public with my ex-boyfriend getting into an argument, and there was a group of guys who seemed to be around my age, who came up to me and asked me if I was okay because I was visibly upset. And they did so in front of my ex-boyfriend, who was standing right in front of them, just so they could let him know that others were watching if he had any intentions of harming me. And they looked ready to protect me against my ex-boyfriend if he were to be a harm to me, which thankfully he wasn't. But the gesture alone showed me that at least some of the men in Jordan were aware of domestic violence and the issues that can come from that. What I do want to emphasize is that it is easy for people as a collective to assume a negative image of a country as a whole due to the actions of a few. That is not my intention was sharing information about honor killings in the Middle East at all. Every country in the world has terrible people who do terrible things. And the act of honor killings in Jordan is not a reflection of Jordanian people or the country as a collective. To say that would in the same breath denounce the extensive work that

Jordanian human rights activists and certain media outlets in Jordan does when it comes to bringing awareness to honor killings. With that being said, let's discuss the severity and prevalence of honor killings in Jordan. According to the new Arab, a Middle Eastern newspaper, killings of women and children by family members in Jordan were up by 94% in 2002, as opposed to the year before (Christou, 2023). A report by the Jordanian women's solidarity association revealed. A report titled "Until When" showed that 35 women and children were killed by relatives last year. While six women and girls were killed by non-family members, the majority of women and children were killed by close family members like brothers and husbands (Balaha, 2021). As of right now, honor killings are illegal in Jordan.

However, this doesn't mean that there aren't loopholes in the law. What I mean by this is that Jordanian law allows for a family member to reduce the severity of legal penalties against murders. In the case of a brother, killing a sister, for example. According to the Library of Congress, they state, there are two provisions in the Jordanian penal code that allow a family member to receive wider penalties for honor killings, according to the Project on Middle Democracy. Just to show you what this means, Article 348 of the penal code, stipulates that whoever discovers his wife or one of his female relatives committing adultery with another person and kills one or both of them is exempt from punishment for the offense of murder. Furthermore Article 98 of the code provides that a perpetrator will be exempt from the punishment for murder if his criminal act was due to a state of extreme anger in response to a wrongful and serious act on the part of a victim. Keep in mind, this is true as of August 9th, 2023 (Sadek, 2023). Many of the sources I've looked into say that a main motivator for honor killings is partially because of financial issues in the family. This is across the board in general, and isn't

really specific to any countries. But because honor killings are usually committed by men against women, I can't help, but think that this may not be a major motivating factor. The questions I asked myself are wouldn't women in the families also feel these financial strains in their lives? How come they tend not to lash out similarly? This is obviously because honor killings are disproportionately carried out by men as opposed to women. Or perhaps on a darker side of the stick, maybe honor killings could be perpetuated because of financial issues. What if honor killings are used as justification for getting rid of a family's child, because they're too much of a financial burden to the family? As dark as the thought may be, there aren't many other reasons why I would think that financial motivations would have a correlation to honor killings. But I've been hearing this throughout my research. Rana Husseini, the activist that I mentioned earlier, wrote a book called *Murder in the Name of Honor*, which has a lot of information about honor killings in the Middle east. She states that in some cases, these women were killed for financial or inheritance reasons. So, Rana focused on social issues for over 25 years with a special emphasis on violence against women, as well as the brutal crimes that are committed against Jordanian women in the name of family honor. Her coverage on this topic is so impactful that she brought about national awareness on this topic. And an article she wrote for the Wilson center states, "I wanted to be their voice and tell the whole world who these women were. I wanted to share their ambitions in life before it was cut short, usually by a male relative because they allegedly sullied their family honor, or were victims of a sexual assault, rumors, or suspicion." She states while reporting about these murders, "I came to the bitter realization that the justice system also winked at killers. Perpetrators would get a slap on the wrist with prison terms as short as three months to one year for killing one or more female relatives" (Husseini, R. 2023).

You know, what's even more shocking about honor killings is that we're actually not sure how many honor killings happen each year. A lot of countries that have historically turned a blind eye to honor killings or are not accurately revealing the statistics on the number of honor killings. That happened annually according to human rights organizations. Another trend that I've seemed to notice throughout my research is that global human rights organizations like the United Nations can't seem to agree on how many honor killings are happening on a global scale. With how uncertain this issue is and how little information there is about honor killings online, it is definitely more than difficult for countries to find a solution. Even the most corrupt governments you can think of openly condemn the act of honor killings, but they don't seem to know how to go about this issue. This is because they're relying on the patriarchy to uphold society. So they can't be locking up men in jail. Instead of the victims of honor killings, they have to be locking up the victims to keep them safe. Instead of locking up people who are a threat. Pretty much every government in the Middle East has openly condemned honor killings in some way. And the good news is that in every Middle Eastern country, there seems to be some governmental action taken against honor killings. But of course simply condemning the act does not seem to be changing the opinion of those who are carrying out the honor killings. One thing that's important to understand when it comes to honor killings is the root cause and why they're happening in the first place. A lot of people seem to think that the Middle East is oppressed due to religious reasons and look to blame Islam. Though there are a lot of fundamentalist ideologies in the Middle East, it's also important to understand that religion cannot be to blame for every single person's individual ideologies and intentions. Rana Husseini states that she had a great interest in tracing the root cause of these crimes. Violence against women has been documented throughout history. Most of the ancient civilizations among them, the Syrian, Roman, Manu, Babylonian and



Sumerian had penal codes that condemned women adulterers and their partners, but allowed men to publicly have mistresses with little or no punishment at all (Husseini, R 2021). As an Iranian, I know the importance of preserving the accomplishment of ancient Persians. And I have come to realize that Middle Eastern people care a lot about connecting with their ancestors from ancient times. After all, we do boast the root of all human civilization. We have created human rights and so many advancements of the modern world started in the Middle East. We housed three of the most influential religions in the world. Beyond just that we are the descendants of the world's most profound philosophers, thinkers and poets of the world. We are a prideful region of the world and rightfully so, our ancestors created much of the groundbreaking technologies that the modern world relies on to this day for usage. It really is important for us to maintain the credit for our ancestors' accomplishments, but we also need to recognize the faults that come from this. It is easy for us to let our egos overshadow our judgments. Since we created so many of the moral codes and philosophies that the entire world relies on still to this day, it's easy for us to think that our moral compass is flawless. Considering we have historically been relied on so heavily as a region, it's easy for us to get stuck in our old ways. Even though many of the technologies and tangible items we have created have been evolved and transformed to help us in our daily lives, many of the ideologies regarding women's rights and human rights overall are harming vulnerable populations in the region. We need to understand the double standards when it comes to relationships in the Middle East, I truly do believe the relationship dynamic in some parts of the Middle East is messed up. How come in some cultures in the Middle East, not all of course, but some, men can freely have multiple wives to this day, but women can be killed even if their husband just has a slight suspicion of her cheating? How is it then fair that this man will be let off the hook for her murder. I don't care what anyone says. This is not only a double

standard, but it completely devalues the lives of these women. This goes beyond just objectification. This is just outright viewing women as property and subservient to men and viewing men as godlike beings who can do no wrong. Murdering a person, even if it is true that they cheated on you or were unfaithful to you, should not be acceptable or normalized in any situation. It is also a double standard to create systems that allow for men to get away with essentially cheating on their wives and forcing them to be compliant to it. And then in the same breath, denouncing and shutting down any chance of a woman benefiting from the same system.

Firstly, I recognize that I come from a place of privilege and I will probably truly never understand the relationship dynamics in the Middle East as a Middle Eastern woman who grew up in the US, but I do want to provide an outside perspective to the role of unfaithfulness. Firstly, we all think cheating and adultery is wrong in relationships, and we should never put our partners through that. But since polygamous relationships exist in the Middle East, let's put ourselves in the shoes of a Middle Eastern woman whose husband suggests polygamy. In this hypothetical situation, the woman may not be okay with her husband having mistresses or multiple wives. But a lot of the time, she doesn't have a choice. She starts to feel as though her husband doesn't love her anymore, or isn't committed to just her. And since divorce is looked down upon in Middle Eastern society, she has no choice but to stay with him. Is it fair for a woman in that position to cheat on her husband? I would argue that it is in fact fair because he cheated on her in the first place. She's trapped in a relationship with someone who clearly doesn't love her with no way out. And he just views her as property. She is also probably relying on him for an income due to the traditional roles of gender in the Middle East, where most of these honor killings are happening, which further causes her entrapment. She also has no right to tell

the husband that he should fully devote himself to her. By law, in countries where this is common, she actually has no right to oppose this. Not only can she not oppose it, but she can also lose her life on the extreme end for even being suspected of doing something similar or on the less extreme end, she'll be subject to imprisonment, torture, or public shaming.

And there's no logic or thinking beyond these double standards and acting on them. It is all just based on emotions and viewing women as property. I apologize for going off on this tangent, but I just, gosh, I get so riled up when I think about this. It's just so, so frustrating. There's no way to rationalize or justify any of this because it's just purely based on emotions. And it's based on this feeling that a man can control a woman and everything that she does and all aspects of her life.

Okay, now that I'm done with my rant, please tune into part two where we're going to get very deep into these cases and just what I've been able to gather about honor killings in Jordan from a long time ago, from more recent times. So please tune into part two and thank you so much for listening to this. And if you would like to see where I got my information from, I'm going to be uploading the source material to the website, [www.honorkillingspodcast.com](http://www.honorkillingspodcast.com). Thank you so much.

## **EPISODE 3: JORDAN PART 2**

Hello, everyone. Thank you so much for tuning into the last episode. And this is going to be part two of my episode about Jordan. I'm your host, Bella Nowroozi. Thank you so much for listening to my podcast. Okay. So let's just get right into it. There is going to be so much to talk about in this episode, I have watched multiple documentaries about honor killings in Jordan. So I've seen so many different cases and I'm going to be talking about all of that in this episode today. So you may be asking yourself, why is it important to continue discussing honor killings in Jordan?

They're way less prevalent than they were before. Yes, that may be true, but that doesn't mean they're not still happening. As I briefly mentioned in the last episode, there was recently a headline coming from Roya News which states three women in Jordan were murdered within one week for honor (Roya News, 2023). When did this happen? This happened in May of 2023. So it's pretty recent. So most of the information for this episode is going to come from documentaries that I watched and I watched some pretty old documentaries, some newer ones. So there's going to be a range of the stories that we're going to be discussing in this episode. That's not to say that it's not important to discuss the older stories. I mean, they're not too old. They're from mostly the two thousands. So, it's still pretty recent. What I'm trying to emphasize here is that it's important to remember what was happening before society started to change, and how recent that was because this has been happening in the two thousands. I mean, this wasn't that long ago. And what has changed since then? What has caused this change? And why is it still happening at least to some extent?

The first documentary I'm going to talk about was filmed in April, 2004. It comes from Journeyman Pictures (Journeyman Pictures, 2008). Of course, if you want to watch this documentary or any of the other ones I'm going to talk about, they're all going to be linked in the source material for this episode on our website. So this documentary starts off with a clip of a little boy and a little girl, and they're dancing around in their house. And these two kids are siblings whose mother was honor killed. So essentially the family accused the mother of having an affair and the mother's name was Hanan. The children are seen in the care of their father's sister, their aunt. Even after the father killed the mother. So in efforts to preserve the family honor, the father killed the mother in front of their then six year old son. Now, obviously I cannot

even begin to fathom the trauma that that poor six year old boy must have from witnessing his own mother being killed by his father at just the age of six years old. So at the time of the documentary, the boy was 12 years old. As he was interviewed for the documentary and he said, my father took out his gun and shot my uncle Wa'el once, but he got away. Then he went to my mother and asked her why she had been with Wa'el, (that's the name of the uncle). Then the mother said, "we love each other and we will get married. And it's none of your business." Then the little boy came back from school and saw that his father shot his mother. He witnessed the whole thing. And after that, the father surrendered to a traffic police man. Then the son finishes all of this off by saying she deserved to die. It was right. The son believed that what his father did was the right thing to do. Or at least this was what he was told to think. I mean, how much can we expect from a young boy who witnessed his father literally kill his mother in front of his own eyes. Of course, he's going to think that this is the right thing to do because not only is society telling him that this is the right thing to do, but his father did this in front of his own eyes. I mean, he's going to be conditioned to believe that this is normal. So earlier on, I told you guys that these two kids, the brother and the sister, they're staying with their aunt who I had told you about earlier. And she agrees with the actions of her brother. So then later she was interviewed and she said, it's good to kill those who do the wrong thing. It benefits everyone. She also stated, and traditionally everyone supports it. So at the time of the filming of this documentary in around 2004, Roughly 13% of Jordanian murders were honor killings. But official statistics are obviously underestimating this problem. At the time of this documentary, a man could face just six months in jail if the murder was done so in the name of honor, rather than other kinds of murder. I have to ask since this was so recent, how much change could have actually been done in such a short period of time? Lima Nabil, a journalist interviewed for this documentary, found

teenage girls locked in prison simply for their own protection. She spoke to a then 13 year old girl who was raped by her own father. She states she's in prison and he's outside. Women are always to blame when it comes to honor killings even if she is innocent. Lima Nabil also made frequent visits to Jordan's first women's shelter. These shelters were created as short term solutions for someone at risk of domestic abuse. A woman named Shahrukh was interviewed. Shahrukh had a difficult upbringing with an abusive father. Shahrukh was married to a man with whom she had six children with, he divorced her three times. And after the third time he took her back home to live with her abusive father who locked her in a bathroom for five years. She eventually remarried and had three children with another man. While being locked into the bathroom for five years, she said the only thing that kept her from going crazy was reading the Koran. Another thing that was helping her during the time was praying. So the police eventually became involved. And then for her own safety, they put her in prison, which is what they were doing to a lot of women at this time. Locking them up as a way of quote-on-quote keeping them safe. After being released from prison, her father and brother decided that she brought the family too much embarrassment. One of her brothers told her father to shoot her. So when her father began shooting and finished all of the bullets in the first gun, her brother, someone who works in a hospital, asked her father to start with another gun. Now, one thing that I really want to emphasize is if society is so conditioned to justify honor killings that literal hospital workers are taking part in honor killings, what does that say about the perception of such a brutal act, being so normalized in society that the very people who are supposed to be keeping the public safe were not only normalizing honor killings, but they're also playing a role in honor killings. Going back to the story. When her father noticed that she was still alive, the brother then told the father to aim for her head so that she would die. Shahrukh was rushed to the hospital with six gunshot

wounds. And by some kind of miracle Shahrukh lived. She lived to tell her story. Her father was arrested, but relatives had convinced her to drop the charges against her father. And she agreed. He made false statements about Shahrukh for 43 years and made her entire family despise her. Even after everything she went through at the hands of her father, he basically pretty much should have succeeded in killing her because of six gunshot wounds. Wow. She survived by some kind of miracle. He basically was so close to succeeding in killing her, and this poor woman wants approval of her father, the love of her father so badly and the approval of her other relatives that she decides to drop the charges against her father. So then after she drops the charges, her father states that she was loose in her teenage years. So then she says, this is our law. "Your father is your God." And lastly, the interviewer interviewed Jordanian university students from wealthier families to kind of gather their opinions on this topic. So she asks one guy, the interviewer, she asks one guy if he found out that his wife cheated, what would he do? And he said, if I found out my wife cheated, I would kill her. Simple. Another guy responded and said, I disagree. The law exists to handle situations like this. We are not barbarians. (Journeyman Pictures, 2008)

So there seems to be a lot of polarization when it comes to the topic of honor killings in Jordan. So it seems like even young people at that time were not able to agree on the morality of honor killings and the principle behind the act. A DW News documentary titled "Can Jordan Put an End to Honor Killings?" states that as of four years ago, 5,000 honor killings happen per year. Actually this statistic, I've seen it a lot throughout my research, it hasn't really been changing much. Which just further leads me to believe that it's not really accurate and it's not really all-encompassing of all of the cases that go unheard of and unreported. So this number was made

public by the United Nations. And it seems to be the only statistic that we have when it comes to honor killings on a global scale. So, if we look at that number, this comes out to around 13 per day around the world. Activists say they are usually able to document 20 of these cases annually in Jordan. However, the true number of honor killings are difficult to document and record because so many of these murders are made to look like accidents. (Al Jazeera English, 2007)

Rana Husseini is interviewed for this documentary. If you don't remember who she is, she was mentioned in the last episode. She's one of the main activists when it comes to honor killings, not just in Jordan, but throughout the entire Middle East. And she wrote a book called *Murder in the Name of Honor*. So at the time of this documentary, which was four years ago when Rana was interviewed, she said that she believes Jordan's decades long problem with honor killings is finally coming to an end. I think what she means by that is its larger scale problem and how society views the issue. But obviously there have still been cases of honor killings reported in Jordan. And they've been talked about in the media (Al Jazeera English, 2007).

It has not come to an end since the time of that documentary, which was four years ago. She believes that it is now so much easier for her to talk about what was once a very taboo subject. So she began reporting on this issue around 1994. And when she first began reporting on honor killings, she was one of the very few people in Jordan. And one of the first people in Jordan to speak out about this issue. Rana's activism began with a case that she still remembers very vividly. And actually I'm going to go more in depth about this case right now, because I was able to find it online and this documentary doesn't really go very much in depth about this case that started Rana's activism about honor killings, but we're going to talk about it right now. So all of this information that I'm going to be discussing right now comes from Al-Jazeera and this article



is called “Murdered Women: a History of Honor Crimes.” And Rana Husseini is interviewed for a podcast on their website for that article (Husseini, 2021). I'm going to link that in the show notes.

I'm going to quote Rana right now. She states, “on a hot summer day in late may, 1994. I drove to an Eastern suburb of Jordan's Capital Amman to investigate the reported murder of a 16 year old school girl by her own brother. With limited information, questions roiled my mind as I drove up the hill towards the neighborhood. Why had this girl's life been cut short by her brother? What had her final thoughts been? My questions would soon be partially answered by a man who was walking through the neighborhood when I arrived. ‘Yes, I know why she was killed.’ He answered calmly as if talking about the weather. ‘She was raped by one of her brothers and another sibling murdered her to cleanse his family's honor.’ ” So then Rana went on to say that she interviewed the young girl's uncle and basically the uncle stated that, “she had seduced her brother to sleep with her and that she had to die for that.” (Husseini, 2021)

So Rana was assigned to cover hearings on homicides in Jordan as a reporter. And she basically started her career because she kept coming across multiple stories of women who have been killed by their male relatives for family honor. So she started to investigate that and that's what eventually sparked her interest in the topic because she just kept seeing patterns and kept seeing multiple stories related to this issue. So Rana was basically saying that their sentences were very little and they would range from around approximately three months to two years of jail time. But in this young girl's case, case, the court basically rejected the rape excuse that her brother had basically stated in court. And he ended up getting 15 years of prison time for manslaughter,

which Rana said was unusually high for its time. But Jordan has so many legal loopholes when it comes to honor killings, and a lot of those legal loopholes have to do with the family's involvement in dropping charges. But obviously this doesn't work because the family is the reason that there are charges in the first place. So of course they're going to drop the charges against their own family members. So the girl's brother's sentence ended up becoming half of the time that it was originally supposed to be because the family was able to drop the charges since they have the power to do so. (Al Jazeera English, 2007)

All of this shows us there is some hope because Rana has done so much activism and she's brought about so much awareness to the topic. And throughout reading this article, she basically stated at the end that many men have become much more interested in being part of the solution and that their reactions to her lectures and the topic. "I have undergone a major shift." And this has been throughout the span of around 10 years. (Husseini, 2021)

So at least there's some beacon of hope in all of this. In the case that Rana was talking about, she states that a 16 year old school girl was first raped by her brother after he gave her sleeping pills, he threatened to kill her if she told their family. But then she had to tell their family because she became pregnant with his child. And he tried to kill her, but she survived. She had to undergo a secret abortion, then she was married off to a man who was 34 years older than her. And then six months later, he divorced her. The day that he divorced her, another brother killed her, and he went outside, waving the knife saying he killed his sister in the name of family honor. Rana says that at the time, it really made her realize that society blames women for everything. And it was shocking to her. She said, somebody gets raped and then killed it's incomprehensible. So the

interviewer asked Rana if she had faced any backlash from reporting on honor killings in Jordan. And she said her editors received a call from a Jordanian intellectual woman who was screaming and yelling at her editors to not publish such stories and that they should stop her from publishing such stories because this was not them or Jordan and that she was tarnishing Jordan's image. (Al Jazeera English, 2007).

This mentality is so prevalent in the Middle East, where people are so focused on saving face and focusing on their country's image. This is because of such nationalistic beliefs that are so prevalent in the Middle East, that sometimes we forget that our countries have real issues and real problems that are affecting so many people's lives. And the more that we use the excuse of saving our country's image and saving face, the less we're going to have the opportunity to actually try to fix these problems in our countries.

Okay. Rana stated in her book that the justice system itself was actually siding with the killers. She then went on to state that the killers were getting away with very lenient sentences. Some of which were three months, some were six months, some were a year. And in a way, the justice system was just winking at them. And the prosecutors were, in Rana's words, "bringing in very weak cases." Rana stated that her mission was to just keep writing, keep writing about every case. And she would just repeat and repeat and repeat and keep writing more and more about each case so that it was unavoidable to the public eye. If you missed one of the cases, you would see another case and so on and so forth. (Al Jazeera English, 2007)

And this is alarming because there were so many cases of honor killings happening in Jordan that she had so much to write about. She said that this was her strategy when it came to honor killings and that it worked for her and she was able to get her point across and she was able to make a change at an impact.

So then in the documentary, they state quote, “in 2016, Jordan's Iftad department, which issues religious rulings, proclaimed a fatwa, that banned killing women in the name of honor. It read, "Anyone who kills his relative, claiming that he wants to cleanse the family honor is committing an act against Shariah and should be held accountable.” So then they go on to say in the documentary that quote “in 2017, the penal code was amended to prevent judges from granting reduced sentences to perpetrators of honor killings.” (Al Jazeera English, 2007)

So this would make a lot of us think, oh honor killings are no longer a problem in Jordan. The country's government is working so hard to prevent them from happening in the legal system and the law is working against those who are perpetuating honor killings. So there's no longer going to be a problem with this, right? Well, obviously that's wrong because as we know, it's not just the law that's causing people to commit honor killings, but the problem goes so much farther than that. And it's honestly probably more so cultural than anything else. Countries where the law matters a lot more, especially when it comes to things like murder, for example, the United States, they're still happening. Honor killings are still happening in the United States. I mean, obviously it's not as widespread as it is in certain other countries and cultures. But they're still happening. And the reason for that is because of people's mentality and it's because of people's particular cultural beliefs that are instilled in them.

And that is the way that people need to handle honor killings. That's the way countries need to handle honor killings. They need to tackle it from the root of the problem, which is the mindset and the mentality of the masses. So then in the documentary, they go on to state that it's not just the country's laws that are protecting murders that were the problem. So then they go on to argue that there are so many flaws in Jordan's system of dealing with targets of honor killings. As I mentioned in the previous part about the fact that Jordan imprisons women who are at risk of being honor killed, this is what the documentary then goes on to talk about. So they state that under Jordan's crime prevention, law authorities are allowed to indefinitely imprison women who are at risk of being attacked or killed in the name of family honor. And this practice is known as protective custody. (Al Jazeera English, 2007)

This basically means that a woman can be imprisoned against her will. She has no right to say "I don't feel unsafe. I don't want to be in prison" even if she is feeling unsafe, but she says that she doesn't feel unsafe and that she wants to leave, she has no rights to do that. So then this strips away all autonomy from a woman, she has no right to make her own personal choices and she has no say in anything. She has to stay in prison for her own protection. So then one of the women that they interviewed for the documentary, she was housed in Jordan's prison for protective custody for about seven months, she didn't have any other option. She either had to continue living with a man who tried to kill her, or she had to go to jail with women who were put on death row. Prostitutes, drug dealers, murders, you name it. How does this necessarily protect someone if they're going to still be put in jail with other people who could be a threat to them? I've seen cases now of women who have been put in these jails, these Jordanian jails,

they've been put in these jails for 10, 20, 30, 40 years. I've seen cases where women were put in jail for most of their lives. Some of these women have had their entire lives taken away from them, stolen away from them. For what? For what reason? They're completely innocent. They are completely innocent and they've put the wrong people in jail. Instead of putting in the men who were trying to kill them. And let's just think about it rationally for one second. Okay, you're going to put that man's wife in jail. What is he going to do? He is going to go and marry someone else probably. And what's going to happen is the same thing, and it's going to repeat itself. So I just don't understand how they couldn't have put an end to the cycle by putting in the male, the man in jail, putting the man in jail instead of the woman. I'm going to be talking more about this in the next episode. There's multiple other cases that I've read about and watched documentaries for where women have been locked in jail, and we're going to be discussing those in the next episode. So please stay tuned for that. And if you want the source materials for this episode, you can check out the website [www.honorkillingspodcast.com](http://www.honorkillingspodcast.com).

## **EPISODE 4: HONOR KILLINGS IN JORDAN PART 3**

Hello everyone. And welcome back to the honor killings podcast. My name is Bella Nowroozi and I'm the host for this podcast. This is part three of my multi-part series about Jordan. So if you haven't already listened to parts one and two, go back and do that. And in last week's episode, we talked about Jordan's crime prevention laws, which used to allow authorities to indefinitely imprison women who were at risk of being attacked or killed in an honor killing. And today we're going to continue on with that discussion.

One woman was housed in Jordan's protective custody for seven months, and she had no option but to either continue living with a man who tried to kill her or to go to jail. So they put her in jail with women who were on death row, supposedly for her own safety. Jordanian activists have even documented women who were at risk of honor killings, even spending up to 10 years or more in jail for their own safety. So for this documentary, lawyer Elham Abu Libdeh was interviewed and she stated that there was one case of a woman who was detained for over 20 years in protective custody. Lawyer Elham Abu Libdeh went on to state that she had tried to contact this woman at the beginning of 2020, but she had discovered that the woman had unfortunately passed away and she only had four years of freedom. (Al Jazeera English, 2007)

So another thing that's absolutely wild about Jordan's protective custody law is that in order for a woman to escape this protective custody, she has to wait for someone to come bail her out and guarantee her safety. So usually this is a brother or it's a father or son or husband. Which is crazy because usually that's the reason why she's locked up in so-called "protective custody" in the first place. It makes absolutely no sense to me because these are the very same people who are threatening her. These are the very same people who are threatening these women. And now, they're the ones who have to come get them out of protective custody. So it's estimated that hundreds have gone through the prison system under the pretext of protection, but lawmakers have been trying to make changes to the country's prison system. In late 2018, the ministry for social development opened a shelter for women whose lives were under threat by members of their own family. So this shelter was actually located in an isolated place, and it had surveillance constantly. So it was always under protection, and the other good thing about this is that they hid the location and very few people from the government and workers of this shelter, as well as the

women who were at the shelter, were the only ones who knew about its existence and its location. The point of the shelter was that women would be in a safe spot away from threats of honor killings. And they also received counseling, legal and vocational training with the aim of reintegrating them into society. Also at the time children up to the age of six could remain with their mothers at the shelter and women were also allowed to leave if they wanted to do so, which was different from what you remember about the prisons. Women were not allowed to leave. They had to be bailed out or rescued, essentially by the very person who was threatening them. So it seemed like at that point that Jordan had tried to do a lot to change the circumstances surrounding honor killings, and they had even gone so far as to change their laws, to hinder judges from giving lenient sentences, to those who kill people in the name of honor. But current laws still grant perpetrators reduced punishments if the victims' families end up forgiving them. Rana believes that an end should come to that practice. And she believes that it goes to show that society's views aren't changing yet. (Al Jazeera English, 2007)

So then the United Nations also made a documentary called “In the name of Honor.”(United Nations, 2010) It told the story of a woman named Fatin who cannot be identified for protection reasons because she lives in fear for her life. 31 years ago, she almost lost her life in a brutal attack, and she said that her family shot her. She was shot in the head, legs, chest and hands. When Fatin helped her younger, pregnant sister who was unmarried, they were both shot by their older brother. Her sister ended up dying in the attack and she was badly injured. After all that happened to her, she ended up being locked up in a jail for 15 years of her life. And so also at the time of her imprisonment, about half of the inmates in the prison were also locked away for similar reasons for their own protection. (United Nations, 2010)



Al Jazeera made a documentary called, “Why Are Women Murdered in the Name of Honour?” (Al Jazeera English, 2020) This documentary discussed the case in Jordan, which got many, many people protesting. Witnesses said that they saw a young woman being chased out of her house by her father who then beat her to death with a brick in the street. This man did not care at all, obviously. And then some of the neighbors even said that they saw him sit down and drink tea right next to his daughter's dead body. We know that the victim was a divorced woman in her late thirties. She had been living in her family home, but at one point she went to a woman's facility saying that she was experiencing domestic abuse. A few days later, she was back at her parents' house and killed not long afterwards. Throughout my research, I've been seeing a very alarming statistic from the UN that says around 50,000 women around the world are killed each year by intimate partners or family members. But then the UN estimates that only 5,000 of these are honor killings. (Al Jazeera English, 2020)

I've actually found research that says that around 20,000 are expected to be honor killings. And this research isn't from the United Nations. This is actually from NGOs around the world (AlQahtani et al. 2022). The article will be linked in the show notes.

In 2017, Jordan repealed a law that allowed rapists to escape punishment if they married their victims. And even more alarming, statistics find that around 65% of women inmates from six years ago were detained for their own protection. Over half of all of the inmates that were in the Jordanian prisons at the time, just let that sink in. So at one point there was a story about a 26 year old woman named Sasan who was detained for two years. Her story started when she was

13 and her sister was 14. Her father and stepmother used to really mistreat them and they used to leave them in the house and lock them in and deprive them of all kinds of freedoms. Sasan and her sister escaped home, but they lost each other. Sasan went to the police who put her in a juvenile center until she was 18. When she turned 18, she was transferred back to the governor who gave her two options : A either go back to her family or B: go back to the prison. But again, her father refused. So the governor told her that she had no choice but to stay in the prison. And the first three months were full of fear for her. She couldn't take it. She used to bury her head and cry wondering why her life had turned out this way. And she went through hell. She saw things that she had never seen before, all mixed up together. People throwing themselves down the stairs, breaking the sink to cut their arms, strangling and beating each other. One woman who was 32 at the time of this documentary was detained for seven months. She said they were living without proper food or drink and it was humiliating. They lived in a closed off room, they couldn't see the sun, the door was closed 24 hours a day. Sometimes she would find women hanging themselves in the bathroom, they'd cut off some cloth from the blankets, and in the mornings you would see that they had hung themselves. (Al Jazeera English, 2020)

So for me, this begs the question: if women were killing themselves in the Jordanian prisons, how many women truly have indirectly died from honor killings or for this matter, the threat of honor killings? We know that the UN estimates the number of honor based killings is thought to be much higher than 5,000 per year around the world. Same with the NGOs. This is the statistic that I keep seeing over and over again throughout my research, because it hasn't been updated. It hasn't been updated by the governments. It hasn't been updated by the organizations, and governments aren't giving us accurate numbers. So, how many women were killed in these

prisons in Jordan alone. One thing to think about the common pattern that I keep seeing about protective custody in Jordan is that these women need to be bailed out by the very same family members who are the reason they're there in the first place. But if they commit suicide while they're in protective custody, who cares that they've died? Their family members obviously don't care about them. They are leaving them there for a long time. They're the reason that they're in there in the first place. So they don't care about the lives of these women. And obviously the government will not want the protective custody system to gain even more controversy. This is why I think there's far more honor related deaths that go unreported.

A woman named Fatima, who was at the time of this documentary, 52 years old, was detained for 22 years. She accompanied her sister who was pregnant out of wedlock to the hospital, which was similar to another story we heard. Her sister was shot by her father and brother and died, leaving Fatima to survive. She remained in the hospital for six to seven months, and then the police came and put her in prison. When she entered the jail, she was 25 years old. When she left, she was around 48, 49. So when she went inside, they put her in the cells with murderers, drug addicts, thieves, and prostitutes. She no longer knew who she was and you know, she said her life was gone. Her youth was gone. Everything she wished for was gone. For most women, the only way to leave these prisons is through arranged marriages. Sasan, the young girl who was mentioned at the beginning of this video, she said that in her third year in the prison, a lawyer came and tried to help her out and said, "we can help find you a husband, a decent man to marry, and you can get out of here and you can go live with him." And so a few days later, a man who she was arranged to marry came to get her from the prison. She didn't even get to meet him. She didn't know anything about him. And he signed her marriage certificate and that was that was it

for her. She left and she didn't have a choice. And if she were ever to ask for a divorce or anything like that, she would just return right back to the prison or to her parents who would kill her. So it's just a constant circle. It's important to note, by the way, that the names of these women in the documentary were changed to protect their identity. And that concludes my multi-part series about Jordan. (Al Jazeera English, 2020) Thank you so much for listening and you can find all the source material on the website [www.honorkillingspodcast.com](http://www.honorkillingspodcast.com). Thank you so much.

## **EPIISODE 5: HONOR KILLINGS IN THE WEST AND THE SHAFIA KILLINGS IN CANADA**

Hello everyone. And welcome back to the honor killings podcast. My name is Bella Nowroozi, and the story I have for you today is very very crazy. I have been listening to true crime podcasts, reading about true crime, watching true crime videos, and reading about honor killings for so long now. And I have not heard anything like this story that I'm going to share with you guys today. Today's story is just one part of my entire series that I'm doing about honor killings in Western countries. So if you have not listened to the other parts, you can listen to them now, and please do so because I found a lot of interesting information. Without further ado, let's get into it. Today's story is about four women who were part of a family of 10, who were murdered by three people from their family. This is the story of the Shafia family killings. Sahar Shafia, Geeti Shafia, Zainab Shafia, and Rona Amir Mohammad. On June 30th, 2009, the Kingston police in Kingston, Ontario received a shocking phone call from a worker at the Kingston Mills. This employee was calling to report a submerged black Nissan Sentra with a damaged left tail light. Now, inside of this Nissan Sentra, a group of divers discovered the bodies of four women

floating inside. So when that phone call came to police that morning, at first they thought that this might have been a stolen car, or even just a prank from a group of teenagers. But then something quickly caught the police's attention, because that very same morning, a man named Mohammad Shafia was present at the Kingston police station to report the disappearance of four of his family members. They were three teenage daughters and an alleged aunt. Police and investigators had absolutely no idea what was to come from this investigation because inside of that car was the body of three sisters and their father's first wife from a polygamous marriage. This discovery revealed an intricately planned, but obviously poorly executed, honor killing which would soon astound all of Canada with its shocking details. So many of the details that I'm going to provide for you guys about this case comes from a 2012 documentary called House of Shafia by the Fifth Estate. And you can watch this documentary on YouTube. It gives a really good detailed analysis of this murder case. (The Fifth Estate, 2016) And many of the other details from this case that I'm going to be sharing with you guys comes from an article written by Michael Friscolanti that's titled, "Inside the Shafia Killings that Shocked a Nation." And this was written March 3rd, 2016. (Friscolanti, 2017). So if you guys are interested, I'm going to be linking both of these in the source material. And I highly recommend reading this article if you have the time. It's really long, but it does give a very, very detailed account of the Shafia family killings.

This story starts off in Afghanistan with the father of the family. Mohammed Shafia who grew up from a middle-class family in Kabul, and he was not really considered to be a very educated man by Western standards. However, Mohammad was a very successful businessman and ended up making millions of dollars, both in Dubai and in Canada, and just traveling all around the world

to do work. So as this is a family of 10, this story has a lot of names and a lot of people. So it's going to be a bit hard to keep track of who everyone is, and I'm going to try to do my best to structure this in a very clear way for everyone to understand. As part of an arranged marriage, Mohammad went on to marry a woman named Rona Amir who was the daughter of a retired army colonel. So throughout her marriage to Mohammad, Rona kept a diary that was actually used as a very big part of this investigation for evidence, and just to figure out the dynamics of this family. She wrote in her diary that once she got married to Mohammad, her life began to spiral downwards. And after many years of trying to conceive, Rona was unable to do so. And Mohammad often shamed her for this. So in a fit of anger, she told Mohammad, 'go and take another wife. What can I do?' And so he did. The second wife was Tooba Mohammad Yahya, who was 17 years old and she was a relative of one of his friends. And she was about half his age and he was old enough to be her father. So according to Mohammad, allegedly, it was Rona who helped him pick his second wife, even though Rona herself had kind of a different recollection of all of this. And I'm assuming this was made apparent in her diary, which was thoroughly investigated. And also, it seems as though the second wife Tooba was not very excited about this marriage either. There were even photos of the three of them standing together at this wedding. Not long after the wedding, Tooba ended up becoming pregnant with the first child, Zainab. So the circumstances surrounding one of their other children, Sahar, was a bit strange because actually what had happened was that Tooba ended up giving quote on quote "ownership" of Sahar to Rona, the first wife in the relationship. So throughout all of this, Rona's role was kind of just to help Tooba the second wife take care of the babies and just help out around the house. Throughout all of that, she was also praying for a child of her own. Throughout all of this, Tooba was trying to isolate, alienate, and kind of other Rona. As well as just trying to separate her from

her husband and just trying to separate her from the rest of the family altogether, as though she was never there. So you might be thinking, well, didn't she give the "ownership" quote on quote of their second daughter Sahar to Rona to take care of? This seems like something kind and something that a caring person would do. But this just seemed to be a bit of a manipulative tactic on Tooba's end; she just wanted to give Rona everything that Rona had ever wanted: a child, someone to look after, someone to distract her. Then, when the son Hamed was born, Rona wrote in her diary that happiness had left her. And then Tooba went on to say that Mohammad should stay three nights with her and just one night with Rona and Rona wrote this in her diary. So then there were seven children, one was named Geeti and she was the youngest daughter. She's also a very important person to note for this story because she is one of the girls who ended up getting killed. Two of the other kids in this family were kind of known to be tattletales. So they were siding with their parents, spying on their sisters, giving information about their sisters, to their parents. That's the role we know of the other two kids to play. And then the last child ended up in foster care. The family settled in Dubai for a little while in hopes of leaving Afghanistan. And then they ended up moving to Canada. After they moved to Canada, Rona actually ended up being left behind because in Canada it's illegal to have two wives. So actually the reason that Mohammad was able to even take the family to Canada is because he was a wealthy man who ended up investing in Canada. And during that time he invested \$400,000 as part of the immigrant investor program, which allowed him and his family to move to Canada. Other sources say that he invested around \$2 million in total. After the rest of the family moved to Canada, they had to find a way for Rona to come. And since it was illegal to have two wives in Canada, he actually ended up lying to the Canadian government and saying that Rona was his cousin who was there to take care of the kids. And then, that qualified her to get a temporary

visitor's visa. Throughout their time in Dubai, Rona wrote in her diary that Tooba enjoyed a lot more privileges than she did, this included driving and buying a bunch of gold. And then she just did this all in kind of a stealthy way in order to not draw attention to the whole thing. She was playing this whole innocent act. She didn't want to draw attention to Rona. She just wanted to enjoy privileges and kind of dangle it in front of her face. As soon as he moved to Canada, Mohammad built a \$900,000 mansion to house all 10 members of the family. When it came time for the kids to go to school, Zainab, Sahar and Hamed, three of the kids, all went to school together. Zainab and Sahar wanted to integrate into Canadian society, but they found it difficult to do so because they were going to school with their brother and he would spy on them and report back to their parents. And then a classmate of Zainab's, his name is Ammar Wahid, (originally Pakistani) he took notice of Zainab and started liking her. So he slipped a note into her locker that said, "if you think it's appropriate for us to begin talking then wear white the next day." So then Zainab did that, and then they started their relationship after he sent her a Valentine. (Friscolanti, 2017) (The Fifth Estate, 2016)

That's when everything changed. And on the other hand, Sahar was accused by her mother of kissing a boy. Then the mom even went into the school and started shouting at the principal and the staff at the school, basically saying that Sahar isn't allowed to do this and basically blaming the school for the way that she believed her daughter was acting. So she blamed the school for that. And just throughout their time at that school, the staff and the teachers noticed that there were problems with Zainab and Sahar. For example, one of the girls fainted in class and just looked like she hadn't been eating and was just not doing well. It was really obvious to the teachers. So in total they called child protective services three times. The child protective



services didn't do anything to help these girls. They knew what was happening. They even had talks with the parents and they asked the girls individually. They asked one of the girls individually, if she was facing abuse at home. And she said, yes. And then the father walked in and they asked the father if the child was being abused at home. And then the father said, no, And then the child, the girl, one of them, she changed her answer to that question once the father came in, and then child protective services just didn't do anything about it because basically they thought that there was no evidence of abuse since she changed her answer to the question.

One time, Sahar threatened to commit suicide. And she was telling everything to her vice-principal. She was telling her vice-principal everything about her home life and the vice principal called child welfare services in Quebec. And they didn't do anything about it. Even though this girl was threatening to commit suicide. Actually, her sisters saw her once go so far as to attempt suicide. She took one of those white Silicon gel packets, the ones that usually come and shoe boxes, and she mixed it with water and drank the water. When that happened, Rona and Geeti were really hysterical and they were rushing to her side after she drank it. In her diary, Rona ended up saying that Tooba didn't care about this attempt, and she wished that her daughter had gone through with it. Throughout all of this, Rona would go on walks in the park because she wasn't really being paid attention to. She wasn't really being as heavily supervised as the others. So she would basically slip through the cracks and just go on walks in the park. And during that time she had no money. She had a very, very small allowance. She used that money to phone relatives from Afghanistan to explain to them what's happening at home. They went on to basically keep her in contact with others that they knew abroad, relatives in the United States. She would only be using these payphones to talk to her relatives. And she would be talking to

one woman in particular for three times a week, maybe. That relative said that Rona had no freedom at home and she wanted to get a divorce from her husband, but her husband threatened to kill her if she did so. The only reason she stayed was because she wanted to stay with the kids too. Rona felt bad for them. She felt like she had to be there for them. (Friscolanti, 2017) (The Fifth Estate, 2016)

Zainab was sent away to a different school. She didn't have contact with her boyfriend Ammar Wahid, but she found a way to contact him and met him secretly over time. Then Sahar would also come with her new boyfriend who was introduced to her by Zainab. That boyfriend was named Ricardo Sanchez and he was from Honduras. Just a quick side note. If you watch that documentary that I'm talking about in the show notes, the one that I'm going to be linking in the show notes, basically the one that I got most of my information from, if you could just see Ammar's face throughout all of this. He looks obviously so depressed. He was so in love with Zainab and he just lost himself. He's not the same person he used to be after losing her. He looked so depressed. (Friscolanti, 2017) (The Fifth Estate, 2016)

Hamed and his father used to beat Zainab and Geeti very often. And at one point, Zainab just couldn't take it anymore. So she ran away. Zainab sought refuge in a women's shelter. During all of this, her father's main concern was that Zainab was sleeping with random men. The other kids in the family were obviously devastated by this action. So their grades started slipping. They were depressed, barely showing up to school. Their teachers took notice of all of this. The social workers were called again. At that point, Geeti even made a statement that said she wanted to live with a foster family and that she was tired of living with her family. Once again, these

reports were not taken seriously. For a child to come out and say that they want to live with a foster family, that should be enough of a red flag for social workers. To know that this child doesn't have a happy home life. Tooba was able to find a way to contact Zainab and Tooba told her that she can come back home and marry Ammar, so Zainab decided to come back home. Actually, she was reluctant at first. She didn't want to come back home, but it was Amar who convinced her that maybe her parents were finally coming around. And to this day, he feels so guilty about doing that. In the documentary, he was saying that he blamed himself for her death. (Friscolanti, 2017) (The Fifth Estate, 2016)

Rona was kind of observing things from the sidelines. And she overheard a conversation between Tooba, Hamed, and Mohammad Shafia in which Mohammad Shafia basically told Hamed and Tooba that he's going to prepare documents and sell his properties to go back to Afghanistan and he was going to kill Zainab. Rona told her sister about this, her sister who lives in France and her sister told her that nothing was going to happen to her because they were living in the west. I'm sure she actually thought that this was true. I'd like to think that she would have done something. And she's also one of the people in the documentary who ended up blaming herself for their death. So Zainab ended up marrying Ammar, but then for whatever reason, she had to divorce him not long afterwards. The parents, Tooba and Mohammad went back to Dubai to do some business. And they left Hamed in charge of the household. And Hamed was going on a little power trip to say the least. He was bossing the girls around, just keeping constant tabs on them, and being very strict with them. Sahar was spending a lot of time with her boyfriend. Once her dad left the country and she even snuck him into the house, and Hamed found out one day and was furious with her. Sahar's dream was to rescue Geeti, her younger sister from this

lifestyle, from this family. At school, she even asked her teacher if it would be possible to take Geeti with her, to which her math teacher said no. When Geeti learned of this, she was so stressed out and anxious. The principal at her school had to spend an hour calming her down at lunch. Then Geeti didn't show up to school for days before she died. Seven weeks later, the police found a page in one of her notebooks full of affectionate doodles to Sahar. She wrote. S plus G for life. She looked up to Sahar and Sahar was her favorite person in the entire world. (Friscolanti, 2017) (The Fifth Estate, 2016)

One of her siblings found out about Sahar's relationship with her boyfriend and, Sahar told one of her teachers that she was really stressed out because she was worried that the sibling would tell her father. She wasn't doing well in school. It was very obvious that she wasn't doing well. So the service workers were called on her again. But Geeti also wasn't doing well. She was failing four of her classes and had even gone down a rampant shoplifting spree. As all of this was going on, Hamed, the father, and Tooba had all devised a plan together and Hamed was kind of the mastermind behind everything. He was doing all of the research. He was searching for bodies of water and his Google search history looked very suspicious. He also ended up canceling Zainab's phone plan. It's important to know, as I mentioned at the beginning of this podcast episode, Zainab is older than Hamed, but Hamed had all of the control over her. The parents finally came back from Dubai and announced that they want to take a family trip to Niagara Falls. The story ends with Mohammad somehow convincing Sahar, Zainab, Geeti, and Rona to get in one car together on this trip. Then what they did is they used another car to push the vehicle into the canal at Kingston. The car fell into the water and the four of them tragically drowned. The idea was for them to try to stage a traffic accident, but then investigators wiretapped their car and

ended up finding out the truth. They heard the full story. Everything was pieced together. And the three of them ended up getting arrested and charged. (Friscolanti, 2017) (The Fifth Estate, 2016)

Out of every story that I looked up and read about in relation to honor killings, I think this one is the one that resonates with me the most. This is the one that broke my heart the most. And this is the one that I'll remember for the rest of my life. These four women and girls were constantly failed by those around them, by those who were supposed to protect them from harm. I only gave you guys the tip of the iceberg when it comes to this story, but this story has so many details. So many characters, so many people who are involved, who knew exactly what was happening, but did nothing to stop it or try to solve the issue at all out of fear. I don't necessarily blame the family members and friends of these four victims because who could have ever predicted that something this crazy was going to arise from this. I will say, though, I do believe that the school did a good job of noticing the behavioral changes in these girls and reporting it to the social workers. But I will say the social workers did not do their job properly. It's very obvious they weren't trained properly to handle situations like this because they let it go multiple times. They didn't do anything to help these girls. And we also have to think about it this way, right?

Mohammad Shafia was a very wealthy man. He was a multimillionaire. Part of me also thinks that his wealth had something to do with why people didn't step into help.

This story teaches us to not ignore the warning signs. If you know that someone around you is not doing well, it doesn't even have to be related to honor killings. It can be related to anything. We don't know what people's struggles are. And if you can tell that someone's not doing okay,

please try to do something to help them because you never know what the consequences of those actions will be. I can tell you right now that a lot of people in this story, a lot of people in this case, really regret not stepping in to help these girls. A lot of people have regrets. A lot of people even blame themselves for not doing anything. You don't ever want to be put in a position where you feel that way and you shouldn't have to be put in a position where you feel that way. I understand that a lot of people would be scared of such abusers and they're scared of what those people could do to them. But just know that if you don't step in, someone else in those situations might have it much worse than you. Thank you so much for listening to this episode. And if you want more detailed information on this case, you can find some in the source material on our website. And there's also tons of other information about this case. If you're curious to learn more, the source material for this episode is on our website. [www.honorkillingspodcast.com](http://www.honorkillingspodcast.com).

## **EPISODE 6: HONOR KILLINGS IN THE WEST (ALI IRSAN, NASIM IRSAN, NESREEN IRSAN, GELAREH BAGHERZADEH, COTY BEAVERS, AND NOOR ALMALEKI)**

Hello everyone. And welcome back to the honor killings podcast. My name is Bella Nowroozi, and today we're going to be talking about honor killings in the West. And in this episode, we actually have an interview with someone who was connected to the Ali Irsan case, which I'll be explaining in this episode.

I actually had never heard of the Irsan case until I started talking to my mom about my research project and she told me that she knows someone who was friends with the Bagherzadeh family.

So in this phone call recording, this is also my first time hearing about this case. After that, I became fascinated with this case and I watched the Netflix documentary “I’m a Killer” episode about this case. This case is one of the most high profile cases in Houston history. Ali Irsan was a Jordanian immigrant in the US, and he had a very large family and his family dynamics were very complicated. He ran a very strict Muslim household, and his daughter Nesreen and her sister wanted to conform to Western standards of living. So they eventually defied his strict rules once they went off to college. Then after a while, Nesreen started dating an American guy named Coty Beavers. They also both became involved with a group of Christian friends. Eventually, Nesreen had had enough of her father's rules and decided to climb out of a window of their house in the middle of the night and run away to live with Coty Beavers, her boyfriend. She also ended up secretly befriending this Christian girl named Gelareh Bagherzadeh who came from Iran. Gelareh was a student and a human rights activist. I interviewed one of Gelareh’s family friends, Khadijeh Raki, and she kind of explained the community reaction to this case. So take a listen.

*Interviewer: “Do you mind telling me from the very beginning what you know about this story and your connection to it?”*

*Okay, um, I met Gelareh's mom and dad at Lifetime Fitness. And, uh, I met them there. Then I met them with Gelareh at a few Iranian parties like New Year's and stuff. Then, I met Gelareh in a few different ways, um, like protesting against the Iranian government. And she was a really open-minded and very happy girl. And she was one of those girls that talked her mind, you know, yes, she, she would talk and fight back against whatever was not right. So Gelareh became friends with a girl in university, whose parents were from Jordan. Then, the girl had an American*

*boyfriend. The dad and mom were against the poor American guy because they were very religious. So, they wanted their children to marry a Muslim person just like them. Okay, so their daughter, the Jordanian daughter, ran away with the boyfriend.*

*First she goes, and stays at Gelareh's house. Okay. And, when the Jordanian dad finds out, he calls and looks like he starts arguing with Gelareh. Okay. And Gelareh, tells 'em that you guys are wrong and this and that, and she talks against Muslim laws and Islam laws and all that. What happens, the dad thinks that the reason their daughter is against them, most of it is because of Gelareh, you know? She's not a good character for her daughter, his daughter. Good influence, yeah. She's a bad influence for their daughter.*

*After a while, we found out what happened. The dad and mom and their son were following Gelareh from university. Then they followed her from there to the house. What happens when Gelareh gets near the house, they shoot her, shoot her in the head from their car. And the, uh, the son said, it was the Jordan father and his wife. And the son looks like shot the girl, but then, first they said that dad did it, then they said son did it. Anyway, they shot her and she lost control and she went to one of the garages behind their house, which was a townhouse next to each other and they called the police actually, it's the whole news.*

*If you check Houston News about Gelareh Bagherzadeh, everything comes up, even her pictures and all that and exactly the story, the picture of the guys and the family, the Jordanian guy. After that, they find out, they call the police and find Gelareh. We found out the next day. They ran*



*away. They ran away, so they didn't know what happened and who shot Gelareh till after a few months.*

*The Jordanian guy kills his own son in law, the son in law, the American one. The one his daughter ran away with.*

*Interviewer: So, what about the daughter? Did anything happen to her?*

*Nothing happened to her because when she was out, when she came home, she saw her husband died. So she knew that's her father who did it. So she goes to the police and tells police everything. So then they found out these two killings, you know, they are connected. So that's the way they found out who really killed Gelareh.*

*Interviewer: And so, do you know where they found the father and the rest of the family, the Jordanian father?*

*They live in Houston. They live in, yeah, they live in Houston and, they live in actually out of the town in a farm area. And the way I heard these people actually, they carried a lot of guns underground and they had a lot of cash with them too. Because of a certain way they start getting a lot of money from the government, you know, in different ways, like disability, this, that, you know how some people do that?*

*So the police found out the connection between the two deaths. Then they found out he killed another one of his sons a few years back.*

*Interviewer: So how did he get away with it? Because you said that he was hiding somewhere after he killed Gelareh, so he was hiding.*

*No, he wasn't hiding. The police couldn't figure out who did it till he killed his own son in law.*

*Interviewer: So what was the reaction? Do you know what was the reaction from the Iranian community in Houston when all of this happened?*

*Everybody was really upset and sorry and, angry because first they thought even it might be a political thing, you know, they thought because Gelareh was in a lot of demonstrations against the Iranian government, they thought maybe some Iranian person, you know, did it because of what happened in Iran and there is a lot of people in from Iran who they work for the government and they live in the United States. So they thought maybe they did that. So, but the whole thing came out after the guy killed his own son in law.*

*Interviewer: Okay, so they thought, everyone thought that at first, Gelareh was killed by someone from the Iranian government because she was active in the woman life freedom movement?*

*It wasn't, that time wasn't woman life freedom. It was the time Ahmadinejad actually was working.*

*Interviewer: Oh, so this is a case from what year exactly?*

*I don't remember. But, uh, if you check, Google it, just Google Gelareh Bagherzadeh.*

So, as you can tell, that was my very first time listening to this case. The details of this case are extremely shocking. And this is another one of those cases that just really resonates with me.

*Yeah, it's not good at all. And, you know, like, Yeah, and it's also happening a lot in Iran, too.*

*Interviewer: That's part of the reason that I'm doing this project, is to bring awareness to it happening all around the world and even in history.*

*Yeah, I mean, Houston has a lot of Pakistani people. I know that, uh, they, uh, even there was a guy with his wife and his sister, they killed two of their daughters because they had a boyfriend.*

*Interviewer: Yeah, this is very common actually, Because I'm, I'm also examining like honor killings in Western countries, and they're very different from honor killings in the Middle East, because they are usually about someone from an immigrant family who is struggling to you know, maintain their identity from their ethnic background, but kind of conform and fit in with Western society*

*Interviewer: Do you know anything about the Jordanian girl? Like what happened to her after that?*

*I think she's living by herself now, but I know the mother and the son and father, they're in jail. The son, they were going to do the death penalty too. They were going to kill the son too. Yeah, the son was on death penalty. The dad was on death penalty. But the son, because when that happened, he was under 18, so he was under the dad's influence. And they even interviewed the son in the documentary, and he told everything.*

*So they tried, the lawyers, they tried not to do the death penalty, but they put him in jail for a long time, for like 40 years, something like that.*

*Interviewer: So, if you don't mind sharing this part, what did Gelareh's parents say about all of this to you?*

*Gelareh's parents, they, I mean, you know they brought the daughter from Iran to you know, do the rest of her education in the best, one of the best universities in the U.S.,*

*Interviewer: And you also were friends with Gelareh?*

*Yeah, Gelareh came because when we met, first we met dad. The dad was here from Iran first, then after a few years, he brought in mom and his daughter.*

*Interviewer: And how close would you say you are with their family? Are you close?*

*No, we were not very close, but we were spending time in Lifetime Fitness, and then we went to their house. Because not that long after they came, this happened, you know?*

*Interviewer: So you didn't know them for very long?*

*No, I knew them for more than a year. But we met all the time at Lifetime Fitness. So we talked a lot and we did exercises together. And then after a while this happened because poor Gelareh was not here that long after she came. She was here for maybe two, three years when this happened. So it took them a long time. To bring a Gelareh for her PhD, right? So, and they, they were in shock, the poor guys and poor things. After that they moved to Washington and they took Gelareh's body to Washington too, because they had a son there, which, the son had a wife and the child, they were going to be close to their son after.*

*They had another son in, I think in Texas, in San Antonio or Austin. I don't know exactly, but they took Gelareh with them. It's really hard. I think that's the hardest thing in life for a parent to lose their child. I mean, if you lose the parent it is easier than losing a child. And it was really sad, very sad.*

*Interviewer: I mean, it sounds, it sounds so depressing. This is the first time I'm hearing this story and it's very depressing. Because the difference between this one and the other stories that I'm talking about, this one didn't happen from someone that she knew. It didn't happen from someone who was in her own family. It happened from someone who was kind of a, basically a complete stranger to her. Her friend's family.*

*Exactly. Exactly. Yeah, this is very different from what I've typically heard before. And the way I heard, she didn't even meet them. She might talk to them on the phone, you know? Poor thing. I mean, it's a very sad situation, what happened to Gelareh.*

*Interviewer: I'm assuming because you said that her family took her body to Washington, did you go to her funeral?*

*I went to a gathering they had for her here in the church. Because Gelareh became Christian, so that was another thing which I think the guy got very angry too because he really looked at Gelareh as an enemy.*

*So, yeah, we went to the church, and they had a big gathering. A lot of people came, a lot of Iranian community, they got together because the parents were really nice people, and even though they were not here too long, they already knew a lot of people. Very friendly, very friendly people. Yeah. It was a sad situation.*

*Interviewer: Are you still in contact with her family now?*

*I saw them not long ago and one of the friend's fathers died and they came down from Washington. When they come here, we usually meet them somewhere or they call us to meet.*

*Interviewer: And so, how are they doing now?*

*They're okay. They look okay, but I think there is something there you never forget. There is something dark in their heart that stays there forever.*

*Interviewer: I'm sure they think about her every single day.*

*Of course. Yeah. Definitely. I mean, they're never going to be normal people like before. You still can see in their face, they are heartbroken. Yeah, and especially the girl was really happy, loud, funny, active. She was all that. She wasn't quiet or anything. She was singing all the time when she was in the house. I mean, she was one of those girls with a lot of noise, you know? So, I'm sure their house just shut down after Gelareh left. Very sad.*

*Interviewer: One other thing, and this is probably kind of a bit of a crazy question to ask, but do you know if, I mean, you may not know the answer to this either, but do you know at all if Gelareh's family is still in any way in touch with the Jordanian girl?*

*No, I don't think so. No. But they came down every time there was a court, I believe. Till they found out they were gonna put them in the death penalty. No. Yeah. I don't think so. They don't have any connection with them. That's why they left Houston. That's another thing. They stayed away from them. These people were dangerous. They were even doing drugs. They even found drugs in their house.*

*Interviewer: The parents and the child?*

*Yeah, yeah, the parents, they, yeah, they, they were even on drugs and selling drugs and everything. They were really messed up people.*

*Interviewer: So do you think they were under the influence when they committed this crime?*

*No. No. No. The guy, I mean, when you see the guy, he, you can tell he's really crazy. He's a really scary crazy guy and I don't think he's sorry about what he did.*

*Interviewer: One other question, actually, I should have asked this sooner, but did you actually go to any of the court hearings yourself?*

*No, no, I didn't, but there were a few gatherings for Gelareh. And the police came and explained what happened. But, yeah I've been following the news because every time there was something about Gelareh's court, they would say it on the Houston News. So, I've been following that, plus the documentary they came out with not long ago. Do you know, did you see the documentary?*

*Interviewer: No, I actually have no idea about any of the details of this. This is the first time I'm hearing it.*

*I'm gonna send you that documentary then. Yeah, I'm gonna send it because that's not a long time ago since they made it. They made it after they took the Jordanians' son from the death penalty. They took him out of that because they found out he was a minor. So yeah, after that they interviewed him, and he told everything and they interviewed one of Gelareh's close friends.*



*Interviewer: Do you know her friend? Is she Iranian too?*

*Yes, he's a he, he's Iranian, yes. Yeah, he's Iranian. And I met him a few times, but to be honest with you, I forgot his name.*

*Interviewer: Do you know other people who were interviewed? Like, do you know them personally?*

*They interviewed that guy only specifically, and the son of the old Jordanian guy. Oh, okay. He was the main guy who talked more, and then the friend.*

*We always met each other in Iranian community places where they have gatherings and stuff. Yeah, and we went to their house and we found out what happened to Gelareh the night after that.*

*Interviewer: Oh, so you saw them right after?*

*Yeah, the night after we went there.*

*Interviewer: And it was to pay your respects?*

*Yes you're right We went to their house. It was really scary. And they, the parents, were in shock. I mean, I don't know how to even say it. They were just lost. They were just lost in their own heads.*

*Interviewer: I was also gonna ask, I actually did think of one more question, but I was gonna ask, do you know if people felt like anything could've been done to prevent this situation? Like were there any warning signs?*

*No, no. No. No, no, not at all. There was no warning sign because the situation didn't look that big of a deal, you know? Gelareh was just friends with this Jordanian girl and she had fallen in love with this American guy. And Gelareh gave her some space after she ran away from the father's house because even I heard the father could have killed the girl. The girl in the documentary, you will see the girl ran away from the window or something from their house. Because even her life was in danger.*

*Interviewer: That's why I'm a bit shocked because it seems like his anger was with the daughter. I mean not to say that it was justified at all because it wasn't none of these actions were justified at all, but it seems like he took out his anger for his daughter on Gelareh.*

*Yeah, he took it from Gelareh then after a few months I think it lasted maybe more than six months. He found out where their daughter and her husband lived and they went and found the husband by himself and they killed him. They shot him. Then the daughter comes home and finds out the husband is dead.*

*So, she tells the police everything.*

*Interviewer: What else did you hear from Iranians about all of this? Did you hear anything else that you think is important to share?*

*No, I know Gelareh was really active. She was an activist too. Yeah she went to, actually when Ahmadinejad the former Iranian president came to New York, even Gelareh was there too, in front. Yeah, but they get, every few years the presidents of different countries come to the United Nations. When Ahmadinejad came to the United Nations and some of her Iranian friends, they were there. Iranian people from all over the U.S. They usually gather there in front of the United Nations and demonstrate against the Iranian government. So she was there too, yeah. She was really active about this.*

After this interview, I decided to watch the documentary that Ms. Raki was talking about. I have so many mixed emotions about this case. My heart really goes out to the families of the victims. And I cannot imagine what they had to go through with all of this. After doing a bit more digging, I realized that there's people out there who are petitioning for Nasim, the son of Ali Irsan, who was the one who was the mastermind behind everything. I saw online that there were petitions to get him out of jail. I would encourage everyone to watch that documentary, but part of me almost feels bad for Nasim. Of course, I definitely believe that he should have said something to the police. I can also understand the fear from his end of what his father could have done to him. So this is why I think this situation is so complicated. I also can't imagine what Nesreen was going through because she lost her best friend and then lost her husband. And at the

same time, two of her family members got locked up in jail. And on top of that, it was later revealed that her father had intentions to also kill her. I can't help but believe that part of her feels responsible for all of this. There's probably a part of her who honestly blames herself for all of this blames her own actions. That heavy feeling, that burden should not be on anyone. And this is all because she wanted to live a normal life and have the same freedoms that everyone around her had. It's easy to place blame on her and say, if she had never done any of these things and nothing would have happened. But how could she have predicted what her father truly wanted to do and what his intentions truly were? I truly see her as a victim in all of this. The desire to fit in in a Western culture when your parents come from a different culture is very real. All of the cases that I examined about honor killings in the West have to do with this feeling of not fitting into the culture that your parents brought you into. I think everyone from an immigrant family has felt that struggle throughout their lives. I completely empathize with what Nesreen was going through because I've gone through the same thing. This case is also very similar to the Noor Amaleki case. Amaleki's experience had striking similarities to Nesreen's. This was the first honor killing case that was really popularized in the US media. CBC created a 48 hours episode on this case. (Freed & Leach, 2012)

This was kind of the first time that most people in the US heard about the concept of honor killings. Noor Amaleki's family left Iraq when Noor was just four years old to go live in Phoenix, Arizona. Noor Amalaki's father had high expectations for her and he really didn't like that she was starting to conform to a Western standard of living. After that, her father tried to send her back to Iraq to marry a cousin. She was terrified. They left her in Iraq all by herself, and they told her she could only return if she married her cousin. Then she ended up returning

without having gotten married. She ended up running away to live with her boyfriend and his mom who are both also Iraqi. Then her father tracked her down and ran over her and her boyfriend's mom with his car. Her boyfriend's mom ended up surviving, but she (Noor) unfortunately tragically passed away. Her father fled to the UK to escape after he ran over them. And he was extradited back to the US and tried for their murders. (Freed & Leach, 2012)

As I mentioned earlier, the issue of honor killings is not Muslim. It's not strictly Muslim and it's not strictly Middle Eastern. I read a very interesting article that I wanted to share a segment of with you guys. And this article, titled "Shades of Foreign Evil: Honor Killings and Family Murders in the Canadian Press" by Allie Shier and Eron Shor. They conducted a systematic qualitative content analysis, examining a sample of 486 articles from three major Canadian newspapers between 2000 and 2012. They talked about tons of different cases of what could be considered honor killings, but the Canadian media labeled them otherwise because they tended to come from white families. Especially cases of domestic violence between spouses. Several of these were mentioned in their article. (Shier & Shor, 2016)

Perhaps the issue of honor killings does have some kind of connection to certain religions. I'm not saying this to be true, but there is a striking difference between how they're labeled. They stated, "this notion that honor killings and sometimes family murders more broadly are imported to progressive and civilized Western nations from archaic stagnant and misogynistic societies was a very common theme in the articles. We examined how such statements ignore the fact that barbaric family murders have always been a common practice in Western societies, including Canada. And in fact, even higher rates before the recent waves of immigration. There is no

evidence that Canadian, visible minorities or immigrants are associated with increased levels of spousal violence compared with other ethnic groups. According to statistics Canada in 2011, only 5% of visible minorities versus 6% of non-visible minorities self-reported experiencing spousal violence in the same report, 4% of immigrants and 7% of non-immigrants reported being a victim of spousal violence” (Shier & Shor, 2016).

My research also found that honor killings have been known since ancient Roman times. They were also known in medieval Europe, where early Jewish law mandated death by stoning for an adulterous wife and her partner. But today they are still prevalent in the Middle East. (Husseini, 2021)

Wikipedia states that France’s article 324 inspired laws in other Arab countries such as Algeria’s 1991 penal code article 29; Egypt's 1937 penal code number 58, article 237; Iraq's 1966 penal code article 409; Jordan's 1960 penal code number 16, article 340; and many others. These are all basically in the Middle East.

Did you also know that the Napoleonic code was the framework that allows for laws that protect perpetrators of honor killings in the modern day? This will be linked in the show notes so you can see for yourself. Noor Almaleki dreamt of being a teacher one day and Gelareh Bagherzadeh went to medical school. Gelareh was just weeks away from graduating when her life was brutally cut short. Gelareh never got to live on to see the woman life freedom movement take place in Iran. And I'm sure she would have been an active participant in that, as her main goal was to bring awareness to women's issues in Iran. I hope you found this episode to be useful for you.

Please keep these victims in mind. Source material for this episode can be found on our website. [www.honorkillingspodcast.com](http://www.honorkillingspodcast.com). Thank you for listening.

## **EPISODE 7- HONOR KILLINGS IN IRAN**

The main source that I'm going to be using to derive information from, for this podcast episode is an article called, "Iranian Women Campaign to Stop the Rise of Honor Killings" published on August 26th, 2021 by Fariba Parsa (Parsa, 2021). There's two articles in the Iranian penal code that have to do with honor killings. Parsa states that "article 630 of the Iranian penal code allows a man who witnesses his wife having sexual intercourse with another man to kill both of them if he is certain that she is a willing participant. Article 301 stipulates a father and paternal grandfather are not to be retaliated against for killing their own child. According to Islamic law, a father owns his child's blood and therefore he can go without penalty if he or his father kills his child. Similar laws also existed before the Iranian Revolution, but at the time the majority of women were largely under the men's control. This new generation of Iranian women, however, has access to the internet and social media, and is much more aware of their rights and does not follow the old cultural norms, which resists discrimination against women and limitations on personal freedom" (Parsa, 2021).

Actually learning about honor killings in Iran is the first time I learned what an honor killing even is. And it helped me familiarize myself with this issue. Iranians as a collective do push to bring about change when it comes to honor killings, especially Iranian women. Honor killings are well-known as a societal issue in Iran due to the advocacy work of Iranian women specifically to bring about awareness to this issue. In today's episode, we will be discussing

various cases of honor killings, especially cases that sparked nationwide outrage and protest. In a previous episode, I talked about the indirect deaths related to honor killings, especially by suicide. Fariba Parsa then goes on to state, “the number of honor killings victims is greater than reported. As in some cases, women were driven to suicide or the cause of death was not reported as a murder, but as illness” (Parsa, 2021).

According to Dr. Moghadam, founder of the Iranian organization to stop honor killings, Dr. Moghadam has documented more than 1,200 cases of honor killings in the country. According to research which will soon be published as a book and made available to the public. These kinds of violent killings of women and girls have been increasing in the last 20 years in different cities and villages around Iran. (Parsa, 2021)

Honor killings in Iran show us the familial and societal consequences for when a government is neglecting to resolve this issue. On February 2nd, 2024, just last month, news came out from Iran International that a man named Bahram murdered 12 people from his family for being involved or taking part in his sister's honor killing, which he witnessed at the age of just 12. He saw his father and brother killing his sister right in front of him at the age of 12. And this obviously left him with severe mental trauma. Now at the age of 22 on February 17th of this year, just within a month of me sharing this information with you all, he stormed into his family's home and killed 12 people before being killed by the police. He killed three brothers, two sisters, one sister-in-law, and four nephews. Three neighbors were also injured, but survived the injuries. (*Iranian Murders 12 as Revenge for Honor Killing of Sister*, n.d.)



Honor killings are a major problem in Iran and are going widely underreported due to the government's efforts of suppressing this information and trying to downplay the issue of honor killings. I have mentioned many times in previous episodes, 5,000 honor killings supposedly happen around the world per year according to the United Nations. Human rights activists measure an annual range of 375 to 450 in Iran alone. But these numbers often go under reported and are probably not very accurate (Parsa, 2021). However Bahram and his sister's story just goes to show that honor killings are leaving dark and prominent strains on other family members who bear witness to such horrific and tragic crimes. This just goes to show us that honor killings are severely impacting more people than just those who are killed or those who are facing the abuse directly.

Given how recent this story is, and similarly other stories coming out of Iran, it has me thinking just how prominent of an issue honor killings in Iran truly are. I think that the Iranian government really just needs to use Jordan as an example for growth when it comes to the issue of honor killings. I mean, as an Iranian, I do not believe at all whatsoever that the Iranian government cares in any way about women's rights. And data backs up that idea. I mean, think of the recent revolution and the women's rights protests that happened in Iran because women are being killed directly by the government. So of course the government isn't going to do anything to help protect them from being victimized by honor killings.

So the main case that helped me learn about honor killings is the case of Romina Ashrafi, which caused nationwide outrage and protests. This case was shared all over social media by millions of Iranians in May, 2020. At just 13 years old, she was beheaded by her own father with a sickle

while she slept. This is because Romina decided to run away with her 34 year old boyfriend to marry him. (Parsa, 2021)

Now do I think what Romina did was right? No. But that's not the point of this story. I mean, children make mistakes all the time and she was a child after all. If anything, I actually blame the grown man that she decided to run away with because what business does he have trying to marry a child? Romina and many children are also victims of grooming by grown men. And unfortunately, child marriage is still happening in Iran and that needs to be stopped as well. Were her father's actions in any way, shape or form justified? Absolutely not. If anything, the boyfriend was the one to blame. Fariba Parsa then goes on to state after considerable pressure from the public, Masumeh Ebtekar, then president Hassan Rohani's assistant for women's issues reacted by condemning the killing of children. She presented a bill named after Romina to strengthen the punishment for the honor killing of children, which the majority of the members of Iran's parliament, the Majlis, voted for. However, it was rejected by the guardian council, which claimed that the law was against Sharia. (Parsa, 2021)

The rise in social media significantly helped women and Iranians around the world to share Romina's story. And as an Iranian myself, I know that my mom really closely pays attention to the news that's coming out of Iran. She's in tons of group chats where they share stories like Romina's all the time. Iranians have recently become very active as a community when it comes to rallying together to bring awareness to issues like this around the world. Many of us are on the same page and we share these stories and rally together as a group to support one another. Especially the women of Iran. And they were the reason that this case was so publicized in

Western media. It got the attention that it deserved. We can continue to use social media as a tool to help spread these stories. Stories like Romina's. And we can use this to finally bring an end to this issue. (Parsa, 2021)

During the woman life freedom revolution, a story came out about a young girl named Mona Haydar. At just 12 years old, Mona had been married to her husband and then she gave birth to their son when she was 14 years old. She decided to run away to Turkey to escape domestic abuse. She was assured by her family that if she returned to Iran, she would be safe. Then when she returned, her husband and her brother-in-law beheaded her. After this, the people of Iran protested because they wanted the minimum age of marriage for children to be raised. It's currently set at 13 for girls, but girls even younger than that can legally marry with judicial and parental consent. Now are you ready to be angry when you hear how long these two spent in jail? Her brother-in-law was given a 45 month sentence and her husband was given only eight years. Now, keep in mind, this happened in 2023. So they're still serving their jail time, obviously. (Gritten, 2023)

On Tuesday, October 17th, 2023, an article came out that stated. "Surge in Honor Killings as 13 Women Lose Their Lives in Iran in 17 days" (*Surge in Honor Killings as 13 Women Lose Lives in Iran in 17 Days*, 2023). This was published by Iran International. Thank you so much for listening to this episode, and you can find the source material for this episode on the website, [www.honorkillingspodcast.com](http://www.honorkillingspodcast.com).

## References

- Al Jazeera English. (2007, May 17). *Riz Khan - Jordan Honour Killings - 15 May 07* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5Kh6FNve2E>
- Al Jazeera English. (2020, November 12). *Why are women murdered in the name of 'honour'?* | *Start Here* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nziwELWS5Ts>
- AlQahtani, Sarah M, Danah S Almutairi, Eman A BinAqeel, Reema A Almutairi, Reem D Al-Qahtani, and Ritesh G. Menezes. 2022. "Honor Killings in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: A Narrative Review." *Healthcare* 11 (1): 74. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare11010074>.
- Anees, M. S. (2022, July 28). 'Honor killings' continue unabated in Pakistan. *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2022/07/honor-killings-continue-unabated-in-pakistan/>
- Arnold, R., & Nguyen, J. (2023, October 19). The Evidence Room, episode 26 - The Honor Killings. *KPRC*. <https://www.click2houston.com/news/local/2023/10/19/the-evidence-room-episode-26-the-honor-killings/>
- Balaha, H. (2021, March 8). *Until when?! Honor Killings and Other Domestic Violence Against Women in Jordan*. POMED. <https://pomed.org/publication/until-when-honor-killings-and-other-domestic-violence-against-women-in-jordan/>
- Christou, W. (2023, January 10). Familial homicide in Jordan up by 94% in 2022: report. *The New Arab*. <https://www.newarab.com/news/familial-homicide-jordan-94-2022-report>

- D’Lima, Tanya, Jennifer L. Solotaroff, and Rohini Pande. 2020. “For the Sake of Family and Tradition: Honour Killings in India and Pakistan.” *ANTYAJAA: Indian Journal of Women and Social Change* 5 (1): 22–39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2455632719880852>.
- Feldner, Yotam. 2000. “‘Honor’ Murders – Why the Perps Get off Easy.” Middle East Forum. December 1, 2000. <https://www.meforum.org/50/honor-murders-why-the-perps-get-off-easy?ref=nf&ref=nf>.
- Freed, L., & Leach, J. (2012, September 2). Was Noor Almaleki the victim of an honor killing? *CBS News*. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/was-noor-almaleki-the-victim-of-an-honor-killing/>
- Friscolanti, M. (2017, March 18). *Inside the Shafia killings that shocked a nation*. Macleans.ca. <https://macleans.ca/news/canada/inside-the-shafia-killings-that-shocked-a-nation/>
- Gritten, B. D. (2023, January 18). Iranian man who beheaded 17-year-old wife jailed for eight years. *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-64319487>
- Hasanvand, R. (2023, October 17). *Surge in Honor Killings as 13 Women Lose Lives in Iran in 17 days*. Iran International. <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202310178706>
- Honor killing*. (n.d.). Academic Dictionaries and Encyclopedias. <https://en-academic.com/dic.nsf/enwiki/5011234>
- Husseini, R. (2021, August 3). Murdered women: A history of ‘honour’ crimes. *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/8/1/murdered-women-a-history-of-honour-crimes>
- Husseini, R. (2023, May 31). *Uncovering “Honor crimes” in Jordan and across MENA*. Wilson Center.

<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/uncovering-honor-crimes-jordan-and-across-mena>

*India and Pakistan account for 2000 honour killings every year.* (n.d.).

[https://hbv-awareness.com/india-and-pakistan-account-for-2000-honour-killings-every-year/#:~:text=Honour%20killing%20is%20the%20murder,Based%20Violence%20Awareness%20\(HBVA\).](https://hbv-awareness.com/india-and-pakistan-account-for-2000-honour-killings-every-year/#:~:text=Honour%20killing%20is%20the%20murder,Based%20Violence%20Awareness%20(HBVA).)

*Iranian murders 12 as revenge for honor killing of sister.* (n.d.). Iran International.

<https://www.iranintl.com/en/202402206332>

Journeyman Pictures. (2008, January 8). *Honour Killings - Jordan* [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iq5J1M2dNIU>

*Karma Nirvana.* (2024, March 1). Karma Nirvana. <https://karmanirvana.org.uk/>

Khafagy, F. (2005). Honour Killing in Egypt. *UN Division for the Advancement of Women in Collaboration With: UN Office on Drugs and Crime.*

<https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/vaw-gp-2005/docs/experts/khafagy.honorcrimes.pdf>

“Literacy in Iran – Women, and Girls Make up Two-Thirds of Illiterates.” NCRI Women Committee. January 14, 2022.

[https://women.ncr-iran.org/2021/09/08/literacy-in-iran-women-and-girls-make-up-two-thirds-of-illiterates/.](https://women.ncr-iran.org/2021/09/08/literacy-in-iran-women-and-girls-make-up-two-thirds-of-illiterates/)

Mains, Susan P. 2009. *Encyclopedia of Gender and Society.* SAGE Publications, Inc. eBooks.

[https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412964517.](https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412964517)

Meetoo, Veena, and Heidi Safia Mirza. 2007. ““There Is Nothing “Honourable” about Honour Killings’: Gender, Violence and the Limits of Multiculturalism.” *Women's Studies International Forum* 30 (3): 187–200. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2007.03.001>.

“Middle East | United Nations Security Council.” n.d.

<https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/repertoire/middle-east>.

Odgaard, L. (2014, March 25). Upsurge in Palestinian ‘honour killings.’ *Al Jazeera*.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2014/3/25/upsurge-in-palestinian-honour-killings>

Parsa, F. (2021, August 26). *Iranian women campaign to stop the rise in “honor killings.”* Middle East Institute.

<https://www.mei.edu/publications/iranian-women-campaign-stop-rise-honor-killings>

*Rana Hussein website.* (n.d.). Rana Hussein Website. <https://www.ranahusseini.com/>

Roya News. (2023, May 13). *Three women in Jordan murdered within week for*

*“honor.”* <https://en.royanews.tv/news/41727/2023-05-13>

Sadek, G. (2023, August 9). *Jordan: Two Honor-Killing Cases Transferred to Criminal Court for Trial.* The Library of Congress.

<https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2023-08-08/jordan-two-honor-killing-cases-transferred-to-criminal-court-for-trial/>

Shier, A., & Shor, E. (2016). “Shades of Foreign Evil.” *Violence Against Women*, 22(10), 1163–1188. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801215621176>

Singal, J. (2017, March 6). Here’s what the research says about American honor killings.

*Intelligencer.*

<https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2017/03/heres-what-the-research-says-about-american-honor-killings.html>

Singh, R. N., & Dailey, J. D. (2016, August 3). *Honor killing | Causes, Consequences & Solutions*. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/honor-killing>

Statista. 2020. “Arab Respondents on ‘Honor Killings’ MENA 2019.” August 26, 2020. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1019538/mena-arab-respondents-on-honor-killings/#statisticContainer>.

*Statistics on so called ‘honour-based’ abuse offences, England and Wales, 2021 to 2022*. (2022, October 13). GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statistics-on-so-called-honour-based-abuse-offences-england-and-wales-2021-to-2022/statistics-on-so-called-honour-based-abuse-offences-england-and-wales-2021-to-2022>

*Surge in honor killings as 13 women lose lives in Iran in 17 days*. (2023, October 10). Iran International. <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202310178706>

The Fifth Estate. (2016, June 27). *Shafia family murders : House of Shafia (2012) - the fifth estate* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjhLGiWILgc>

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. n.d. “REFWorld | Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC).” Refworld. <https://www.refworld.org/publisher,AIHRC,,50ffbce4f6,,0.html>.

United Nations. (2010, December 17). *Jordan: In the name of Honor* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51UG9Ctphi8>

*Violence against women a ‘mark of shame’ on our societies, says UN chief on World Day*. (2018, November 27). UN News. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/11/1026511>



Webteam, Web. 2012. "The Horror of 'Honor Killings', Even in US." Amnesty International USA. April 10, 2012.

<https://www.amnestyusa.org/updates/the-horror-of-honor-killings-even-in-us/>.

*Women victims of honor killing.* (n.d.).

<https://web.archive.org/web/20121209111420/http://www.yobserver.com/culture-and-society/1009304.html>

朱燧晨. (n.d.). 中国首例伊斯兰教"荣誉谋杀"案! 知乎专栏.

[https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/651349786?utm\\_id=0](https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/651349786?utm_id=0)