

Honor Killing, a Growing Worldwide Crisis: Preliminary Preventive Policies Using a Socio-ecological Perspective

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Dear Editor

Although honor killing seems to be a heartbreaking issue around the world, the recent occurrence of a heinous honor killing in Iran provoked a wave of astonishment and apprehension in society, both among the general public and social experts. The worrying occurrence of honor killings in the Middle East, combined with the war-torn conflict, activities of terrorist groups, and economic instability threatening the family system, necessitates the immediate identification of prevention strategies. Hence, using some of the available evidence, we aimed to propose a set of strategies based on an ecological approach to preventing honor killings.

Unfortunately, the last year's honor killing of a 17-year-old woman who was brutally beheaded by her husband and had her head turned on the street sparked a wave of public outrage in Iran. Honor killings occur in many cultures and countries of the world and are forgotten in silence. However, the peculiarity of the recent murder was that it soon went viral on social media, making people and experts think about its causes and solutions to stop it.

Honor killing, the most heinous and violent crime against women, is the murder of a girl or woman by members of her family including father, brother, husband, uncle, grandfather, or members of her tribe because she is thought to have shamed the family and the tribe and/or has disrespected the laws and traditions.^{1,2} Honor killing has socio-cultural roots and its continuation shows that no firm step has been taken to change it or the proposed solutions have been ineffective. Therefore, this culture of violence is still transmitted from generation to generation.

A report from the United Nations Population Fund estimated that approximately 5000 "honor killings" occur every year all around the world.³ However, a study estimated the number of victims in the Middle East and Southwest Asia to be four times higher than this report at around 20,000.⁴ In the Middle East region, Iran has been in the news in recent years due to frequent cases of honor killings; according to a report, 400 to 500 honor killings happen in Iran every year.⁵

In our view, a range of multiple factors or conditions in different intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, community, and policy levels influence the occurrence of honor killing. Intrapersonal factors may include, but are not limited to, women's powerlessness, lack of socio-communicative skills, legal illiteracy, inability to self-control emotional upsets like anger, and lack of adherence to human morality. Lack of social support, poor interpersonal relationships, increase in child marriages in recent years, and patriarchal supremacy in family relationships are among the interpersonal conditions that should be noted.

Community factors include poverty and unemployment, declining value of women in the community, lack of NGOs defending women's rights, tribal pressure, and unquestioning obedience to tribal senior-led and opinion leaders. Institutional factors include lack of proper education by educational institutions, insufficient attention and care by religious organizations, display of violent content by the mass media, injustice and unplanned economic and social institutions, and lack of attention to

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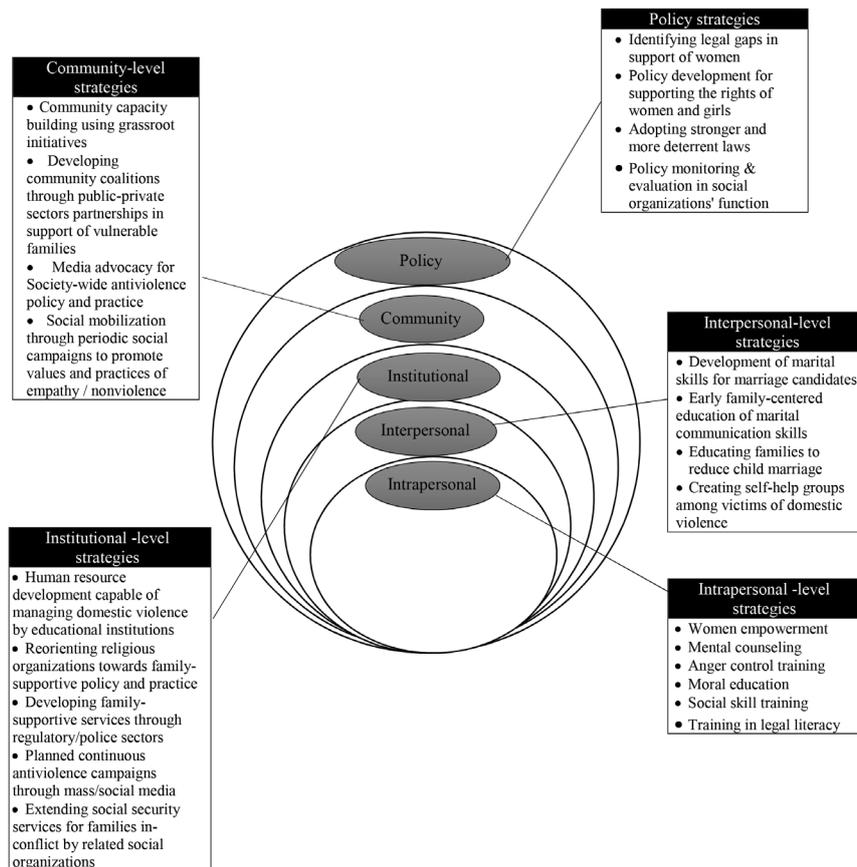


Figure 1: Proposed strategies to prevent honor killing based on socio-ecological approach.

programs in the health system to struggle with honor killing. Finally, political factors include legal gaps in the protection of women and girls and a lack of oversight over social and governmental organizations to enforce protectionist and educational laws.

Given the multifaceted causes of this problem, prevention strategies should be developed based on the socio-ecological approach. A socio-ecological model indicates that the determinants of gender-based violence are intertwined and accumulated at different individual, family, community, and social levels throughout life.⁶ Therefore, it is a suitable model for drawing our proposed strategies (Figure 1). Although the effectiveness and efficacy of these strategies need further studies, the urgency of the issue forced us to suggest some strategies at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, community, and policy levels for intervention and research. Intrapersonal strategies include those such as training, counseling, and giving information, which are presented towards self-improvement and self-empowerment. Interpersonal strategies include practical assistance, counseling, and training for couples and their families, as well as counseling with peers who have had successful experiences. Institutional strategies include organizational training to reduce domestic violence, orientation of religious organizations towards family support, and

development of social security services for families. Community strategies include community capacity building, development of social coalitions, media support, and social mobilization to promote values of empathy/non-violence in families and support of vulnerable families. Policy strategies include identifying legal gaps and developing policies, adopting stronger laws, and monitoring to protect women and girls. To prevent the recurrence of these disasters, it is necessary to develop programs based on the mentioned multiple strategies. The figure below presents our proposed strategies.

Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to this research.

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