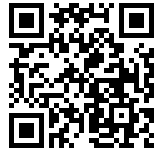


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Title: Representation of Femicide in National and International Dailies: A Case Study of Pakistan

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Representation of Femicide in National and International Dailies: A Case Study of Pakistan

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Abstract

This research analyzes the portrayal of Pakistani femicide cases in international and national newspapers. News articles published from 2017 to 2020 in the selected newspapers such as, *The Independent* (Britain), *The New York Times* (America), *Hindustan Times* (India), *Khaleej Times* (UAE), and *Dawn* (Pakistan) were selected for the analysis. Through quantitative and qualitative content analysis, the news articles related to the femicide cases were covered and analyzed with several frames used in both national and international newspapers. The results showed that the *Dawn* underreported the femicide incidents whereas the international dailies gave more coverage to femicide incidents in Pakistan. This study explored that femicide cases in Pakistan have strong association with indigenous culture, rituals, and religion. The international dailies also criticized the legislation and administrative efforts to expedite the action against femicide. However, violence in any form and to any extent is unacceptable.

Keywords: femicide, framing, international media, social values, violence against women

Introduction

The Human Rights Watch' defines femicide as an 'act of violence, usually murder, committed by intimate male family members, violence against female family members, who are perceived to have brought dishonor upon the family'' (Human Rights Watch, [2001](#)). Honor killing is characterized as a response to the conviction that a female or young person has disrespected her family's will for the most part due to the impression of sexual injudiciousness (Wynn, [2013](#)).

According to the United National Population Fund, more than five thousand women are killed every year across the world in the name of honor by their intimate male family members such as, husbands, fathers, or brothers. Femicide or "honor killings" are mostly carried out in the

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countries of Middle East, Africa, and some parts of Asia however, it is not bound to only these regions as it extends worldwide from Britain to USA, Italy, Sweden, Turkey, Uganda, and Ecuador (United Nations Fund for Population Activities [UNFPA], [2000](#)). Regardless of the region, the reasons behind the occurrences of these violence-based killings of women are the same to a large extent (Abu-Odeh, [2011](#)).

The Pakistani femicide cases that came into prominence included the murder of British national Samia Shahid by her father and former husband in 2016 and the killing of social media celebrity Qandeel Baloch by her brother, followed by in 2018 the death of Italian woman Sana Cheema in Gujrat by her brother and father. These cases were reported in Pakistan and gained the attention of many human rights activists and international media outlets as well.

The rationale of the current research is to evaluate the amount of attention given to femicide cases by Pakistani and international newspapers. Secondly, the research intends to keenly study the frames that are applied to cover such heinous act. Moreover, it analyzes the role of international and national dailies in treating femicide as a murder or wrapped the incident as a family matter, religious practice, or cultural pattern.

This study evaluates the frequency of the coverage along with the context of the frames in which the femicide cases of Pakistan are presented in national and international dailies and highlights the elements that are associated with the cases of violence against women from Pakistan in recent years.

Research Questions

RQ1: What percentage of representation is given to femicide cases in Pakistan by both international and national dailies?

RQ2: What type of frames are prominent in the portrayal of femicide cases in the selected dailies?

RQ3: What are the variances in the coverage of national and international dailies regarding femicide cases in Pakistan.

Currently, NGOs and media in Pakistan are playing a greater role in highlighting the issue of femicide, crime against women by strangers and intimate family members, and honor killing. Although every newspaper covers the stories of violence against women according to its policies,

however, the majority of the news stories are related to domestic violence, kidnapping, and rape (Cihangir, [2012](#)).

Literature Review

Femicide and honor-based violence occurs when the male member uses honor as the justification to kill the victim and considers it morally accurate. Hence, honor killing as a term is considered a contestable pair when used together (Gill, [2009](#)). The following studies will elaborate the framing through which Pakistani media covers the issue of honor killing. Several types of violence against women are witnessed in the society of Pakistan for many years. Raza and Hussain ([2016](#)) investigated the amount of coverage that was given to different types of violence in Pakistani Urdu dailies namely, Jang and Khabrein from October 2012 to March 2013. The major coverage was allocated to rape crimes after that domestic violence and sexual harassment and the least coverage was given to femicide and forced prostitution.

Bhanbro ([2015](#)) examined the news coverage in three English language dailies namely, Dawn, The Express Tribune, and The News by conducting critical discourse analysis. He studied how the female killings are related to the tribal and patriarchal context in Pakistan.

Kiran ([2019](#)) investigated the role of Pakistani English dailies, Dawn and Express Tribune, in the coverage of honor-related crimes and in spreading awareness to the general public.

Gauhar ([2014](#)) in her report collected the media reports from print and electronic media and conducted a text analysis. The research concluded that the news related to honor killing was presented in a very informal manner and consisted of only a few lines without even mentioning the details of the incident. While, the Urdu newspapers used a lot of sensationalism in reporting such crimes.

Gilbertson and Pandit ([2018](#)) studied the coverage of violence against women in four mainstream newspapers of India. Two of them were Hindi newspapers namely, Dainak Jagran and Hindustan and other two were English newspapers namely, Times of India and Hindustan Times. The sample newspapers were published in 2017. By thematic analysis, the results suggested that violent news against women is treated as a standalone issue and not as a social issue.

Shendurnikar (2014) studied the stereotypes in English dailies regarding honor crimes and found that while covering the most common stereotype they are presenting that honor killing is carried out in rural and background and results in a misrepresentation to the urban population. Avaz (2019) studied the portrayal of honor killing discourses in Iranian newspapers. The researcher compared the coverage of 18 cases across Iran by secondary analysis of online news sources. The results suggested that Iranian newspapers neither promote nor condemn the honor killings therefore, reported only the demographics of victims and perpetrators involved in an honor killing. Most of the news reported was from the tribal areas. All of the news was based on facts and figures related to the honor killing incidents.

COVID-19 adds the miseries of females, especially when the abusers are intimate family members (Slakoff et al., 2020). While analyzing the Middle Eastern media's role in highlighting the coverage of violence against women, Alabed (2009) compared the coverage of two leading Jordanian newspapers that covered honor killing news. Alghad and Alrai Jordanian newspapers were selected for the analysis that were published during the time period of five months. The results suggested that the all-over coverage of the honor killing news was less than expected and both the newspapers differed in their agendas of covering the honor killing in the country.

Violence against women has been part of the West for many years but the academic development started in the early 2000s in Sweden when three Kurdish women were killed in an honor killing by their family (Mayeda & Vijaykumar, 2016). Mainstream European media started to report honor crimes in the framework of orientalism which termed the 'other' as savages, uncivilized, backward, and ultimately leading towards the white race dominance. The major coverage of the media is related to the problematic and biased presentation of the Eastern men 'Orient' and how they subvert the women in their families in the struggle to settle in the free Western culture (Said, 2003).

Western media is playing an influential role in reinforcing the stereotypes and linking the crimes with particular races, religions, and ethnicities as far as violence against women is concerned. This repeated exposure has resulted in the notion that every person from a racial group dares to commit the crime (Jiwani, 2006).

In order to investigate the narratives and discourses that are built around violence against women cases in public media and state, Olwan (2013) studied the problem from three different perspectives. Firstly, he examined the foreign femicide cases that were covered in Canadian mainstream newspapers, The Globe and Mail, Toronto Star, and the National Post. These newspapers covered the majority of the cases based in Muslim countries and posed that Canada is a much safer place for women than these states. Secondly to study how Canadian national newspapers built narratives of honor killing, he conducted a textual analysis of news articles of Canadian dailies from 2009-2012. The newspapers projected that honor killings are carried out as a result of ethnic and cultural signs of a patriarchal society. Thirdly, the study then highlights the stance of the state especially in the context of cultural otherness and migrants in Canada. Vatandoost (2012) examined that the cases of killing of women were related to Islamic fundamentalism and the clash of culture between the East and West. While covering the intimate women killing/intimate femicide in Romania and Moldova, mainstream media published the victim's online media photos with partner to diminish the offender's responsibility and normalize the incident (Balica & Balica, 2022).

A systematic review of more than two hundred research articles about femicide concluded that media discourse that rely on stereotypical reporting serves to minimize, naturalize, dilute the intensity of crime, even legitimize the violence against women before killing, and put other women at risk (Aldrete et al., 2024).

The above literature on the print media's portrayal of violence against women shows that the issue is treated very differently in various countries and it is affected by a lot of factors. The femicide in Pakistani and Indian media shows great evidence of underreporting with a lot of missing information about the victim and the follow-up of the cases. On the other hand, western media's coverage is largely based on honor killings in immigrant communities and is highly biased and stereotyped in the Islamophobic frames.

Thus, this study evaluates the progress of the Pakistani media coverage in highlighting the issue of honor killings in light of recent cases. It further investigates how vigilant the media has become in the past three years in representing the honor killings. This research particularly deals with the Western media's portrayal of reporting femicide cases in Pakistan.

Methodology

Content analysis was applied to analyze the framing of femicide in national and international dailies. News reports published in the selected dailies including one Pakistani (*Dawn*) and four international (*The Independent* (UK), *The New York Times* (USA), *Khaleej Times* (Middle East), *The Times of India* (India)) were examined to evaluate the differences in the coverage related to the femicide incidents in Pakistan. The time period selected for the study was from January 2017 to December 2020. The purposive sampling technique was applied to the study. A total of 497 news items were collected from the selected national ($N=157$) and international ($N=207$) newspapers during the selected time period and were evaluated for the current study.

The frames and their operationalization are described as follows:

1. Benevolence Frame
2. Here and Now Frame
3. Legislative Measures Frame
4. Administrative Stance
5. Socio economic Frame
6. Cultural Context Frame

The data was collected manually where the initial news stories related to honor killings from the selected newspapers were scrutinized to point out the frames and contexts that are mentioned in the coding sheet. Holsti formula was used to obtain the intercoder reliability.

$$\text{Reliability} = \frac{2M}{N_1 + N_2}$$

M is the number of the decisions whereas N_1 and N_2 are the number of decisions made by the two coders.

The frame-wise intercoder reliability in the national and international newspapers for the four frames A, B, C, and D were 95%, 96%, 96%, and 98%. Overall, the sum of the intercoder reliability on these frames was 96%.

Analysis

RQ1: What percentage of representation is given to the femicide cases in Pakistan by both international and national dailies?

Table 1

Frequency of Publication of News Stories Covering Femicide Cases in Pakistan

Newspapers	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Dawn</i>	157	43.13%
<i>Hindustan Times</i>	59	16.20%
<i>Khaleej Times</i>	69	18.9%
<i>The Independent</i>	47	12.9%
<i>The New York Times</i>	32	8.79%
Total	364	100%

A total of 364 news articles were published nationally and internationally by five dailies from 2017 to 2020. As shown in the figure above, two national newspapers covered a total 49% of the total coverage. *Dawn* published 157 (31.6%) news stories and *The News* published 133 (26.7%) news stories from 2017 to 2020. On the other hand, four international dailies published 41.6% of the femicide news in Pakistan from 2017 to 2020. The Indian mainstream daily, *Hindustan Times* published 54 (10%) news items.

Middle Eastern newspaper, *Khaleej Times* published 59 (11%) news items related to the femicide in Pakistan. Britain-based newspaper *The Independent* covered honor killings based in Pakistan in 37 (7%) news stories. However, the American-based leading newspaper, *The New York Times*, including *Women in the World* published 25 (5%) news items.

It is evident from the figure that cumulatively the selected newspapers have given more coverage to femicide in the year 2017. It is due to Pakistan's two highly covered honor killing cases of Samia Shahid and Qandeel Baloch included with other femicide cases were reported extensively during that time period.

RQ2: What kind of frames are used in the coverage of femicide in the selected newspapers?

Table 2

Percentage of Frames of Femicide Related News Stories in National and International Dailies

Newspapers	Benevolence Frame	Socio Economic Frame	Here and Now Frame	Total
<i>Dawn</i>	23%	7%	67%	157
<i>Hindustan Times</i>	33%	15%	39%	59
<i>Khaleej Times</i>	37%	5%	53%	69
<i>The Independent</i>	30%	16%	41%	47
<i>The New York Times</i>	44%	16%	32%	32

The above results showed that the *Dawn* was dominated by the here and now frame as it just reported the occurrence of a crime, incident, and violation of women's rights. The majority of the news about the femicide stated only the occurrence of the incidents and whereabouts of the crime thus, 67% ($n=92$) of the news was just factual. Whereas, the responsibility frame was observed in 23% ($n=32$) femicide news and occurrence of socioeconomic frame was 7% ($n=9$).

The *Hindustan Times* used here and now framing in 39% ($n=21$) of the news items, the benevolence frame was used in 33% ($n=18$) of the coverage, and 15% of the news belonged to the socio-economic frame.

Khaleej Times covered 53% ($n=31$) of the femicide cases majorly in the here and now frame. The second most used frame was the benevolence frame 37% ($n=22$) by *Khaleej Times*. Whereas, the socio-economic frame and morality frame were observed in equal percentages that is, 5% ($n=3$). About 28% ($n=8$) of the news was in a factual frame. The socio-economic frame was used in 14% ($n=4$) of news coverage and the morality frame was present only in 10% ($n=3$) of the total coverage related to the honor killing news.

The Independent published 41% ($n=15$) of the news in the here and now frame. The second most used frame by the newspaper was the benevolence frame 30% ($n=11$). The independent published 16% ($n=6$) of the news in socio-economic whereas the morality frame was witnessed only in 14% ($n=5$) of the total news related to the cases of violation against women.

The New York Times/Women in the World published 44% ($n=11$) of the news in the benevolence frame. The second most used frame was the

here and now frame making 32% ($n = 8$) of the total coverage. The socio-economic frame was observed in 16% ($n = 8$) whereas the least used frame was the morality frame representing only 8% ($n = 4$) of the total honor-killing news from Pakistan.

RQ3: What are the differences in the coverage of national and international newspapers regarding femicide cases in Pakistan?

Table 3

Cultural Context of Femicide in Dailies

Newspapers	Positive (+)	Neutral (0)	Negative (-)	Total
<i>Dawn</i>	1	0	0	1
<i>Hindustan Times</i>	0	1	1	2
<i>Khaleej Times</i>	0	0	0	0
<i>The Independent</i>	0	1	2	3
<i>The New York Times</i>	0	0	2	2

Table 4

Frequency of Legislative Measures regarding Femicide in National and International Newspapers

Newspapers	Positive (+)	Neutral (0)	Negative (-)	Total
<i>Dawn</i>	11	12	0	23
<i>Hindustan Times</i>	2	6	1	9
<i>Khaleej Times</i>	2	9	4	15
<i>The Independent</i>	01	01	04	06
<i>The New York Times</i>	2	2	4	8

Dawn published 11 (48%) news stories to explain and appreciate the legislative measures regarding the violence against women in Pakistan in 12 (52%) news stories in a neutral tone in this context. The *Hindustan Times* published 6 (67%) news stories in neutral here and now tone, 2 (22%) news stories appreciated Pakistan's laws and legislature to curb the violence against women whereas 1 (11%) news items were laws negative.

Middle Eastern newspaper, *Khaleej Times* published 16 (70%) news reports in a balanced and mixed tone, 6 (26%) news stories criticized Pakistan's law and order situation regarding honor killings and only 1 (4%) news story covered the context in a positive tone. Similarly, 9 (60%) news

items were in a balanced tone, 4 (27%) were in a negative context, and 2 (13%) news items were reported in a positive context.

Britain-based newspaper, *The Independent* wrote 4 (50%) news items negatively in this context whereas 2 neutral (25%) and 2 positive (25%) were published by the newspaper. American newspapers, *The New York Times/Women in the World* negatively covered this context and published 4 (50%) news stories. It subsequently published 2 (25%) in a neutral tone and 2 (25%) in a positive tone.

Table 5

Administrative Stance on Femicide in News Stories

Newspapers	Positive (+)	Neutral (0)	Negative (-)	Total
<i>Dawn</i>	6	1	2	9
<i>Hindustan Times</i>	0	3	5	8
<i>Khaleej Times</i>	0	4	3	7
<i>The Independent</i>	0	2	1	3
<i>The New York Times</i>	1	2	0	3

Dawn appreciated the stance of administration regarding the femicide in 6 (67%) news items, 2 (11%) were in a negative connotation and 1 (22%) was neutral. Similarly, *The News* was also majorly positive and published 5 (63%) news items, 2 (25%) were negative, and 1 (13%) in neutral tone.

Whereas, *Hindustan Times* negatively portrayed Pakistani government's role in dealing with the femicide through 05 (63%) news items in negative, 3 (38%) in a neutral tone, and no coverage in a positive tone. Whereas, *Khaleej Times* published 4 (57%) news items in a neutral tone and 3 (43%) in a negative context.

On the other hand, *The Independent (Britain)* published 1(33%) in a negative context and 2 (67%) in a neutral context. American-based *The New York Times* published 2 (67%) news articles in neutral and 1 (33%) with positive connotations in this regard.

National and International Dailies' Take on Legislative Measures and Administrative Role regarding Femicide

The benevolence frame of *Dawn* consisted of 19% government positive, 6% govt negative, and 3% govt neutral while, 38% laws and legislature context neutral and 34% laws and legislature positive. Whereas, *Hindustan*

Times is 35% neutral in the context of the law, 12% positive, and 6% negative. It was 29% negative for Pakistani government's role in curbing honor killings and 18% neutral. Similarly, *Khaleej Times* was 41% neutral, 18% negative, and 9% positive in the legislature context. Moreover, 18% news stories were neutral and 14% were negative about the Pakistani government's role in controlling the honor killings.

The benevolence frame of *The Independent* consisted of 36% negative, 18% positive, and 18% neutral news about laws and legislature context. Additionally, 18% neutral and 9% negative news were about the government's role regarding honor killings in Pakistan.

Furthermore, the benevolence frame of *The New York Times/Women in the World* had 36% negative stance, 18% positive, and 18% neutral in terms of laws and legislature context whereas 18% was neutral and 9% positive in the administrative standpoint on honor killing.

Conclusion

In Pakistan, *Dawn* is the most widely circulated names in English newspaper. Despite the relative popularity of the newspaper, it stands true that the magnitude of reporting on honor killings in this daily is far less in comparison to the extent by which this social issue prevails in the country. The nature of the reports was found to be majorly here and now and neutral. While the neutrality of the reporting might be an appreciable step towards maintaining the veracity of the incidents, the scope was only limited to a very basic standardized form about "who-where-when". The demographical details of the victims and background narratives of the incidents were generally missing which might hold a significant merit in the insinuation of the perpetrators. Moreover, it is quite evident that apart from the widespread reporting of the mainstream cases, follow-up on others was not found in abundance.

It is a perceptible reality that to some extent these newspapers acknowledge honor killing as a vice existent in a patriarchal society that connects its roots with tribal culture and not religion. In addition, they have reported femicide not as a gross generalization across Pakistani culture as a whole, but as a variety of remote tribal regions in the country.

Media in Pakistan has a colossal influence in directing perceptual realities in the minds of readers. Cognizing the gravity of the impact, media can be a stepping stone for initializing a movement to advocate women's

rights in Pakistan. In particular, the right to live which is deprived of honor killing, has to be advocated for women more strongly than it already is by the media. More share and proportion of coverage in addition to specific sections or editions to condemn and highlight this existing issue might create an awakening in the audience to realize the severity of the evil. In addition to social influence, such exposure might initiate changes in government and legislative bodies.

Turning the gaze towards international coverage, manifold approaches concerning various contexts relevant to honor killing cases in Pakistan can be sought. On one hand where a generous appreciation regarding relevant legal reforms coupled with skepticism towards their implementation can be seen, on the other side a stringent negative critique in social, religious, and cultural aspects emerges as a general observation in reporting.

As concluded by the previous research (Entman, [2009](#); Saleem, [2007](#)), the framing of the news is influenced by the ideologies and gatekeepers of the newspapers. Therefore, every newspaper in the sample framed the issue of honor killing with their own “tilt”. This can further lead to the specific directed influence or perception in the minds of the readers about the country and a social problem prevailing in that country.

It is an absolute reality that violence in any form and to any extent is unacceptable. To condone femicide specifically in a dressing of religion, culture, or social tradition is condemnable and needs to be stopped. This has been supported by previous literature that honors killings cannot be associated with any religion, caste, or ethnicity (Ardèvol-Abreu, [2015](#); Singh, & Bhandari, [2021](#)). The murder should be treated as murder regardless of whatever the reason or motivation was behind it and should be treated as an independent crime in the media without linking it with “outside culture” and creating a dichotomy in the fabrics.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The data associated with this study will be provided by the corresponding author upon request.

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