

Virginity Cult and Violent (Dis)Honour

by

Maya Kanaan

A Major Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of

Social Sciences at the University of Ottawa

In Partial Fulfilment of Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Major: Anthropology

Under the supervision of Professor Ari Gandsman

August, 2022

Table of Contents:

Part One: Understanding Violence Against Women and Honour-Based Violence

Part Two: The Cult of Virginity

Part Three: Hymen Myths, Forced Virginity Tests, and Hymenoplasty

Part Four: Crimes of (Dis)Honour

Part Five: Moving Forward; Combatting Honour-Based Violence

Conclusion

Bibliography

Part One: Understanding Violence Against Women and "Honour"-Related Violence

"In every country of the world, women fare far worse than men on a number of important indices: income and wealth, political participation, vulnerability to sexual assault, and degree of access to the most prestigious social positions. In many developing countries, the inequalities based on gender are especially stark: girls are less likely to be educated, receive health care, or even be fed than their male siblings." – Satz, cited in Okin,

2013: ix

Honour-based violence (HBV), also known as honour-related violence, is a type of violence against women that is committed against women in the name of 'honour'. To understand honour-based violence (HBV), we must examine the manifestations of violence against women. The United Nations defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life" (UN, 1993). Violence against women and girls includes physical, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse. In patriarchal societies, men use violence to control women and maintain the power relations in which women are at a subordinate level and inferior to men. Women are often subjected to physical, psychological, and sexual violence. Physical violence includes aggressive actions such as hitting, slapping, and biting. Often, these intentional acts of harm are covered up as "accidents," and many women often die due to the severity of the physical violence enacted against them. Psychological or emotional violence includes prohibiting women from seeing their family and friends, continuous belittlement and humiliation, restricting economic freedom, and threats of physical violence and other controlling behaviours. Finally, Sexual violence encompasses acts

such as denying women the right to use contraception or to take precautions against sexually transmitted illnesses, as well as forced intercourse through physical force, threats, and intimidation.

Violence against women is often described as gender-based violence since it is predominantly perpetrated against women by the men in their lives, such as their partners, fathers, brothers, and other male family and community members. Gender-based violence is "acts or threats of acts intended to hurt or make women suffer physically, sexually or psychologically, and which affect women because they are women or affect women disproportionately" (Richters, 1994). According to Krantz and Moreno (2005), violence is divided into three categories: self-directed violence, which is violence that is perpetrated against the self, such as self-harm; interpersonal violence, which is violence that is committed against a person by another person or group of people; and collective violence or community violence, which includes people who are not related to one another and usually occurs outside the home.

Women are subjected to all types of violence; however, interpersonal violence, or violence committed against a woman by another person or by a small group of people, is the most prevalent form of violence against women because it occurs in all communities (Krantz & Moreno, 2005). Krantz and Moreno (2005) further subcategorize interpersonal violence into two categories: family and partner violence, which usually takes place inside the home, and community violence which typically occurs outside the home or in public spaces. Women are often subject to family and partner violence, while community violence typically occurs between men. Whether they are self-directed, interpersonal, or collective, violent acts are typically classified as physical, sexual, or psychological (Krantz & Moreno, 2005). In some circumstances, psychological violence is frequently paired with physical and/or sexual abuse, creating a complicated pattern of behaviour (Krantz & Moreno, 2005).

Investigations have begun to expose the extent to which domestic abuse, sexual assault, culturally sanctioned forced marriages, and female genital mutilation (FGM) inflict harm on women around the globe (Horvath and Kelly, 2006). Although much progress has been made in comprehending the nature of VAW, there is still more work to be done in addressing its effects and preventing its occurrence. Reports by the World Health Organization and the United Nations concluded that at least once in their lives, 736 million women worldwide—nearly one in three—have experienced physical or sexual abuse from a romantic relationship, sexual assault by a non-partner, or both (WHO, 2021). In the year 2020, 81,000 women and girls were killed across the globe; and 58% of them (47,000) were killed by an intimate partner or family member (WHO, 2021). Over the span of two decades, women's rights activists fought for the acknowledgement of women's rights as human rights, and violence against women served as a significant focal point of their campaign (Patel, 2020). As a result, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, which unambiguously articulated criteria and principles against violence against women, was passed by the General Assembly in 1993 with the support of all members (UN, 1993).

However, despite numerous international declarations such as the CEDAW, violence against women persists globally. A possible cause for this, according to Patel (2020), is that "violence against women is often inherent in the patriarchal traditions and culture". Patel (2020) further argues that although it is undeniable that violence against women is a global phenomenon, its manifestations are frequently localized within a society by the ideals ingrained in cultural specificities. However, Gill et al. (2014) argue that emphasizing cultural explanations for HBV, especially when honour-based violence is viewed as something that only affects 'othered' women from 'othered' societies, obscures the significance of gender and the fact that violence against women is experienced by women of all races and nationalities (Gill et al., 2014). Furthermore, Abu Lughod (2011) explains that although there are no

justifications in Islamic law for honour crimes, and such crimes are condemned by both Islamic law and Muslim religious authorities, their frequent association with news and reports from the Middle East and South Asia, as well as with immigrant communities with roots in these areas, they have come to associate Islam with honour-crimes. When crimes of honour are attributed to specific cultures and ethnic communities, the crime of honour becomes 'culturalized', and culture itself is considered to be the cause of violence (Abu Lughod, 2011). Hence, this categorization stigmatizes entire cultures and ethnic groups rather than stigmatizing particular violent acts (Abu Lughod, 2011). Therefore, academics and policy-makers should be sensitive to the varying experiences of women across countries without perpetuating essentialist notions of cultural difference (Gill et al., 2014). Furthermore, Razack (2021) argues that culture-centric explanations tend to portray White men as superior to non-White men by portraying them as less patriarchal or as not patriarchal at all, and tend to obscure the reality that White women are subject to significant violence from White men. In addition, it is essential to note that colonialism and white supremacy are obscured by cultural explanations (Razack, 2021). Culturalizing violence against women fosters "a global regulation of racialized societies through the idea that such societies are deeply patriarchal and require the guidance of the West, and sometimes bombs, to enter modernity" (Razack, 2021: 33). Hence, by framing honour-based violence as a subset of violence against women sanctioned by patriarchal honour codes, we are able to escape these traps while still acknowledging the centrality of gender (Gill et al., 2014).

Honour-based violence is a unique and particularised manifestation of patriarchal ideals and traditions. Within academic literature, little consensus has been formed as of yet about the meaning of honour-based violence, which is the subject of great debate. This discrepancy is a challenge, particularly for practitioners trying to make sense of the literature. When authors use different definitions for HBV, comparing findings and generalizations about honour-based

violence and honour-related crimes becomes challenging. Existing classifications of HBV range from restricted and highly specific (covering only a small number of crime categories and identifying particular victims and perpetrators) to broad definitions covering a wider variety of crimes, victims, and perpetrators (Roberts et al. 2014). Narrow definitions of honour-based violence offer the advantage of avoiding overgeneralizing behaviour since they clearly define the context of HBV; nevertheless, they also risk leaving out intriguing and pertinent characteristics of HBV. For example, some authors, such as Meeto and Mirza (2007), characterize HBV solely as domestic violence perpetrated by men against women. However, it is essential to remember that men are sometimes victims of honour-based violence, and women are sometimes the perpetrators of honour-based violence. In addition, HBV encompasses actions that are not often categorized as domestic violence, such as forced marriage and female genital mutilation (Roberts et al., 2014). On the other hand, broad definitions of HBV include far more behaviours and wide-ranging situations; however, they run the risk of overreporting HBV. For example, the U.K Association for Police Officers (ACPO) defines HBV as "a crime or incident, which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of the family and/or community" (ACPO 2010). Since this definition is gender neutral and does not specify which types of crimes and behaviours are included, it makes it possible to classify a broader range of behaviours as HBV (Roberts et al., 2014).

It is challenging to assess the motivation of offences, which makes it challenging to know unequivocally if a crime has been committed to defend or protect family and community honour. Nonetheless, honour-based crimes do have distinguishable and particular traits. The term 'honour-based violence' (HBV) typically refers to a range of interpersonal types of abuse perpetrated against women (and sometimes men) by uncles, fathers, brothers, husbands, and other males (and occasionally female) relatives. Usually, it involves a premeditated act in an effort to protect or restore lost "honour" (Begikhani et al. 2015). Honour-based violence is

typically distinguished from other types of domestic and gender-based violence by the fact that it happens within the context of collective family and community systems (Begikhani et al., 2015). According to Welchman and Hossain (2005), honour-based violence acts, or crimes of honour, include "a variety of manifestations of violence against women, including 'honour killings', assault, confinement or imprisonment, and interference with choice in marriage, where the publicly articulated 'justification' is attributed to a social order claimed to require the preservation of a concept of 'honour' vested in male (family and/or conjugal) control over women and especially women's sexual conduct: actual, suspected or potential" (Welchman and Hossain, 2005: 4). Thus, 'honour' crimes are perpetuated by patriarchal customs and a culture of silence regarding such matters (Begikhani et al. 2015). In terms of both victims and perpetrators, HBV is gender-based violence. Although men are sometimes victims of HBV, they are usually solely targeted because of their relationship with women who have broken social norms and ideals and not because of their own actions. HBV is typically an assertion of male dominance over female kin; hence, it can be classified as a kind of patriarchal power (Begikhani et al., 2015). Similarly, in this research paper, the conceptualization of HBV includes all types of violence that are executed "within a framework of patriarchal structure at the community or societal level where the main justification for the perpetration of the violence is the protection of a social construction of 'honour' as a value-system, norm, or tradition" (Begikhani et al. 2015: 27).

Some scholars have expressed reservations about using the term "honour" since it unnecessarily emphasizes male honour (Gill, 2011). There is nothing "honourable" about violence committed against girls and women; thus, using the term honour to refer to such crimes indicates that the victims are to blame and belittles the victims' experiences. Welchman and Hossain (2005) assert that the use of the term 'honour crimes' is problematic. According to them, the fact that the 'honour crime' terminology and other related terminologies are used

to describe types of violence that almost exclusively affect women provides more evidence that the concept of "honour" is deeply embedded in the ways in which women are expected to conduct themselves (Welchman and Hossain, 2005). In addition, crimes defined using the word "honour" are open to "exoticisation" (Welchman & Hossain, 2005: 4). Furthermore, although HBV is a global phenomenon that cuts across class, culture, ethnicity, and religious boundaries, the term "honour" is attributed to the exotic "Other" (Gill et al., 2014).

In Western immigrant-receiving countries, patriarchal violence has been outsourced to the "Other". Grewal (2013) argues that honour killings are now a marker between backward traditional communities and modern enlightened communities. In her investigation of honour-killing representations in the media, Grewal (2013: 5) found that "the many murders committed in the USA, where entire families are killed by their fathers, brothers or relatives are not called 'honour killings' [...] but if a Muslim or South Asian father or brother murders a daughter or sister, it would be called 'honour killing' because it is assumed that modern men do not kill their daughters or sisters". By presenting the modern man as not driven by the concept of "honour", patriarchal violence becomes associated solely with the "other", and any violence in the dominant society is considered to be random (Grewal, 2013). Thus, patriarchy is outsourced to the traditional non-West, and Western violence against women is blamed on individual behaviour, not on particular cultures (Razack, 2021). Such representations not only obscure the fact that white women suffer from patriarchal violence but also portray Muslim and immigrant women as objects owned by males and lacking agency. In addition, such representations portray immigrant and Muslim men as sexually deviant and barbaric, which perpetuates the idea that Muslim women need saving from Muslim men. Media representations of honour killings portray immigrant men as barbaric and violent. Government officials take advantage of such reports to restrict immigration services, create border control policies, and justify military interventions under the guise of freedom (Abu Lughod, 2011).

Consequently, labelling these acts as "honour-based violence" or "honour killings" tends to reinforce misconceptions about minority ethnic communities, mainly Muslim and South Asian ones, that make the issues more difficult to resolve (Begikhani et al. 2015). Some societies might benefit from having specific forms of violence named and criminalised since it could inspire judicial training and reform, raise public awareness about the problem of violence against women, and provide justification for the establishment of shelters, police training programmes, and relief programmes for victims (Abu Lughod, 2011). Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, we must be wary of using terminologies that have come to be associated with particular cultures and groups of people to avoid further stigmatizing already marginalized groups.

The West is predisposed to view so-called "honour" killings as being linked to particular cultural norms, yet, these crimes and other forms of HBV are not limited to a specific religion, culture, type of society, or socioeconomic stratum (Gill et al., 2014). According to Bourdieu (1977), honour is not an aspect of cultural practice but is formed through interpersonal exchanges. Hence, although crimes of honour occur in many different societies, each cultural context must be examined separately to understand how and why such behaviours have developed (Gill et al., 2014). Furthermore, Western nations have often used HBV as a type of violence against women to demarcate the "gendered cultural codes of diasporic families and communities from the gendered norms and values of the dominant society" (Begikhani et al., 2015). However, in such instances, the desire of the male (and sometimes female) leaders within patriarchal households and societies to maintain their political and cultural dominance by reinforcing traditional gender norms may be more significant than conceptions of 'honour' (Begikhani et al. 2015). The ways in which women are oppressed as a result of honour systems vary by geography, cultural norms, and socioeconomic status (Gill et al., 2014). For example, in some South Asian households, it is honourable for women to work outside the home and

pursue higher levels of education; in others, women's participation in work outside the home or education is seen as shameful (Gill et al., 2014). In this way, gender-role expectations might range from being highly patriarchal to being somewhat egalitarian (Welchman and Hossain, 2005).

Although honour-based violence cuts across a broad range of cultures and religions, "it takes specific forms in individual communities: these forms are determined by many factors, but key among them are cultural and religious issues in a complex intersecting mix. Thus, some cultural practices and traditions have been recognised as harmful, especially to women and girls within particularly male-dominated or patriarchal societies" (Begikhani et al., 2015: 8). Historically, HBV has occurred in a broad range of societies, from European to African cultures and from Asian to Latin American cultures (Abu Odeh, 1996). Nevertheless, accepting the universalism of honour-based violence does not excuse particular societies and communities from dealing with their own context-specific manifestations of HBV (Begikhani et al., 2015).

Like other forms of violence against women, honour crimes are not ahistorical and do not occur in a vacuum. When investigating honour crimes, one must consider the unique historical, political, and socioeconomic forces governing those individuals' lives. Abu Lughod (2011: 44) emphasizes that blaming only cultures for violence against women not only flattens and fixes cultures, removes moral systems' complexities, homogenises human experiences within communities, and obstructs modern political and social interventions; it also ignores the "dynamism of historical and political transformations of women, families, and everyday social and cultural life experience" (Abu Lughod, 2011: 44). Such historical and political transformations include insecure financial conditions, insecure political conditions such as wars and conflicts, racism and discrimination, and conflicting types of governmentality. For example, Lebanon's various wars increased poverty and violence, strengthening the patriarchal system. Men became more violent due to their participation in the war, and women were forced

back into their homes since it was no longer safe to be in public. Patriarchies strive in these conditions, which may increase incidences of patriarchal violence against women.

In the past, most cultures used codes of honour to govern and regulate interpersonal behaviour. Some societies, such as Middle Eastern societies, are still governed by honour codes. For the most part, honour standards pertaining to family and personal life function to regulate sexual and social behaviour among women. 'Honour' codes are generally closely guarded in families and social groups because breaches of these norms can be considered as 'staining' the 'honour' of the transgressor's family, kin-group, or community as a whole (Begikhani et al. 2015). Transgressors of the honour code are typically punished using HBV, such as honour-killings, in order to restore the tainted family honour (Begikhani et al. 2015). Since the community assigns honour, losing honour brings humiliation and ridicule to the individual and to their entire family; thus, individuals and families are coerced into accepting certain social norms and traditions to avoid being publicly shamed and humiliated.

To understand honour-related violence, we must understand what "honour" means. Most commonly, honour is described as a virtue or character quality linked to honesty, moral uprightness, and altruism, with people being regarded as possessing honour or as being honourable (Roberts et al. 2014). The second, less popular definition of honour is based on a person's capacity, strength, and power to impose their will on others and to extort respect from them (Roberts et al. 2014). Therefore, according to this definition, honour is something that must be fought for, zealously cherished, and protected. According to Roberts (2014), this emphasis on acquiring and upholding honour appears to be the driving force behind honour-based violence. Furthermore, Tas-Cifci (2020) argues that honour has a variety of different meanings which differ across cultures and times. Hence, she states that "merely considering its [honour] lexical meaning – respect, pride, esteem – is not enough; we can interpret honour in different structures: universal, historical, Western, Eastern, and so on" (Tas-Cifci, 2020: 27).

Therefore, when discussing honour-based violence, we should consider all the possible meanings for honour in the specific context in which it appears.

There is a propensity in the West to consider 'honour' killings as linked to distinct non-Western cultural practices. However, as mentioned earlier, this and other forms of HBV aren't restricted to any one religion, culture, type of society, or social stratum (Gill et al., 2014). For Bourdieu (1977), the concept of 'honour' is not specific or inherent to any culture; instead, honour codes arise through interpersonal experiences and connections. Hence, in order to understand how and why various 'honour'-based behaviours have developed, it is necessary to look at the contexts in which these practices emerged. Many feminist scholars have argued that there is a significant inclination to utilize women's bodies as a symbol of authoritarian politics and control in all major religious organizations, including Christian ones (Begikhani et al., 2015). Consequently, to understand why honour-based violence occurs, we must move beyond basic descriptive classifications and cultural preconceptions; rather, we must investigate the meanings and values attached to the term 'honour' in different communities. Generally, social structures and conventions based on gendered values and norms that legitimize the regulation of women's sexual and other behaviour are embedded in 'honour' rules that are widely and pervasively accepted in many cultures around the world.

Begikhani and Gill (2015) state that within patriarchal and honour-based societies, men are considered the household leaders, regardless of the value placed on female activities. In such scenarios, the male is the protector of his family and their collective honour; consequently, it is his responsibility to guard his and his family's honour against any behaviour that the community may view as disgraceful, embarrassing, or humiliating. In such patriarchal societies, women are often considered to be the personal property of their male relatives before marriage and the property of their husbands after marriage (Gill, 2011); hence, it is crucial for men to safeguard women's honour since it is through the conduct, acts, and social performances

of women that families achieve and keep honour, respect, and distinction (Begikhani et al., 2015). Since 'honour' in such societies is mainly based on the behaviour of women, the necessity to protect family honour provides men with the power and "right" to regulate women's bodies and behaviour. Women in such patriarchal societies are endowed with negative power, which Kandiyoti (1988) explains as the power in women's behaviour to bring shame and dishonour to all the male members of their family, community, and lineage (Begikhani et al., 2015). Consequently, since it is widely accepted that female chastity and modesty are critical components of a family's public reputation, societies that adhere to these principles control women's social and sexual behaviour (Begikhani et al., 2015).

The concept of 'honour' means different things for men and women. For example, Tas-Cifci (2020: 29) states that men can have honour by "being masculine, reliable, honest, faithful, and diligent, providing for or fulfilling his family's needs, and protecting them from any risks and dangers". In societies where males are the leaders of the household, men must provide housing, food, and protection from danger; failing to do so results in men losing their honour. In contrast, women do not obtain honour by being reliable, honest, or faithful. Women do not actively possess honour; instead, they protect the collective family and community honour by safeguarding the symbol of honour in honour-based patriarchal societies: the hymen. Women must remain virgins and embody their virginity and purity in social settings. In honour-based patriarchal societies, males are considered responsible for their female kin; thus, having reverent, modest, and chaste wives and relatives who appropriately raise their children helps men acquire or preserve their honour. Tas-Cifci (2020) further argues that honour is a gendered concept since "women's chastity, purity, modesty, shyness, and obedience, and their relationships with kinsmen and outsiders, are strongly related to honour; they bring their kinsmen and family honour/dignity when they are practised and damage it when they are not" (Tas-Cifci, 2020: 29). Women can acquire and lose their own pride, modesty, and virtue, which

are usually tainted due to sexual misbehaviour. However, suppose a woman's virtue is tainted because she transgressed, or was believed to violate, the social code of sexual conduct. In that case, her family's virtue and reputation will also be tainted, specifically the reputation of her mother and sisters, because, in cultures where chastity is highly valued, a mother's primary domestic responsibility is to raise the children according to such social norms; hence, if the public doubts her daughter's virginity, she has failed in her parental role (Tas-Cifci, 2020).

How can women be honourable to avoid the dangers of "dishonouring" their families? It is difficult to ascertain how women can be honourable due to the various meanings of 'honour'. For women, being honourable means behaving in specific ways that convey chastity, purity, modesty, shyness, and obedience. However, the most important thing a woman must possess to be honourable is virginity. The following chapter further examines virginity, exploring how virginity operates in honour-based patriarchal societies, the gendered aspects of virginity, and the consequences of living in a society overly obsessed with female virginity.

Part Two: The Cult of Virginity

"In every case, both the concept and preservation of "virginity" result in attempted patriarchal control over women's bodies which is translated and codified as issues of honour and shame that further extends the attempt to control their sexuality as well. Thus, patriarchal practices relativize women's value by looking at her through the rubrics of purity and contamination, the entire spectrum of which process is arbitrated by men."

– Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2004: 1190

Virginity is generally recognized as a state of someone who has not experienced sexual intercourse, a boundary between sexual experience and sexual naivety. However, virginity has different connotations in Middle Eastern societies, much like other patriarchal and honour-based societies. For women in such societies, virginity serves as a symbol of honour, modesty, humility, and social status. In patriarchal honour-based societies, female chastity and virginity are at the core of cultural and social systems. Ghanim (2015: 1) argues that this veneration for hymen and virginity "conditions how romance, sexuality, honour, social life, and gender relations and roles are performed and perceived in society". Virginity is a significant social status marker, and there is a great emphasis put on the preservation of an unbroken hymen until the wedding night in conjunction with a severe condemnation of premarital sexual relations. Consequently, in societies that place a high value on female virginity and marriage is a central way of life, virginity is a valuable commodity in the marriage market. In communities that place a high value on female virginity, "failure to prove virginity on the wedding night can have fatal consequences for women" (Tas-Cifci, 2020: 65). In such cases, the groom immediately informs the bride's family, and the bride is labelled as damaged goods or impure, which dishonours her family. The bride's kinsmen are humiliated and shamed because, according to the groom's family and the wider community, they failed to exercise their

authoritative power on their kinswomen, could not control their women's behaviour, and failed to raise their daughters in accordance with social rules and norms (Tas-Cifci, 2020). Furthermore, if the bride is discovered to not be a virgin on her wedding night, the husband has the legal right to return her to her family as "damaged goods" and keep the dowry or mahr, or both, as compensation for being scammed (Shehadeh, 2010).

The obsession with female virginity is a longstanding and deep-rooted tradition in the Middle East. According to Lerner (1986), the 1780 BC Babylonian code of Hammurabi is the first law in ancient Mesopotamia to institutionalize the management of women's sexual behaviour and the patriarchal family in a legal framework. According to this law, fathers had the authority and power to treat their daughters' virginity as a family asset, and a man caught pursuing a virgin had to pay her father three times her value (Lerner, 1986). Nonetheless, an older code dating back to 2100 BC, known as the Ur-Nammu code and the oldest surviving code known today, also emphasized female virginity and purity. The Ur-Nammu code states that any man who violates the rights of another man by deflowering his wife should be put to death, and any man who deflowers the virgin female slave of another man must pay five silver shekels (Ghanim, 2015).

In Middle Eastern societies that highly value virginity, the sexual behaviour of girls, once they reach puberty, becomes very important. With the onset of puberty, chastity becomes everyone's concern, where the female's entire social system has a stake in her virginity (Ghanim, 2015). Surely, girls who are raised in an environment where the concept of honour and shame is instilled in them from an early age take great pride in upholding the prescribed code of conduct. Nonetheless, the sense of accomplishment that girls derive from adhering to the social norm of female virginity would significantly limit their range of aspirations and desires in society. The pressure placed on girls and women to be virgins greatly restricts their

social development; hence, obsession with female virginity is a social arrangement that restricts one-half of society's right to complete and healthy growth (Ghanim, 2015).

On the other hand, it could also be argued that premarital sexual intercourse, especially at a young age, is not always a healthy or safe experience. In addition, not all young women and girls desire to lose their virginity before marriage or have premarital sexual experiences. Nevertheless, the main issue is not whether premarital sexual intercourse is good or bad; instead, the problem is that, in some cases, women do not have the freedom to choose for themselves, and they are sometimes violently punished for making choices that deviate from the norms.

"The concepts of honour and virginity locate the prestige of a man between the legs of a woman. It is not by subjugating nature or by conquering mountains and rivers that a man secures his status, but by controlling the movements of women related to him by blood or by marriage, and forbidding them any contact with male strangers."- Mernissi, 1982

In societies where women's sexual and social behaviour is tied to family honour, women are not only expected to be virgins but also to embody their virginity. Women are expected to act and dress modestly, to only interact with males who are relatives, and to obey their male kin. The prestige of a family is entirely dependent on its honour, which is primarily defined by the respectability of its daughters, who can irrevocably harm the family's standing if they are considered to have misused their sexuality (Ruggi, 1998). Hence, the cult of virginity creates a disturbing and forceful connection between the sexual behaviour of women and family honour, which deters women from having premarital sexual experiences. Consequently, female sexuality becomes collectively owned by the family and larger community and morally judged according to social norms and traditions (Ghanim, 2015).

Cultural taboos pertaining to female sexuality in the Middle East mark puberty as an age of strict social control for females and the beginning of a life of suffering (Ghanim, 2015). Cultural taboos and obsession with female virginity single out and overburden women. This obsession with female chastity is reinforced through the strict regulation and control of female behaviour and mobility, which negatively impacts and restricts their social lives (Ghanim, 2015). The prevailing honour code makes a female's behaviour the focal point of attention and the primary concern of all extended family members (Ghanim, 2015). Honour codes do not only place tremendous pressure on females but also on their male relatives and family members. Ghanim (2015) explains that "living with the constant fear that a female might do something wrong in the eyes of others exerts a huge burden and stress not only on the female but also on all the others who must constantly stay alert and vigilant". The honour code operating in such societies is an inherent part of patriarchal dominance and control over female sexuality, as well as a crucial component in the creation of masculinity.

The virginity cult both reveals and reinforces the connection of dominance and coercion in society, with grave ramifications for women, men, and society as a whole. Due to the fact that family honour is dependent on women's sexual purity, the male-dominated framework of control over their female relatives has become an incredibly effective tool for social relations management. The high value placed on female virginity as it relates to family honour has strengthened the structure of male control over female kin, which is a highly effective tool for controlling social relations. Since virginity is correlated to gender power dynamics, it becomes a relationship of control, "a long-term process of an effective control over the lives of females in the society" (Ghanim, 2015). Awwad argues that "the culture of honour is a carefully constructed political, social, and economic ideology aimed at controlling and dominating a segment of society that is powerless and deemed socially inferior because of its gender" (Awwad, 2011). In the Middle East and other honour-based societies, the cultural requirement

of female virginity serves to regulate social relations and gender constructions. The virginity taboo is a control mechanism over the life and personality of females. It also determines her emotions and desires and how she evaluates and interprets the world (Ghanim, 2015).

Consequently, this form of control guarantees that virginity defines women, rather than women defining their own virginity, which means that women are prohibited from deciding for themselves what their virginity means to them (Ghanim, 2015). This means that women cannot choose how, when, or with whom to lose their virginity. The cultural expectation that women must maintain their virginity is actually infantilizing women, as it prevents them from going through a crucial rite of passage into adulthood and maturity (Ghanim, 2015).

Typically, sexual conduct is a personal experience that is regulated by personal responsibility, morals, and willpower. However, when sexual conduct is dependent on family control and segregation, and when collective interests are valued more than individuality, external control becomes fundamental (Ghanim, 2015). Hence, virginity is used as a method to control women's sexual behaviour and ensure that they conform to the dominant social norms and traditions. Ghanim (2015: 19) states that this form of control is "very strict and intolerant, and once virginity is lost, together with its concomitant honour, it cannot be repaired or restored. It is an all-or-nothing social arrangement with no room for regrets or a second chance". If a woman loses her virginity, she could lose everything: her family, her home, her life.

Women who transgress the honour code are not tolerated and are harshly punished. According to Baxter, punishing women who violate the honour code "is intended to accomplish many things simultaneously, it demonstrates male control over female family members, particularly important at a time when the offender has flaunted such authority; it serves as a stern warning to other females; reasserts cultural values; reduces, but does not necessarily

eliminate familial shame; and it limits the decline in the family's reputation" (Baxter, in Ghanim, 2015: 21). Hence, virginity is no longer a symbol for virtue or honour; rather, it is a violent social structure that degrades the social existence of both men and women (Ghanim, 2015).

The cult of virginity and honour codes surrounding it is an organization of fear. In the Middle East, a woman's ingrained fear of losing her virginity becomes a routine aspect of her daily existence. This fear has a negative effect on women's lives because it diverts their focus and resources away from more positive goals like education and career advancement, which is detrimental to their overall well-being and growth. Family and social life are characterized by a constant state of fear, with at least half of the population constantly fearing for their own safety and the other half constantly worried about offences that might dishonour their family (Ghanim, 2015). The cultural expectation that females must keep their hymens intact for the sake of their husbands creates a state of continual anxiety among women living in honour-based societies. For women who have lost their virginity, the requirement of the virginity cult disrupts their daily lives.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that women negotiate with these social rules and norms to find ways to embrace and express both their femininity and sexuality. Women's entry into the public sphere and employment slowly desegregated social spaces, and social gatherings, such as weddings, became desegregated spaces that included both men and women (Abu Odeh, 2010). Abu Odeh (2010) argues that desegregation was an important for Arab women's sexuality because it allowed them to publicly express their sexuality to males through the belly dance in a socially appropriate setting. In addition, young women and girls find ways to explore their sexuality without risking losing their virginity or transgressing the honour codes in their community, and without compromising their own morality.

I was born and raised in a very intolerant honour-based society that harshly punished women for transgressing social norms. From an early age, we were segregated from the males in our school, taught to be obedient and that our most valuable and treasured possession was our virginity. I remember fear my female classmates felt whenever they were accused of having an intimate partner or being involved in any kind of sexual behaviour. I also remember the fear I felt when my closest friend's parents threatened to bury her alive if she did not end her relationship with her partner. We were both seventeen at the time. In 2010, I moved to Lebanon, and although it is also a patriarchal and honour-based society, it was more tolerant. I was a student at the American University of Beirut, a prestigious and 'liberal' institution with a diverse student body. Due to the diversity of the student and faculty body and its already liberal environment, it was a more tolerant and accepting community. However, female premarital sexual experiences, illicit sexual behaviour, and homosexuality were still stigmatized and looked down upon. A woman with more than one intimate partner was labelled a whore; however, it was typical for men to have more than one sexual partner at a time. The hypocrisy was audacious; however, much was done to defy these patriarchal and honour-based ideas, owing to the Gender and Sexuality club at the university, which constantly organized events to raise awareness and open dialogues.

Virginity taboos are excellent representations of the way fear controls women's lives. The primary factors that govern a woman's premarital behaviour are her fear of losing her virginity and the ensuing consequences (Ghanim, 2015). Regardless of how frequently or infrequently they happen, acts of honour killing demonstrate the effectiveness of instilling fear to maintain power and control. Parrot and Cummings (2006: 176) further argue that "in addition to the danger of homicide in these cultures, the threat of death creates a culture of fear among women. A man can accuse a woman of anything that would tarnish the family's honour and reputation, and in many cases, the woman is given no opportunity to defend herself." If a

woman loses her virginity, she is in danger of social and physical death. Violence instils terror in the female's mind, causing her to monitor, control, and restrict her life and sexuality. The process of restraining female sexuality is characterized by violence and fear, two sides of the same phenomenon (Ghanim, 2015). Consequently, women's fear is crucial for violence since it is through this fear that men are able to control women. Yodanis (2004) explains that a man does not have to be violent with every woman he encounters for violence to exert its hold on women. Instead, it is sufficient to know that certain women have been subjected to horrendous brutality to regulate the behaviour and mobility of all women in society (Yodanis, 2004). When it comes to controlling a woman's sexuality and life, fear and violence are two essential tools at the disposal of the patriarchy. Acts such as forced virginity testing, gender segregation, marriage and defloration rituals, criminalization of premarital sexual intercourse, and female genital mutilation are all manifestations of control.

Shame and guilt, inherent human emotions that arise through social interactions, are also control methods used to regulate and restrict women's sexual and social lives. According to Ghanim (2015: 29), "guilt is assumed to be more related to the inner self, emanating from violating principles of one's own conscience or ego and, therefore, is a self-blame and an internalized control. Shame, on the other hand, is a value judgment of an act of conduct according to communal moral standards. It is assumed to be a socially induced feeling related to the opinions of others and, therefore, is the other-blame and an externalized control." Hence, feelings of guilt are triggered internally, while feelings of shame are triggered externally. The conceptualization of honour necessitates feelings of shame and guilt. However, when the construction of honour is based on other people's opinions, the ensuing shame and punishment are also defined accordingly (Ghanim, 2015). Since honour depends on what others think, rather than on actual ethical codes, it is not the act that needs punishment; instead, it is the public knowledge of the fact that must be punished. Hence, honour is not an internalized value

since as long as the façade of honour is protected, honour is not in jeopardy; however, if an incident becomes known to the public, action must be taken to preserve or restore the family honour.

In Arab cultures and other patriarchal honour-based societies, shame is a more prominent feeling than guilt. Ghanim (2015) argues that shame, or the fear of being shamed and judged negatively by others, is what pressures Arabs to act honourably. Within the dynamic framework of shame and honour, shame is the inability to control sexual and romantic desires that significantly impact the female's reputation, which is inextricably linked to virginity, dignity, respectability, and honour (Ghanim, 2015). Shame, as a reciprocal of honour, is essential to women because the social group's honour depends on women's behaviour; hence, shame becomes an exclusively feminine quality that females must internalize. The honour and shame system, which is a patriarchal cultural structure, is an effective tool for control. In the existing cultural structure, concern for the reputation of females is institutionalized, symbolizing acknowledgement by others. The damage to a woman's reputation is permanent or long-lasting once she has been shamed, and the humiliation is not just held individually but also collectively because it impacts the family's reputation and social standing.

Nevertheless, as illustrated earlier, virginity is not the only requirement for women to protect their reputations. How a woman speaks, dresses, walks, sits, and laughs affect her reputation (Tas-Cifci, 2021). Women must behave in a modest and shy way that signals their chastity, purity, and obedience. Consequently, all kinds of behaviours are culturally gendered and mean different things for men and women. A strict and intolerant culture towards premarital sexual behaviour coupled with the continuous fear of harsh punishment, including death, for transgressing any of the various codes and laws coerces women into obedience (Ghanim, 2015). However, losing her virginity by engaging in premarital sexual intercourse is the most heinous type of shame a female can bring to her family (Ghanim, 2015). As we

mentioned earlier, honour is collectively held, and having respect depends on what others think of you; hence, shaming the family honour is deemed a heinous transgression. This social construction of honour, which depends on what other people think, restricts agency, autonomy, and individuality.

Women socialized in societies that demand female chastity and docility end up internalizing the external notions of shame onto themselves, which leads them to self-policing and self-governing. Furthermore, women who have internalized this patriarchal control typically try to enforce it on other women. Ghanim (2015: 34) asserts that "when patriarchal injunctions are perceived to be legitimate, mothers transmit to their daughters the very same social values that have dictated their lives. Women themselves play a vital role as socializing agents, and this socialization tends to enforce and normalize oppressive social construct." There is a widespread belief among many women in patriarchal settings that they do not possess the full human potential or are not on equal standing as men (Begikhani et al., 2015). Norms and traditions that sustain honour-based value systems are typically so wholly internalized that women are often implicated in both their own subjugation and the oppression of the women in such communities (Begikhani et al., 2015). When women socialize other women, especially their daughters, they commonly adhere to patriarchal notions because "their multi-layered identities are rooted in class, caste, and familial notions of status: just as a woman's role within her family usually subsumes a woman's identity, so it also defines her position in society." (Begikhani et al., 2015: 30). As a result, many women see conforming to these ideals as essential to their sense of self-worth and social standing. Additionally, the extent to which a woman complies with the values systems entrenched in these systems is mirrored in the way her marital and biological family perceives her—and, hence, how she perceives herself (Begikhani et al., 2015).

Frequently, women do not identify that they are victims of gender-based violence, perceiving such treatment as inherent to their culture (Gill, 2009). Typically, a woman living in an honour-based society learns that she is subordinate to men. In such cultures, young women's socialisation relies on ideals of family honour and cultural traditions that become so ingrained that it is difficult for women to abandon these principles (Gill, 2009). As a result of this brainwashing, many women become complicit in their own subjection because they believe they are at fault for the emotional and physical abuse they endure (Gill, 2009).

Furthermore, In patriarchal households, older women are usually tasked with policing the younger women and keeping an eye on them. As women who have reached menopause and are thought of as having no sexual desires, older women are entrusted to protect the family honour by appropriately socializing and controlling the younger women of the household. Consequently, women are not merely passively adopting prevailing conceptions of shame and honour but actively and significantly contributing to their reinforcement (Ghanim, 2015). For example, gossiping is another method of control over women's behaviour in society. Gossiping, a form of social control that mainly involves women, perpetuates and strengthens the patriarchal construct of female subjugation. In honour-based small communities, people keep watchful eyes on one another because one family's moral failure can symbolize another's moral uprightness, thus, creating an us versus them dichotomy that allows the gossipers to present themselves as more honourable than the others (Ghanim, 2015). Gossiping, like other instruments of control, strengthens the culture of fear. Women do not need to actually engage in any illicit or forbidden behaviour to be punished; rumours about their sexual conduct or even suspicion of any sexual behaviour are enough to ruin women's reputations and inflict violence on them.

However, it is essential to remember that parents have their reasons for expecting virginity and chastity. For example, premarital sexual intercourse may lead to pregnancy out

of wedlock, which is considered both socially and religiously unacceptable. In addition, some people believe that having premarital sex may cause problems later in marital life, as spouses may feel jealous or insecure (Ghanim, 2015). Further, having sex out of wedlock may ruin one's reputation, a valuable social commodity that determines people's social standing. If a woman's reputation is tarnished, the reputation of her entire family is tarnished. In such cases, losing social capital signifies social death, and some families may have to move away from their hometowns because of their humiliation (King, 2008). Finally, it is essential to note that not all families that value virginity will react violently if virginity is lost. Although virginity is a powerful governing force in women's lives, it is not the only force. Young women and girls are seen as more than their virginity, valued for their contributions to the household and community, and loved and seen by their families (Abu Lughod, 2011).

Nevertheless, as illustrated earlier, the greatest dishonour a woman can bring to her family is being a non-virgin through premarital sexual affairs. In the following chapter, we will be taking a closer look into hymen myths that perpetuate harmful ideas about female virginity and sexuality and put women at risk of honour-based violence and honour killings. This chapter will focus on the circulation of hymen myths, the culpability and responsibility of doctors, forced virginity testing, and hymen reconstructive surgery.

Part Three: Hymen Myths, Forced Virginity Testing, and Hymenoplasty

In Arab societies, much like other societies that place a high value on female virginity, the hymen is a symbol of physical and vaginal virginity and is inextricably tied to the social and cultural conceptions of virginity (Mahadeen, 2019). In Arabic, the hymen is called *ghisha' al-bikara*, which is literally translated to "maidenhood membrane". This definition, which considers the hymen to be a symbol and embodiment of virginity, is intriguing because, in Arabic dictionaries, the definition of virginity is not related to the hymen but rather to the "difficulty of penetrating a sexually inexperienced woman" (Mahadeen, 2019: 116). Abu Odeh (2010) argues that the hymen does not solely exist in the vagina; it extends beyond the female body and engulfs her existence with social and cultural rules and expectations through a process she terms 'hymenization'. Consequently, since the hymen extends beyond the female body, it governs female sexual conduct and female social behaviour (Abu Odeh, 2010).

Furthermore, King (2008) argues that the hymen is not only a symbol of virginity but also a border that delineates membership in the group. King (2008: 335) asserts that "a hymen serves as a border to the womb in which a new member of a different patrilineage is gestated. Before one of the wombs belonging to a patrilineage can be used as a gestation site, permission must be granted in the form of a wedding ceremony. Otherwise, a violation of lineage sovereignty has occurred". In patrilineal societies, children are considered descendants of the father, not the mother, meaning that group belonging is passed on from the father, not the mother. In patrilineal communities, "only males can keep a category going from generation to generation, and very female is potentially the bearer of offspring who do not belong to her own category" (King, 2008: 324). According to King (2008), if a woman is killed because she became pregnant out of wedlock, the woman is killed not because she is not considered a valued member of the group. In contrast, the woman is killed precisely because of her membership in the group; the child inside her is the outsider and the enemy who must be eliminated (King,

2008). For example, in 1991, when Kurdistan became independent from Iraq, members of the Peshmerga (Kurdish military forces, also labelled as guerrillas) began killing women who were thought to be sex workers and women who were accused of being promiscuous, immoral, and having premarital sexual intercourse (King, 2008). According to King (2008), this was done to cleanse Kurdistan from any remaining Arab blood by ensuring that women could no longer bear children from the enemy. We must also look at the historical contexts in which these killings emerged. Kurdish people gained their independence from Iraq, but only after thousands of villages were destroyed and tens of thousands of people killed and displaced by the Iraqi government. Hence, it is understandable that the Kurdish people may want to protect their borders, sovereignty, and lineage; however, this does not justify the violence enacted on women in the name of sovereignty.

The hymen, within the framework of shame and honour, is a significant symbol that the whole family owns. Although the hymen biologically belongs to the female, it is actually culturally owned by the entire family. Honourable and respectable females are defined by their ability to maintain their hymen. Thus, the unbroken hymen is not just considered proof of virginity by dominant cultural norms, but it is the only acceptable proof (Ghanim, 2015). Consequently, the hymen serves as the primary criterion for determining a woman's virginity. Since the hymen is only biologically present in female anatomy, it is a culturally recognized mark of female virginity and chastity. This physical distinction rationalizes discriminatory cultural practices since men are not required to prove their chastity or be chaste (Ghanim, 2015).

An intact hymen symbolizes the sexual purity of females; thus, it is assumed that any vaginal penetration that does not produce hymeneal blood is indicative of a social issue relating to honour (Ghanim, 2015). However, an intact hymen does not necessarily mean that a female is sexually inexperienced. It is medically impossible to ascertain the sexual past of a female by

assessing the condition of her hymen. Some hymens are elastic and do not tear or bleed during penetration. Additionally, since the hymen is a fragile membrane, it is possible to tear from non-sexual physical activities, such as horseback riding or gymnastics, using tampons, medical examinations, or injury (Ghanim, 2015). Therefore, it is a biologically incorrect assumption that hymen and sexuality are inexorably linked. The absence of hymenal blood, and even the absence of an intact hymen, does not necessarily denote any past sexual acts.

Although there are many possible reasons for a torn hymen, patriarchal honour-based societies believe that only sexual intercourse could cause a torn hymen (Ghanim, 2015). This conceptualization of the hymen and virginity reduces human sexuality to only penile-vaginal penetration, which is unrealistic and insufficient in accounting for other sexual acts and contributes to patriarchal notions of sexuality and masculinity that reflect power structure in gender reality (Ghanim, 2015). Women can engage in a variety of sexual behaviours and still be considered virgins culturally. Jean-Jacques (2008: 55) emphasizes that "the ascertained integrity of the hymen would by no mean rule out the practice of sexual activities other than vaginal coitus, such as intercrural or anal coitus, cunnilingus and fellatio, none of which are usually associated with the concept of 'virginity'."

Nevertheless, myths and false ideas about the hymen persist in Middle Eastern and other honour-based societies. The veneration of hymenal blood perpetuates harmful ideas about female anatomy, which puts females at risk of being victims of humiliation and honour-based violence. Due to myths that correlate hymenal bleeding with first sexual encounters, women who do not bleed during their first sexual encounters are accused of being non-virgins and could be subjected to public humiliation, ostracization, and immediate divorce (Ghanim, 2015). If a bride is believed to be a non-virgin on her wedding night, the groom and his family may request a virginity test or may simply return the bride to her family and demand compensation for being given "damaged goods". In some cases, the groom's family may request a virginity

certificate prior to the wedding to prove the chastity and vaginal virginity of the bride. In other cases, the bride's family provides an unprompted virginity certificate before the wedding to avoid any possible accusations or suspicions (Ghanim, 2015). Since it is a common belief that women are more likely to misbehave and make poor decisions, there is a pressing need to ensure that they uphold societal standards of decency and purity (Ghanim, 2015). Henceforth, a woman does not have an option but to submit to the examination because denying or delaying the test could be construed as confessing to engaging in dishonourable behaviours that put the reputation of the family at risk (Ghanim, 2015). Thus, even if a woman consented to a virginity test, her consent is nullified by the societal pressure placed on her to protect the reputation and honour of her family.

Female virginity tests "consider an intact hymen as equivalent to virginity based on the hypothesis that sexual intercourse is the only cause of a torn hymen" (Moawad, 2022). The subjectivity of the test, which overcomes the reliability, procedures, and expertise of the typical physician, thereby leading to judgments that are above their capabilities, has led to the rejection of this concept, which is no longer recognized either logically or medically (Moawad, 2022). Virginity tests are usually performed on unmarried women without their consent or are performed on people who cannot give consent, such as political prisoners, detainees, women accused of prostitution, and women alleging sexual abuse. Virginity tests are instruments of control used for women and girls' social and public policing. Under the pretence of preserving women's dignity and chastity, virginity testing is a heinous method of control to suppress women's sexuality, equating to sexual abuse. Virginity tests reflect the superiority and dominance of men in society and perpetuate patriarchal ideas that women are deceitful (Ghanim, 2015). Furthermore, Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2005: 1195) asserts that the "hegemonic power of men in social relationships is further empowered by the use of the medical system

and the imposed virginity test as a patriarchal tool to inhibit women from gaining autonomy over their bodies."

Virginity testing is an invasive and dehumanizing procedure that violates women's fundamental human rights, specifically their right to bodily autonomy. The Human Rights Watch (HRW) has demanded banning virginity tests, arguing that they are dehumanizing, terrifying, and painful. According to the committee of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), coercive practices, such as virginity tests, are "degrading, discriminatory and unsafe and constitute a violation by state authorities of the bodily integrity, person, and dignity of women." Virginity tests could be traumatizing for women, especially women who have been sexually assaulted. In her study on imposed virginity testing in Palestine, Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2005) found that women in her study felt terrified and terrorized by the imposed virginity test. For some women, it was clear that the virginity test was as traumatizing as the sexual abuse they went through. The women in her study manifested their fear in various ways – screaming, crying, pushing, fainting, freezing up, and so on. For some women, the experience was so traumatizing and dehumanizing that they thought of or attempted suicide (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2005). In an interview with a Palestinian police officer in charge of transferring alleged victims of sexual abuse to doctors for virginity tests, he stated that he had never realized how hard it is for women to undergo virginity tests until he personally accompanied a father with his 11-year-old daughter, and witnessed the girl crying and screaming in fear, begging her father not to let anyone touch her. Reflecting on this incident, he said that he hopes he never has any daughters and never has to go through this (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2005).

Women do not only passively receive medicine. Women deliberately and objectively evaluate their medical options while taking into consideration their social, economic, and personal conditions. Consequently, they generally make decisions that support their ambitions

and independence (Wild et al., 2019). Hence, if "the apparent benefits outweigh the costs to themselves, and if technology serves their own ends, then most women will avail themselves to what is offered" (Lock and Kaufert, 1998: 7). Women in patriarchal honour-based societies with cultural virginity taboos are sometimes able to avoid retaliation for transgressing sexual social norms by resorting to hymen reconstructive surgery, also known as hymenoplasty. Hymenoplasty is a procedure where the broken pieces of the hymen are stitched back up, or, if there are no remaining pieces, a complete reconstructive procedure takes place where tissues from the labia are used to create a hymen. In some cases, a gelatine capsule of fake blood is planted with the hymen, which is supposed to break during intercourse to mimic hymenal blood loss. Ghanim (2015: 44) describes hymenoplasty as a "surgical operation for the repair of broken hymen, aiming at revirginizing the female by rehymenizing her body to ensure her marriageability in a cultural context where female virginity is an absolute prerequisite." However, due to the secrecy of hymen reconstructive surgeries, women who undergo them place themselves in risky and vulnerable positions. Due to the sexual nature of restorative nature and the patriarchal social environment, most restorative surgeries are performed in unsanitary and unsafe conditions (Ghanim, 2015). Additionally, due to the secretive nature of the surgery, women who were harmed by the surgical procedure are unable to complain about the doctors who harmed them or take any legal action.

Hymen reconstructive surgery is a very lucrative business for gynaecologists. Hymen reconstructive surgeries are costly because not many doctors perform the surgery and because of the secretive and shameful nature of the surgery. Ghanim (2015: 45) states that another reason for the high price of the procedure is that "the scarceness of the intact hymen, being anatomically non-renewable, tends to increase the value of virginity, and consequently the surgery that restores the broken hymen." In addition, he asserts that there is "an exchange value in virginity, whether biological or restored, due to the attribute of ensuring the marriageability

of the female where the stipulation of sexual purity is an absolute condition" (Ghanim, 2015: 45). Women with the financial resources to afford hymen reconstructive surgeries can protect themselves from honour-based violence; however, women who are not privileged enough to afford the surgery are at risk of humiliation, traumatization, and femicide.

However, women who cannot afford the hymen reconstructive surgery can opt for a fake virginity kit, which is more affordable and accessible. The fake virginity kit consists of a gelatine capsule filled with a blood-mimicking fluid, which, upon penetration, breaks and releases the juices. In addition, intergenerational knowledge passed by the women of the family can help women evade humiliation on their wedding night. For example, older women teach younger brides to keep a needle in their hands while having intercourse; that way, the bride can nick her fingers to release blood and prove her virginity to her groom and his family.

"Hypocrisy, deceit, and duplicity are, in the end, the only weapons available, and many women do not hesitate to use them. Given the framework of relationships as defined by the system, no other behaviour is possible, since direct confrontation would be suicidal. This approach becomes second nature, to the point that even the least subordinate of women has recourse to it the moment she feels threatened."

– Mernissi, 1996: 44

Hymen restorative surgeries and other methods used to fake virginity are often deemed deceitful. However, they are part of the discriminatory cultural process that dehumanizes women and gives them little to no options for protecting themselves. Having premarital sexual relations is punishment enough for women, as it evokes strong feelings of anxiety over virginity loss and fears of paying for expensive hymen restorative surgeries. On the other hand, men do not share the same burden of virginity; hence, not only are they unaffected by these social

norms, but their social standing and recognition increase once they have premarital sex. Thus, hymen reconstructive surgeries, which are needed for protection from cruel and unfair cultural values, reflect women's weakness, subordination, and subjugation in society (Ghanim, 2015). If women were not subjected to harsh, discriminatory and deadly punishment for engaging in premarital sexual affairs, they would not need to resort to deceitfulness. Ghanim (2015: 48) asserts that "the strong virginity cult and the veneration of the hymen make it very difficult for young females to act and behave honestly in society." Even when women want to be honest with their future husbands, the horrifying possibility that they may be killed for their honesty prevents them from being truthful.

From a medical perspective, hymen reconstructive surgery is a selective surgery that is considered unnecessary. Hymen reconstructive surgeries are loaded with moral implications for the doctors involved. Although doctors may want to protect the patient from honour-based violence from her family or her future husband's family, they are "reluctant to injure the woman's intimacy and resent the deceitful character of both the certificate and hymenal repair" (Jean-Jacques, 2008: 112). If doctors perform hymen reconstructive surgeries, they are perpetuating patriarchal values; however, if they refrain, they leave women to endure grave repercussions, which also sustains patriarchal ideologies. Hymen restoration surgeries are crucial for saving women's lives who are in grave danger of being punished by honour-killing for having premarital sex or women who are contemplating suicide because they lost their virginity.

The cult of virginity and the honour codes attached to it are discriminatory sexual practices. A female's first legitimate sexual experience becomes a test of her sexuality and chastity. Women who are honest and do not turn to deception are punished; thus, they resort to deception in order to survive in a hostile and antagonistic culture. A society that is hostile to women necessarily fosters a toxic culture of deceit (Ghanim, 2015). This culture of deception

also harms girls and women since it deprives them of the support, sympathy, and understanding of their family that they need while they are physically, psychologically, and emotionally developing. Societies that punish women for honesty and autonomy and encourage ignorance and naivety negatively impact women's agency (Ghanim, 2015). The virginity cult requires women to suppress all forms of sexual desire and amorous emotions and impulses, controlling women's thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. Since the female body and sexuality are considered to collectively belong to the family and community, women are denied the right to exist autonomously. Thus, women tend to feel alienated from their bodies and being. Best, cited in Ghanim (2015: 65), explains that "when women are perceived solely as objects of the male gaze when their bodies are so regulated and culturally controlled, they are robbed of their subjectivity, of their identity, and, ironically, of the very sensuality for which they are imprisoned" (Best, cited in Ghanim, 2015: 65). The domination and restriction over female bodily autonomy and sexuality indicate that females do not own their bodies. In contrast, bodily alienation causes women to fear their bodies since it belongs to their family and community and not to them. Therefore, the cult of virginity, and its associated honour code, is a social structure which violently exploits and subjugates the female body (Ghanim, 2015). Ultimately, honour codes and virginity taboos lead to the domination over and the degradation of women.

As discussed earlier, women in patriarchal honour-based societies who are found transgressing or are accused of violating the honour codes and social norms of society are harshly punished and sometimes killed by honour-based violence. The following section explores the various crimes classified as crimes of honour, such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation and honour killings, and examines the contexts in which honour-based violence and crimes appear.

Part Four: Crimes of (Dis)Honour

As illustrated in the previous sections, honour-based violence or honour crimes are triggered by actual or alleged acts that are deemed dishonourable in patriarchal honour-based societies. Since the family's honour depends on the social behaviour and sexual conduct of the female kin, those behaviours must be controlled. Furthermore, Gorar (2021: 22) argues that "women can easily infringe unwritten codes of honour, such as by falling in love, exercising sexual autonomy, engaging in extramarital relationships, seeking a divorce or choosing their own husbands. These behaviours are seen as transgressing the boundaries of what is 'appropriate' (that is, socially sanctioned) sexual behaviour."

The concept of 'honour' has become synonymous with a wide variety of abusive and discriminating behaviours, some of which may or may not directly lead to the execution of murder but are nonetheless destructive (Gorar, 2021). Honour crimes are much broader and more complex than the singular acts of violence that they are often equated with because violence committed in the name of honour usually has a community element that supports it (Gorar, 2021). Moreover, honour-based crimes emphasize the gender inequalities that persist in society. Some honour-based violent crimes, such as physical violence, confinement, rape, female genital mutilation, and murder, are considered illegal. Nevertheless, other forms of honour-based violence that are not recognized as criminal offences include restricting autonomy, depriving women of the right to make decisions about their romantic and sexual life, and forced virginity testing (Gorar, 2021).

Honour-based violence shares many similarities with domestic violence as they are both gendered forms of violence that primarily impact women. However, instances of domestic violence are considered singular acts of aggression, while instances of honour-based violence are collective (Gorar, 2021). In most cases of honour-based violence, multiple perpetrators are involved in the execution of violence. There is a culture of silence surrounding such instances

of violence since family and community members remain silent due to fear of retaliation or approval of the violence. If a victim flees violence, the community's assistance becomes of great value; as soon as they find the victim, they inform the family of her whereabouts. There is no statute of limitations for crimes of honour; if a woman is sentenced to death by her family, they will kill her once they find her, even twenty years after the initial sentencing of dishonour (Gorar, 2021).

Stigmatization, marginalization, and isolation from society are passive-aggressive instances of honour-based violence. Isolation and marginalization signal the social death of a female who has transgressed society's honour codes. Women who are educated and have financial resources are able to protect themselves from particular forms of honour-based violence, such as forced marriage or forced virginity (Gorar, 2021). However, they might still face other kinds of honour-based violence, such as isolation and stigmatization. Women who are shunned from their families and communities face oppressive marginalization, as they "are expelled from useful participation in social life and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination" (Young, cited in Gorar, 2021: 81).

In cultures wherein male children are favoured over female children, female children are more likely to be subjected to mistreatment and neglect simply because of their gender, and they may also be expressly denied the same opportunities as male children. For example, young girls and women may be deprived of getting an education or pursuing higher education. Young girls may also be prevented from participating in other activities at an early age "where they may be "policed" by male members of the family; their movements and behaviour restricted, and any transgression met with violent punishment, confinement, or being denied food" (Roberts et al., 2014: 4). Additionally, females may be subjected to relentless psychological and emotional abuse such as humiliation and belittlement and physical abuse such as beating, slapping, and choking. In some cases, young girls and women who are discovered to be non-

virgins are vulnerable to sexual abuse as a form of honour-based violence since females who have previously engaged in sexual affairs are not allowed to claim sexual abuse (Roberts et al., 2014).

Another manifestation of honour-based violence is confinement (Roberts et al., 2014). Suppose a young girl or a woman is caught violating or is accused of violating any of the social norms or behaving in a dishonourable manner. In that case, she may become a prisoner in her own home. Women are pulled out of school and isolated within the confines of the family home. Usually, they become responsible for completing the household chores and taking care of the men and older women of the family. In such cases, women are typically prohibited from socializing or reaching out to anyone outside the family. In some, women are imprisoned in their rooms and are isolated from the rest of the family. Isolation and confinement can have severe, long-lasting adverse mental and physical health effects and are flagrant violations of fundamental human rights and dignity (Roberts et al., 2014).

Education is the most powerful possession a woman can have. Academic credentials offer women employment opportunities, which provide financial independence. Educated women with financial resources can protect themselves from honour-based violence and domestic violence. For example, women who have jobs and are financially independent can move out of their abusive households and maybe even flee the country. However, women with little education and no career prospects are likely to remain financially dependent on their family or husband, which makes them vulnerable to honour-based and domestic violence. Furthermore, education increases a female's self-confidence, strengthens her sense of self and expressive subjectivity, and broadens her worldview. Finally, going to school, university or work helps women make social connections outside their family or community, which may be helpful if there is a threat of honour-based violence. Young girls and women who are deprived of their education and isolated at home become far more vulnerable to other kinds of abuse.

It is worth reiterating that forced virginity tests are also a form of honour-based violence. Forced virginity tests, or imposed virginity tests, are usually performed on women without their consent. Even if women verbally consent to have their virginity tested, the social pressure exerted on women to undergo this invasive examination and the fear of harsh punishment mean that their consent is void (Ghanim, 2015). Being at risk of forced virginity testing instils fear in women and coerces them into suppressing their sexual desires and conforming to patriarchal gender and cultural ideologies. Imposed virginity tests are invasive, humiliating, and traumatizing. For most women, especially women who have endured sexual trauma, the examination itself feels like further sexual assault and re-traumatization. Forced virginity tests are used to humiliate and subjugate women and further assert male domination over female existence. The fact that young girls and women are forced to undergo such heinous and insulting procedures reflects women's subordinate status in society. Any rumour or stain on a woman's reputation, whether real or imagined, puts her at risk of forced virginity testing. If she is declared as a non-virgin from this unreliable examination, she becomes incredibly vulnerable to harsher forms of honour-based violence such as confinement, genital mutilation, or murder.

Moreover, the trauma of forced virginity testing often leads to attempted suicide. For example, when a high school in Turkey ordered the forced virginity testing of all female students, a student committed suicide (Ghanim, 2015). In a separate incident in Turkey, a high school student also heard her principal tell her father to examine her virginity because she had been skipping too many classes and was always socializing with males. Upon hearing this, the student fled, and her body was only discovered a week later at the bottom of a hill, indicating a suicide. What is more shocking is that the father still ordered a virginity test to be performed on his daughter (Ghanim, 2015).

Female genital mutilation (FGM), also known as female circumcision, "includes all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia and any other injuries to the female genital organs whether it be for cultural, religious, or other nontherapeutic reasons" (Ghanim, 2015: 79). According to the World Health Organization (2014), female genital mutilation surgeries are classified into three main types. The first kind of FGM procedure is called clitoridectomy, where the clitoris is partially or entirely removed. The second type of FGM surgery is called an excision. In this procedure, not only is the clitoris removed, the labia minora is removed too. Finally, infibulation is the third type of FGM procedure. It involves "narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal. The seal is formed by cutting and repositioning the inner, or outer labia, with or without the removal of the clitoris" (Roberts et al., 2014: 4). UNICEF (2020) reports estimate that around 140 million women worldwide have undergone female genital mutilation. Female genital mutilation is especially widespread in central African countries, such as Egypt, Somalia, Liberia, and many others, with a 40% prevalence rate. It is worth noting that in Egypt, female genital mutilation is a procedure that both Muslims and Christians undergo. Moreover, FGM is also practised in communities in Western nations; for example, "it is estimated that in the United Kingdom, 66,000 women have undergone FGM, with 33,000 girls considered at risk every year" (Roberts et al., 2014: 5). Since female genital mutilation procedures and justifications differ from one society to another "it is not easy to trace the origin of this practice to any particular point or place in history. In some communities, the procedure is observed as a religious rite, though it is carried out across Muslim, Christian and other faiths, and there is no clear evidence in the Bible or Qur'an supporting it" (Begikhani et al., 2015: 29)

Human health and well-being are profoundly affected by female genital mutilation. FGM is an excruciating surgery that is rarely treated with anaesthesia. Since incompetent doctors frequently perform FGM in unsanitary settings, it can have devastating effects on

victims' health immediately and in the long run (Roberts et al., 2014). A recent study found that 10% of girls who undergo FGM die within a year, and another 25% die young as a result of the long-term effects (U.K Foreign Office, 2011). It is common for girls who have had their genitals mutilated by FGM to have difficulties with basic physical activities such as sitting, standing, and walking (Roberts et al., 2014). In addition, FGM may also affect the female bladder and cause menstrual problems. Girls and women who have suffered from FGM are more frequently absent from school, adversely impacting their education. Some victims of FGM, or girls who are at risk of FGM, may seek aid from professionals; however, fear and embarrassment often hinder them from giving specific details about their situation (Roberts et al., 2014).

Female genital mutilation is a multi-layered and complex phenomenon. FGM operates within the same framework and is guided by the same principles of honour and shame. The obsession with female virginity and the high premium placed on an intact hymen are the reasons for the persistence of female genital mutilation (El-Saadawi, 1980). It is a commonly held idea that some or all of a girl's external genitalia can be surgically removed in order to reduce her sexual desire and, hence, help her preserve her virginity and dignity (Ghanim, 2020). Virginity compulsion, which is justified by honour, makes FGM practices essential to the protection of the family honour. FGM is used to discourage girls from promiscuity by diminishing their sexual desires, which is a crucial prerequisite for preserving one's chastity and virginity before marriage and faithfulness during the marriage (Ghanim, 2015). The practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) is one of the techniques employed to control female sexuality and restrict a woman's right to engage in sexual activity that is healthy. Female genital mutilation inhibits sexual pleasure and makes sexual intercourse a painful experience for women (Ghanim, 2015). As a result, the cultural antagonism that already exists between women and sex is exacerbated even further by these complications (Ghanim, 2015). In addition

to causing permanent damage to a person's bodily and mental health, female genital mutilation has a profound effect on a woman's psychosexual well-being.

In societies that consider female genital mutilation an essential indicator of purity, a bride-to-be must prove her chastity to the groom and his family. Hence, before the wedding, the bride-to-be has to show her "sealed" vagina to the groom's family. After they confirm that she is a virgin and has been circumcised, it becomes her mother's responsibility to take her to get "opened" appropriately before the wedding night (Roberts et al., 2014). Female genital mutilation is justified by claims that it protects women from being sexually assaulted, which protects their family honour. However, common knowledge informs us that circumcision does not impact the risk factors of being sexually assaulted or pursued. FGM is said to inhibit women's uncontrollable sexual desires, protecting the family honour from female sexuality. Women are only allowed to engage in sexual behaviour once they are married, which is when they are "uncircumcised". Females and the female body are treated as commodities and sexual objects that exist solely for male pleasure. FGM further degrades the existence of women and strengthens destructive patriarchal ideologies.

Forced marriage is another typical manifestation of honour-based violence. It is important to note that forced marriage differs from an arranged marriage. In arranged marriages, the families of both spouses arrange the marriage; however, it is up to the spouses to choose if they want to proceed with the wedding (Roberts et al., 2014). Although the parents play a crucial role, the spouses make the final decision. However, in a forced marriage, the spouses have no choice but to agree to be wed. The urge to marry under duress may take many forms, including physical, psychological, and financial abuse (Roberts et al., 2014). According to a report published by the Home Office Working Group on Forced Marriage (2000), in arranged marriages, "the families of both spouses take a leading role in arranging the marriage, but the choice whether to solemnize the arrangement remains with the spouses and can be

exercised at any time. The spouses have the right to choose – to say no – at any time. In forced marriage, there is no choice ... The tradition of arranged marriage has operated successfully within many communities and many countries for a very long time and remains the preferred choice of many young people who spoke to the Working Group" (Home Office, 2000: 10). Nevertheless, it is essential to note that even though the spouses have the final decision to accept or reject an arranged marriage, we must consider the social pressures exerted on them to get married. For example, some individuals may proceed with the union for fear of disappointing their families. Julios (2015: 30) asserts that "survivors of arranged marriages invariably point to the impact that parental, family and community's expectations have on individuals, particularly young people, when considering whether to enter an arranged union." Therefore, social expectations, especially of family members and friends, could be very coercive and may cause individuals to consent to a marriage they do not want.

The victims of forced marriage, who are most commonly women, are subjected to a great amount of trauma, which can manifest itself in a variety of ways, including mental and physical health issues. When a person is married against their will, they are frequently subjected to physical and mental abuse and social isolation at the hands of their spouse or the spouse's family (Roberts et al., 2014). Women who are victims of forced marriage may suffer at the hands of their spouse's relatives, who may subject them to beatings, criticism, and humiliation. Since victims are typically forced to live as members of their spouse's family away from their own family members and friends, they are more likely to be subjected to physical and emotional abuse as well as to experience social isolation (Roberts et al., 2014). They may also be intentionally stopped from making contact with other people, engaging in social activities, and finding employment or pursuing an education (Roberts et al., 2014). Young girls who are married off against their will are frequently prevented from continuing their education, which stunts both their social and educational development. For many victims of forced

marriage, running away from home or suicide are the only options available. Women in forced marriages and who are being abused cannot return to their families because they will be considered to be bringing shame and dishonour to the family; hence, women do not have a support group to protect them from honour-based and domestic violence (Roberts et al., 2014). Unfortunately, some women who flee their abusive husbands and return to their families are either killed by their families for dishonouring them, killed by the husband as an act of revenge, or returned to the husband by their family. Hence, many women with limited options attempt suicide to free themselves from this imprisonment.

Individuals who support forced marriage claim that it protects their children from engaging in bad behaviours such as premarital sexual intercourse, builds interpersonal relationships in the community, preserves cultural and religious traditions, and prevents inappropriate relationships. Brandon and Hafez (2008) confirm that "parents force their children to marry to control their sexual behaviour and pre-empt any actions that could shame the family. In other cases, however, families use forced marriage to strengthen family, community and caste ties and preserve and maintain the family's material wealth" (Brandon and Hafez, 2008: 12). Finally, diasporic families may force their children to get married to protect them from "Westernization" and preserve their cultural, traditional, and religious values. Another justification used for forced marriage is sexual orientation. Members of the LGBTQ community are more vulnerable to forced marriage and honour-based violence. According to Crown Prosecution Services (2013), "Some Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people may face actual or threatened forced marriage and the potential for other forms of honour based violence as a result of how their sexuality or gender identity is perceived within their family or community. There is an increasing body of evidence to support the fact that LGBT people from within affected communities are being forced into marriage to

cure their sexuality or address their gender issues. This may also include honour-based practices such as corrective rape.”

Nevertheless, we should be careful not to conflate forced marriages with arranged marriages. As Abu Lughod (2011) discovered during her stay with the Awlad Bin Ali Egyptian Bedouin community, where arranged marriages are the norm, parents arrange marriages for their children because they love them and they want them to have happy, safe, and respectful marriages. Hence, arranged marriages are done out of love, not out of the need for control. As mentioned earlier, both prospective spouses must agree to the marriage, and Islamic law explicitly states that the woman must agree to the marriage before it can take place. Furthermore, many of the young girls and women in Abu Lughod’s study (2011) expressed their fondness for arranged marriages since they believe it is better to be with someone their family already knows and trusts. In addition, marrying someone from the same cultural background, homeland, and religion strengthens familial and communal bonds. Like other types of marriages, arranged marriages may end badly, and people may end up betrayed or hurt; however, that does not mean that arranged marriages are loveless or have a monopoly on violence.

Honour- Killings

"In a culture revolving around male ego, shaming the honour of men is considered the real crime rather than the killing of the transgressor. In this twisted moral reality, the offender is not the killer but the girl who has tarnished the family's honour and reputation; indeed, honour killing is actually considered justice"-

(Ghanim, 2015: 20)

Honour-based violence is manifested in a broad range of behaviours, all of which primarily operate as instruments of control and oppression. However, the most heinous form

of honour-based violence is honour killings. Honour killings, the most severe manifestation of honour-based violence, "represent a final act of control over a person's behaviour after all attempts at eliciting compliance have failed" (Julios, 2015: 43). Despite the fact that "honour" killings occur throughout all socioeconomic classes and demographics, they are sometimes referred to as "community" or "culture" crimes because of their prevalence within some minority populations, particularly South Asian groups (Julios, 2015), which is a contested categorization. The underlying motivations of honour killings are closely tied to the motivations of other honour-based violence, such as forced marriage, which are embedded in patriarchal ideologies about female sexuality, masculinity, and the role of women in society (Julios, 2015).

Murders committed in the name of honour can either be premeditated, in which case the perpetrators intend for the victim to perish as a result of the assault, or they can be an unintended consequence of some other form of honour-based violence. Honour-killings can be triggered by a wide variety of reasons, such as having a boyfriend or girlfriend, being in an interfaith relationship, dressing inappropriately, wearing make-up, rejecting a forced marriage, fleeing an abusive home or husband, seeking a divorce, engaging in extramarital sexual affairs, rejection of religion, and sexual orientation (Roberts et al., 2014).

Honour killings are typically premeditated and involve more than one perpetrator. Most of the time, honour killings are arranged after a family council, during which male (or occasionally female) members of the family discuss the allegations against the victim and decide whether or not they believe the victim is guilty, as well as the penalty that the victim will face. In some cases, younger males are burdened with committing the crime itself, as some families see this as a "rite of passage" to adulthood, as a means of protecting older family members from being arrested, and in the belief that younger family members will receive a lesser punishment because of their age" (Roberts et al., 2014: 11). Since honour is collectively

owned by the entire family and community, then the punishment will be executed accordingly. Honour-killings are perpetrated to protect family honour or restore the lost family honour. Although men are usually the perpetrators of honour killings, sometimes older female family members are the perpetrators of honour killings. In some cases, the older females of the household plan the crime, and the men perpetrate it. Such honour killings, according to Julios (2015: 67), “exemplify the extraordinary lengths individuals and groups bound by 'honour codes will go in order to ensure compliance from their victims. Paternalistic cultural mindsets, together with distorted notions of family' honour' and 'shame', will translate into extreme levels of domestic and sexual violence against women who defy such norms. In a testimony to the power of the collective over individual agency in 'honour' cultures, those who fail to acquiesce will pay with their lives.”

Part Five: Combatting Honour-Based Violence

The United Nations General Assembly has emphasized the need to criminalize all forms of violence against women and girls, including crimes perpetrated in the name of honour. In Bangladesh, Brazil, Ecuador, India, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan, Sweden, Turkey, Uganda, and the United Kingdom, according to the Report of the Secretary-General, women have been murdered in the name of their culture (Gorar, 2021). The Secretary-General then offered a series of proposals on the criminalization of such acts and emphasized that individuals intentionally participating in, supporting, or encouraging them, as well as those who threaten women and girls in the name of honour, should be penalized (Idriss, 2015). Additionally, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) committee constantly urged state parties to combat honour-based violence and honour-related crimes (Gorar, 2021). The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended repealing laws that allow perpetrators of honour crimes to negotiate their sentences or receive a lenient sentence, regardless of their cultural or religious beliefs (Gorar, 2021). To address violence against women in general and honour-based violence in particular, we must challenge male privilege in sexual matters and social norms of male dominance. Action is necessary. Consequently, both new policies and leadership with strong political will are required. Not only do leaders rule society, but they also provide direction, and leadership affects change (Begikhani et al., 2015).

Raising awareness about honour-based violence and honour killings may effectively reduce their occurrence. Raising awareness may take many forms, including educating women about their legal rights and informing them about available resources. In addition, it is crucial to teach young girls and women about violent and oppressive behaviour. This way, young girls and women can easily spot early signs of violence that may indicate an honour-based violence threat and may be able to protect themselves by seeking help. Furthermore, raising awareness

should include social involvement that engages different classes and ages of the community. It is essential to engage with the older generation and raise awareness about harmful patriarchal ideologies, virginity and hymen myths, the consequences of committing or being culpable in honour-based or any kind of violent crime, and the suffering that victims of violence endure. Decades of being socialized in a particular way may mean that individuals may be resistant to change; however, any attempt at reducing honour-based crimes is an attempt worth taking.

For decades, women have resorted to activism to raise awareness about honour-based violence and to demand their rights (Patel, 2020). Activism is crucial as it brings people together by protesting, organizing, and debating. Activism engages the community as a whole and gives women the chance to organize with non-governmental organizations, non-profit organizations, politicians and leaders, which may help them gather funds and implement real changes.

Education is another crucial method that can be used to reduce honour-based violence rates. Education is the most powerful weapon a woman could have. With education, young girls and women can work, making them financially independent. Being financially independent is crucial for women because it can protect them from honour-based violence and crimes. As we discussed earlier, women with financial resources can leave abusive households or husbands and may even be able to flee the country. However, uneducated women often have fewer financial resources and are financially dependent on their families or spouses, which makes them more vulnerable to abuse. Furthermore, it is worth reiterating that attending school, university, or the workplace bolsters women's self-confidence and sense of self-worth, making them stronger. Finally, these avenues also help women form social connections outside their family and community, giving them a sense of autonomy and independence.

It is worth noting that since many young girls and women cannot escape from honour-based and domestic violence because of limited resources, free housing for all would significantly help women, especially mothers who are victims of domestic abuse and have nowhere to go. Free housing would save the lives of women and all other marginalized and oppressed groups in society.

Law enforcement officers, social work officers, doctors, and medical staff should all be trained to understand honour-based violence, recognize instances of honour-based violence, and intervene. Furthermore, there should be communication between police, social workers, and doctors for them to work harmoniously and get the most desirable results. In addition, language training or providing translators for police, social workers, and hospitals in immigrant-receiving countries could be beneficial since some immigrants may not speak the language well and may be unable to ask for help if they are in danger. Finally, and most importantly, to prevent honour-based violence, young girls and women must be believed when they claim threats of honour-based violence. For example, before she was killed, Banaz Mahmoud went to the authorities in London several times, told them that her family was trying to kill her, and gave them a note with the names of those who were planning on killing her; yet, the authorities dismissed her allegations and ignored her pleas for help. Banaz Mahmoud was kidnapped by her father, uncles, and other men, and was sexually assaulted, beaten, and strangled to death (Julios, 2015).

Combatting honour-based violence in immigrant receiving countries also means increasing awareness about racism and xenophobia, protecting immigrant communities from external violence, and properly integrating immigrants into society rather than keeping them at the edges of social life. Patriarchal violence thrives in insecure conditions such as poverty and political insecurity. Combatting honour-based violence also means combatting the structural and systemic violence that shapes immigrants experiences in Western countries.

Conclusion

Honour-based violence is best understood as gender-based violence and a particular form of violence against women. Although honour-based violence occurs across different demographics, social strata, and socioeconomic statuses, it is most commonly prevalent in central African, Middle Eastern, and South Asian countries and minority groups (Roberts et al., 2014); hence it is labelled as community violence or cultural violence, which is a contested categorization as it perpetuates harmful stereotypes and racist, xenophobic, and Islamophobic ideologies. Honour-based violence should be classified as a particular form of patriarchal violence against women, not very different from other forms of violence against women.

The motivations of honour-based violence are embedded in traditional patriarchal ideologies. Patriarchal and honour-based ideologies include the belief in male superiority over females in all aspects of life. Honour codes operate as instruments to govern female social behaviour and sexual conduct. In patriarchal and honour-based societies, women are expected to remain chaste until they are married, and any sign of premarital sexual experience or behaviour puts women at significant risk of retaliation by honour-based violence (Ghanim, 2015). Women are also required to behave socially to convey their sexual purity, chastity, shyness, obedience, and compliance. If a woman were seen flirting, laughing, or walking provocatively, she would be accused of transgressing the codes of honour and bringing shame to the family (Tas-Cifci, 2021).

The obsession with virginity and an intact hymen forces women to live an inauthentic, degraded, deceitful existence. Cultures that are hostile to women and harshly punish female sexuality force women to deceit (Ghanim, 2015). For example, many women have been resorting to hymen reconstructive surgery, which "revirginizes" them for their future husbands and could protect them from honour-based violence executed by their family or the groom's

family for being non-virgins. If women are honest about past sexual experiences, they place themselves in grave danger of being subjected to honour-based violence (Ghanim, 2015). Hence, women resort to lying and trickery in order to protect their lives.

Honour-based violence is a mechanism for control over female sexuality. Female genital mutilation, for example, is believed by those who perform it to inhibit women's sexual desire, which discourages them from promiscuity (Ghanim, 2015). Forced virginity testing also restricts female sexuality, as the fear of being subjected to a forced virginity test coerces women into suppressing and ignoring their sexual desires and needs. The burden of virginity falls only on the shoulders of women; men are unaffected as the virginity taboos do not relate to them. In contrast, men are congratulated and rewarded with external validation when they have premarital sexual intercourse (Ghanim, 2015). Nevertheless, females still find ways to explore and express their sexuality that would not compromise their own morality or risk transgressing the social norms of their community.

Young girls are often forced to marry without their consent, which puts them at greater risk of physical, mental, and sexual abuse. Coercive acts to force young girls and women to agree to marriage include humiliation, belittlement, physical acts of violence, and financial abuse (Julios, 2015). In addition, young girls who are forced to marry also become at risk of abuse from their spouse and nuptial family. Since women are usually forced to go live with their spouse and their family, they become isolated from their family and friends, which further diminishes their social existence (Roberts et al., 2014).

Honour-based violence is distinguishable from other types of violence by the fact that more than one person usually perpetrates them in an attempt to restore or cleanse family honour. In honour-based crimes, such as honour killings, there is usually more than one perpetrator involved, and the crime is usually premeditated. However, domestic violence

instances are singular acts of violence, as they are usually perpetrated by one person and are not premeditated. Although men are generally the perpetrators of honour killings, sometimes older female family members are the perpetrators of honour killings. In some cases, the older females of the household plan the crime, and the men perpetrate it (Begikhani et al., 2020).

The underlying motivations of honour killings are closely tied to the motivations of other honour-based violence, such as forced marriage, which are embedded in patriarchal ideologies about female sexuality, masculinity, and the role of women in society (Julios, 2015). Honour-based crimes emphasize the gender inequalities that persist in society. The fact that women are frequently subjected to various forms of honour-based violence, such as imposed virginity testing and forced marriage, reflects women's subordinate status and oppression.

There has been considerable effort by international human rights organizations to raise awareness about and combat honour-based violence. The United Nations General Assembly has emphasized the need to criminalize all forms of violence against women and girls, including crimes perpetrated in the name of honour (UN, 1993). The Secretary-General emphasized that individuals intentionally participating in, supporting, or encouraging acts of honour-based violence and those who threaten women and girls in the name of honour should be penalized (Idriss, 2015). Furthermore, The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended repealing laws that allow perpetrators of honour crimes to negotiate their sentences or receive a lenient sentence, regardless of their cultural or religious beliefs (Gorar, 2021).

Nevertheless, much work still needs to be done to combat honour-based violence. Some recommendations include funding grassroots organizations, increasing awareness about issues regarding honour-based violence in particular and violence against women in general, engaging with the community, educating young girls and women about their legal rights and available

resources, and providing free housing and shelter for victims of violence or people in danger of violence, and finally, training law enforcement officers, social workers, doctors and medical personnel on how to deal with incidences and victims of honour-based violence and domestic violence in general.

It is essential to name and criminalize particular crimes of honour since it may help provide funding for shelters and helplines; however, we must be careful not to perpetuate racist and xenophobic ideas about immigrant communities that are already marginalized. We must also be mindful of the various historical, political, and socioeconomic dynamics that may have led to the emergence of violence. Dealing with honour crimes is a very delicate matter; on the one hand, there is the need to protect immigrant men and other cultures from being labelled barbaric, and on the other hand there is the need to protect women from patriarchal violence. By framing honour-based violence as a subset of patriarchal violence against women, and by taking into account the various historical, political, and socioeconomic forces that structure individual daily life, we are able to avoid overly simplistic explanations for violence that blame and demonize entire cultures and further exacerbate incidences of violence.

Human rights activists, social workers, anthropologists, public health workers, and journalists must frame the issue of honour-based violence and violence against women in a way that does not culturalize violence or criminalize particular groups of people rather than the violent actions. Journalists, in particular, play an important role in disseminating news about violent incidents to the public. In many cases, violent attacks and killings of women that have nothing to do with honour or cultural beliefs are framed in that way, which further perpetuates harmful ideas about marginalized people of colour. For example, in 1989 in New Jersey, a 16 year old girl named Tina Isa was found dead. The news reports declared it an honour killing, saying that the Palestinian father killed his daughter because of her “Americanized” lifestyle and for having a boyfriend. However, it later became clear that Tina’s father was financially

supporting a group labelled as terrorists by the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigations), and he killed his father because she planned on collaborating with FBI to expose his “terrorist” cell (Abu Lughod, 2011). In another incident, in Berlin, Germany, 2005, a young girl named Hatun Surucu of Turkish background was murdered by her brothers, and journalists immediately labelled it as a headscarf killing since Hatun was not wearing a headscarf (Abu Lughod, 2011). Nevertheless, what is notable here is that in the wake of Hatun’s murder, six other previous killings in Berlin became reclassified as honour killings (they were not before), which induced “a national panic about the crisis of barbaric immigrants within the national fold” (Abu Lughod, 2011: 27). Fadime Sahindal, a young woman of Kurdish and Turkish origin, was also killed by her father and brother in 2002 in Sweden. Fadime’s case became sensationalized, building on the rhetoric that immigrant men are traditional, backwards, and unchanging. What is interesting about Fadime’s case is that none of the reports explores the lost honour and humiliation that her family felt when the media got involved after Fadime filed a lawsuit against her family, nor did they mention that her father had lost his job after twenty years, nor did they note that the problem with her boyfriend actually occurred four years before Fadime was murdered (Abu Lughod, 2011). Of course, this is not to say that Fadime was culpable in her own death, nor to exonerate her killers from any fault or guilt. Rather, since Fadime’s murder was not because of her Westernized lifestyle as the news reports asserted, and her killers were not motivated by honour, journalists and other reporters must take into account individual circumstances to understand what had led to the eruption of violence, rather than sticking to lazy and oversimplified cultural excuses which strengthen xenophobia and racism.

Human rights activists, social workers, public health professionals, media professionals, and anthropologists, must work together to create a cohesive understanding of honour-based violence as a subset of violence against women, raise awareness about the negative consequences of false and sensationalized reporting, and raise awareness about the

emergence of violence due to racism and xenophobia. Liberating women and protecting them from violence will not happen by oppressing other groups of people. It is important to point out traditions and beliefs that are harmful to women and children; however, we must be careful not to fall into the traps of demonizing entire cultures.

Bibliography

Abu-Lughod, L. (2011). *Seductions of the "Honor crime."* Differences, 22(1), 17–63.

<https://doi.org/10.1215/10407391-1218238>

Abu Odeh, L. (2010). *Honor killings and the construction of gender in Arab societies.* American Journal of Comparative Law, 58(4), 911–952.

Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO). (2010). *Honor-based violence strategy.* London: National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA).

Awwad, A. (2011). *Virginity control and gender-based violence in Turkey: social constructionism of patriarchy, masculinity, and sexual purity.* International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Begikhani, N., Gill, A. K., & Hague, G. (2020). *Honour-based violence: Experiences and counter-strategies in Iraqi Kurdistan and the Uk Kurdish diaspora.* Routledge.

Fox, G. R. (1977). *Nice Girl, Social control of women through a value construct.* Signs, Journal of Women in Culture and Society.

Ghanim, D. (2015). *The Virginity Trap in the Middle East.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Gill, A. (2009). *Honor killings and the quest for justice in Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in the United Kingdom.* Criminal Justice Policy Review, 20(4), 475–494.

Gill, A. K., Strange, C., & Roberts, K. A. (2014). *"Honour" killing and violence: Theory, policy and Practice.* Palgrave Macmillan.

- Gorar, M. (2021). *Honour based crimes and the law: Defining the limits of honour based violence and abuse*. Routledge.
- Grewal, I. (2013). *Outsourcing patriarchy*. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 15(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2012.755352>
- Horvath, M. and Kelly, L. (2006). *From the Outset: Why Violence Should be a Priority for the Commission for Equality and Human Rights*. London: CSWASU.
- Idriss, M. M. (2015). *Sentencing guidelines for HBV and honour killings*. *The Journal of Criminal Law*, 79(3), 198–210. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022018315586167>
- Jean-Jacques, A. (2008). *Certificates of virginity and reconstruction of the hymen*. *The European Journal of Contraception & Reproductive Health Care*, 13(2), 111–113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13625180802106045>
- Julios, C. (2020). *Forced Marriage and 'honour' killings in Britain: Private lives, Community Crimes and Public Policy Perspectives*. Routledge.
- King, D. (2008). *The Personal is Patrilineal, Namus as Sovereignty*. *Identities*.
- Krantz G, Garcia-Moreno C. (2005). *Violence against women*. *Glossary J Epidemiology and Community Health* 2005; 59: 818– 821.
- Lerner, G. (1986) *The Creation of Patriarchy*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.
- Lock, M., & Kaufert, P. A. (2006). *Pragmatic women and body politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Mahadeen, E. (2018). *Hymen reconstruction surgery in Jordan*. *Body, Migration, Re/Constructive Surgeries*, 159–172. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351133678-10>

- Meetoo, V., & Mirza, H. S. (2007). *There is nothing honourable about honour killings: Gender and violence and the limits of multiculturalism*. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 30, 187–200.
- Mernissi, F. (1996) *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory*. London, Zed.
- Parrot, A. & Cummings, N. (2006). *Forsaken Females: The Global Brutalization of Women*. Lanham, MD, Rowman, and Littlefield.
- Patel, G. H. (2021). *Women and international human rights law: Universal periodic review in practice*. Routledge.
- Razack, S. H. (2021). *Should feminists stop talking about culture in the context of violence against Muslim women? the case of "Honour killing."* *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*, 12(1), 31–48.
- Richters, A. (1994). *Women, Culture and Violence: A Development, Health and Human Rights Issue*.
- Roberts, K. A., Campbell, G., & Lloyd, G. (2014). *Honor-based violence: Policing and prevention*. CRC Press.
- Ruggi, S. (1998). *Commodifying honor in female sexuality, honor killings in Palestine*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(5), 997.
- Shalhoub-Kevorkian, N. (2005). *Imposition of virginity testing: A life-saver or a license to kill?* *Social Science & Medicine*, 60(6), 1187–1196
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2004.07.015>
- Tas-Cifci, F. (2021). *Honour killings and Criminal Justice: Social and legal challenges in Turkey*. Routledge.

The Crown Prosecution Service. (n.d.). *Honour based violence and forced marriage: Guidance on identifying and flagging cases*. <https://www.cps.gov.uk/publication/honour-based-violence-and-forced-marriage-guidance-identifying-and-flagging-cases>.

UN General Assembly. (1993). 'Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women' (20 December 1993) A/RES/48/104.

United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office. (2011). *Multiagency practice guidelines: Female genital mutilation*. London: FCO.

United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), (1993). *Declaration on the elimination of violence against women*. Proceedings of the 85th plenary meeting, Geneva.

United Nations. (1970). *General Recommendation 21, Comment Article 16(1)(b) United Nations convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women*. New York: United Nations.

United Nations. (n.d.). *Working towards the elimination of crimes against women and girls committed in the name of honour*. United Nations. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/533605>

Vandello, J. A., & Cohen, D. (2003). *Male honor and female fidelity: Implicit cultural scripts that perpetuate domestic violence*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(5), 997–1010. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.5.997>

Vandello, J. A., & Cohen, D. (2004). *When believing is seeing: Sustaining norms of violence in cultures of honour*. *The psychological foundations of culture*, 281.

Wild, V., Poulin, H., McDougall, C. W., Stöckl, A., & Biller-Andorno, N. (2015). *Hymen reconstruction as pragmatic empowerment? results of a qualitative study from Tunisia*. *Social Science & Medicine*, 147, 54-61

World Health Organization, on behalf of the United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Violence Against Women Estimation and Data (2021). *Violence against women prevalence estimates, 2018*. Global, regional and national prevalence estimates for intimate partner violence against women and global and regional prevalence estimates for non-partner sexual violence against women.

Yodanis, C. (2004). *Gender inequality, violence against women, and fear: a cross national test of the feminist theory of violence against women*. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.

Zayed, A.A., Elbendary, R.N. & Moawad, A.M. (2022). *Questioned Virginity Has No Definite Reply*. *Archive of Sexual Behaviour*.