



**The International
Day of Solidarity
with Victims of
Honor Crimes**

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Several societies use the term ‘honor crimes’ to decriminalize assault and murder of women under the pretext of ‘restoring honor’. Egypt and several Arab countries witness femicides in the name of reclaiming ‘honor’. The mere allusion to honor is enough to discourage people from intervening in murder or sexual or psychological assault. The entrenched culture of discrimination against women stigmatizes the victim and sympathizes with the perpetrator. The International Day of Solidarity with Victims of Honor Crimes was launched on October 29th, 2009. This initiative marks the day when a Syrian guy was acquitted, after murdering his sister, on the claim of honor killing. Femicide is prevalent because of the derogatory attitude towards women. They are perceived as a source of shame because of certain behavior mostly related to sexual freedom or freedom of dress. Therefore, Belady chose to commemorate this day through an analytical paper on honor crimes in Egyptian society.

What Are Honor Crimes?

Honor crimes refer to the murder of a woman by her male family members for a perceived violation of the social norms of sexuality, or suspicion of women having transgressed the limits of social behavior imposed by tradition. This includes seeing or meeting a man even if based on mere suspicion or gossip. Honor crimes include a husband murdering his wife whom he or other family members suspect of adultery.¹

Human Rights Watch defines honor crimes as:

“Acts of violence, usually murder, committed by male family members against female family members who are perceived to have brought dishonor upon the family.” A girl or woman may become the target of retaliation by a male family member for several reasons, including: refusing an arranged marriage, being a victim of sexual assault, or attempting to divorce her husband even if he is an abusive husband.²

Are Honor Crimes Punishable under Egyptian Law?

Article (237) of the Egyptian Penal Code states that “Whoever surprises his wife in the act of adultery and kills her on the spot together with her adulterer-partner shall be punished with detention instead of the penalties prescribed in articles 234 and 236.”

The two Articles mentioned in Article 237 set punishment for second-degree murder, which amounts to life imprisonment, and for first-degree murder, which amounts to death penalty according to Article 234.

Therefore, Article 237 of the Egyptian Penal Code reduces the punishment for a husband who surprises his wife in the act of adultery and kills her with her adulterer-partner. The punishment for attempted murder or beating leading to death does not apply to him.

¹ ["Violence against women: Good practices in combating and eliminating violence against women"](#)

² [Integration of the human rights of women and the gender perspective: Violence Against Women and "Honor" Crimes.](#)

Likewise, Article 55 of the same law represents a pathway to impunity under the pretext of an honor crime. It states:

The court may, when ruling in a felony or misdemeanor with a fine or imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year, order in the same verdict to suspend the sentence if it considers the manners, past, and age of the convict or the circumstances in which the crime was committed, believing that he will not break the law again. The reasons for the suspended sentence shall be indicated in the verdict. The suspension may be made inclusive of any accessory penalty and all criminal consequences of the judgment.

Through these legal provisions, we conclude that the law sympathizes with the perpetrators of honor crimes, encourages them, and offers several pathways to impunity.

Why Are These Crimes Widespread?

In addition to the aforementioned legal analysis, the procedural aspect of law additionally contributes to obliterating the criminality of honor crimes. In case there were doubts or circumstances implying an 'honor crime', the victim's corpse is not only subjected to the standard physical examination but also to a vaginal test to determine whether she is a virgin or not or she has recently engaged in sexual activity, which would affect the punishment of the perpetrator through legal texts.

Hidden crimes (crimes that are not reported to the police and therefore are neither recorded in official documents nor investigated) emerge as an effect of the patriarchal society, as well as the sensitivity of the crime due to its association with family honor and shame according to society and the culture of police, including their stance on women's rights, and the importance of the crime in their perspective and own assessment whether it merits to be recorded or not. These crimes are correspondingly affected by the social status of the perpetrators or victims. Moreover, the state plays an active role in punishing women according to moral perception and public morals. The most prominent example of this is the authorities' handling of the Tik Tok girls' case, mainly the incident in which the girl Menna Abdel Aziz was subjected to rape and beating by a group of young men. When she announced the incident and called for help via social media, the state promptly issued a statement on family values and public morals before taking steps to punish the perpetrators.³

How Does the Closed Political Climate Affect Women's Cases in Egypt?

The legal system in Egypt is contradictory as it guarantees women's rights in general (the constitution and international conventions) but restricts them in the private sphere through the arsenal of laws that concern the public social order, such as the family law and personal status that is topped with male privileges such as polygamy; verbal divorce, making divorce the prerogative of the man but not the woman, requiring a 'guardian' for her to sign the marriage contract, and asking her about her virginity; the right to beat (discipline) the wife; forcing the woman to leave the conjugal home, especially in the absence of children or exceeding the legal age of custody; in addition to requiring wives to obey their husbands. These laws limit the status of a woman to 'wife' or 'mother', as well as control their sexualities. The aforementioned criminal laws encourage male family members to monitor and, if necessary, punish women.

As for the judiciary, the judges' leniency with honor crimes can be explained by the absence of Egyptian women from civil and criminal justice institutions.

³ [After Her Arrest...the Complete Rape Story of the Tik Tok Girl, Menna Abdel Aziz.](#)

All of these conditions that make women the weakest link, can only be changed through civil and political struggle, including protest, engagement, and political representation for women in order to reform the patriarchal system of laws. However, the current political situation imposed by the political authority in Egypt makes the matter impossible due to its determination to monopolize opinion and neutralize all means of protest or demand and due to the imprisonment of anti-regime political opinions. Women refrain from demanding their rights in the current government and become victims of double violence by society and the authorities. The next section will address this issue through the stories of some women who were subjected to double violence.

Manifestations of the Society Punishing the Victim

At the beginning of this year, Passant Khaled, a 17-year-old girl, ended her life due to an incident of sexual blackmail on social media, after a young man posted sexual pictures of her on Facebook. Despite her assertion that the pictures were fabricated, her father's reaction was violent, which made her fall into an acute depressive episode. She decided to end her life, leaving a suicide message to confirm that she was wronged and that the pictures were fabricated.⁴

There is no doubt that society contributed to Basant's suicide after she was subjected to social pressure and violence, as well as physical violence by her father. This incident is striking because informing the concerned authorities to take legal measures against the young man, who blackmailed the late woman and published fabricated pictures of her on social media, took place only after the girl ended her life. This indicates that women are the primary culprit for societal pressures and violence. Criminals were held accountable only after the girl lost her life and the incident went viral on social media. It should be noted that the perpetrator was sentenced to 15 years of imprisonment.

Sexual Assault by State Officials on Women

After the current political authority assumed power, the total number of imprisoned women and girls in the backdrop of political cases from (2013 to 2022) reached 1,283. Among these cases, Belady observed 85 sexual assaults against women by state officials, whether in prisons or police stations. These violations coincide with releasing the perpetrators of honor crimes and inaction against officials who sexually abused women.



⁴ [Independent Arabia, the Suicide of an Egyptian Girl Draws the Issue of Electronic Blackmail](#)