



Honor Killings in Pakistan: A Case Study of North Nazimabad, Karachi, and a Nationwide Analysis (2018-2022)

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This study examines the persistent issue of honor killings in Pakistan, focusing on a case study in North Nazimabad, Karachi, and analyzing broader trends across the country from 2018 to 2022. The research investigates the socio-cultural, legal, and economic factors contributing to these crimes, with particular emphasis on the influence of tribal customs, financial disputes, and the role of traditional assemblies like Jirgas. Data collection involved in-depth interviews with stakeholders, observations, and a review of existing reports and literature. Thematic and comparative analyses were conducted to identify patterns and regional differences in honor killings, highlighting the significant gender disparity among victims. Findings reveal that despite legal frameworks, cultural practices continue to legitimize and perpetuate violence, underscoring the need for targeted interventions and reforms to address the root causes of honor killings in Pakistan. The study also explores the challenges in law enforcement and the impact of societal norms on the judicial system's response to such crimes, calling for enhanced training, awareness, and a more consistent application of the law.

Keywords: Honor Killings, Financial Disputes, Victims, Gender Disparity.

Introduction:

The intersection of gender and state institutions plays a crucial role in shaping societal norms and expectations, particularly in the context of gender-based violence. In Portugal, the legal system and its representatives, including judges and the courts, serve as key arenas where these norms are articulated and enforced. This essay explores the pervasive influence of gender as a social indicator within the Portuguese institutional framework, focusing specifically on how it impacts the adjudication of domestic violence cases [1]. Through an analysis of domestic violence court rulings and interviews with male inmates convicted of such crimes, this study examines the moral frameworks that underpin judicial decisions and societal attitudes towards gender-based violence. These frameworks not only influence the perceptions and judgments of legal authorities but also affect how offenders understand and rationalize their actions [2].

The study reveals a strong correlation between gender and state mechanisms, demonstrating how legal interpretations of domestic violence are often steeped in traditional gender roles and expectations. By evaluating the presence and significance of these moral frameworks within courts and prisons, the research highlights the complex ways in which gender, law, and morality intersect to perpetuate certain views on violence, masculinity, and honor [3]. The findings underscore the importance of critically examining these intersections to better understand and address the root causes of gender-based violence in Portugal. Historically, women have been disproportionately victimized by domestic violence compared to men. In cases where women do perpetrate violence against men, it is often in self-defense after enduring prolonged abuse introduced the term “battered homicide” to describe crimes

committed by women who, unable to leave an abusive relationship due to factors such as economic dependence, traditional gender roles, and lack of social support, see the death of their (ex)partners as the only escape from their suffering, often during periods of emotional vulnerability [4]. The end of the relationship itself is a significant risk factor. Global homicide statistics show that 82% of women, compared to 18% of men, are killed by an (ex)intimate partner [5] [6].

Portugal continues to reflect a patriarchal society influenced by Judaic-Christian ideologies, shaped by 41 years of dictatorship under the Estado Novo regime. These influences permeate social, cultural, and educational spheres, perpetuating symbolic violence against women and reinforcing hegemonic masculinity. This cultural backdrop also affects the functioning of the Portuguese justice system [7] [8]. The attitudes of professionals working with victims and offenders of domestic violence are crucial in understanding how they approach and address this issue. Research has shown that their beliefs and gender stereotypes, along with the private nature of domestic violence, the dynamics between the victim and the abuser, and the challenges of reporting to authorities, all shape their professional conduct. Despite legislative advances in Portugal, such as making domestic violence a public crime in 2000 and implementing victim protection mechanisms, it is vital to enhance the sensitivity of professionals in handling cases, especially those perceived as low-risk (e.g., psychological violence). Although violence legitimization among professionals tends to be low, specialized training is necessary to address their stereotypical beliefs and foster a less tolerant stance toward intimate partner violence. The professionalization and standardization of services and protocols will also encourage victims to report crimes, enhancing their sense of security [9].

Research by Coelho (2019) [10] with the Guarda Nacional Republicana (GNR), a Portuguese military security force, reveals the persistence of conservative beliefs, linking intimate partner violence to factors like substance abuse, unemployment, poverty, and extramarital affairs, often overlooking the role of gender. Similarly, Casimiro (2008) [11] found that security professionals in Portugal attribute violence to communication and trust issues, jealousy, power, and control. [8] suggest that within security and justice sectors, male professionals are more likely to legitimize and excuse domestic violence. This desensitization may result from constant exposure to high-risk situations and the low rate of convictions, leading to a more passive approach toward victims. [12] notes that although security professionals exhibit some ambivalence, they generally view domestic violence as a serious issue.

The literature also highlights a need for greater awareness and training regarding male victims, as professionals acknowledge challenges in addressing their needs and a lack of appropriate services. Research on judges' attitudes toward domestic violence is limited in Portugal, though Botelho and Gonçalves (2016) [13] suggest that Portuguese judges are more likely to impose harsher penalties when the victim is a woman, especially if the offender exercises the right to remain silent. Internationally, [1] found that Missouri judges tended to hold conservative views, favoring family unity and attributing domestic violence to social and economic issues, sometimes blaming victims or recommending couple's counseling, rather than seeing arrest as a solution.

Judges often perceive physical violence as more serious than psychological or emotional abuse. They also tend to view men as aggressors and women as victims, often seeing the latter as dependent, passive, and fragile. This perspective can lead to desensitization among judges who frequently encounter such cases [14]. Victims of violence often seek help from emergency medical services, highlighting the need for healthcare professionals to be trained in recognizing, reporting, and referring these cases appropriately. However, health professionals may not always recognize domestic violence as a medical issue, sometimes blaming victims or

attributing violence to individual factors like substance abuse or psychopathology. This can lead to secondary victimization and hinder effective intervention [15] [12].

Given these findings, it is essential to invest in the training of professionals across various sectors, demystifying inappropriate attitudes and establishing clear protocols and guidelines. The literature suggests that inappropriate attitudes decrease and empathy increases with greater training and education among professionals [16]. This is particularly important when dealing with male victims, who may face secondary victimization and discrimination when seeking help. Due to the limited national research on professionals' attitudes toward intimate partner homicides committed by women, this review focuses on their attitudes toward domestic violence and judicial decisions [17]. A study on judicial decisions in intimate partner homicides in Portugal found that women are the primary victims of this crime, which often occurs in the context of domestic violence. However, there is significant reluctance among victims to report these crimes to authorities, due to fear of revictimization. These crimes are typically committed impulsively or with premeditation, driven by intense emotions such as jealousy and conflict, and are often carried out using bladed weapons or firearms. In most cases, pre-trial detention is imposed as a coercive measure, with crimes typically classified as first-degree murder due to the intimate relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, as well as the premeditated, persistent, and cold-blooded nature of the crime, resulting in an average sentence of 18 and a half years. Women convicted of intimate partner homicide tend to receive lighter sentences than men, with suspended prison sentences being more common [18]. [19] similarly found that gender is a significant predictor of sentencing, with men being two and a half times more likely to be imprisoned than women.

[19] also notes that judicial decisions are influenced by the social status of the accused, with sentences varying in severity depending on their social stratification. The author reflects on the difficulties victims face in reporting crimes, often due to fear of retaliation from the aggressor or their family, and the perception that the justice system is ineffective. This is compounded by the guilt and responsibility attributed to victims by the legal system, which often silences them. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, judicial discretion allows judges to impose their personal beliefs and interpretations on cases, leading to inconsistent and sometimes biased legal outcomes.

Methodology:

Research Design and Approach:

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the socio-cultural, legal, and economic factors influencing the persistence of honour killings in Pakistan. The research primarily focuses on a case study of a specific honour killing incident in North Nazimabad, Karachi, as well as a broader analysis of honour killings across different regions of Pakistan. The study also includes a review of existing data and interviews with key stakeholders [20].

Case Study Selection:

The case of honour killing in North Nazimabad was selected due to its relevance and recency, representing the ongoing issue in both urban and rural settings. The incident was analyzed to identify the cultural, economic, and legal dynamics at play, particularly focusing on the influence of tribal customs, financial disputes, and the role of traditional assemblies like Jirgas.

Data Collection:

Primary Data:

- **Interviews:** In-depth interviews were conducted with various stakeholders, including eyewitnesses, local community members, human rights activists, and legal experts. These interviews provided insights into the motivations behind honour killings, the role of tribal customs, and the failures in law enforcement.

- **Observation:** The researcher visited the North Nazimabad area and surrounding regions to observe the community's response and the social environment post-incident.

Secondary Data:

- **Existing Reports and Statistics:** Data on honour killings and Karo-Kari incidents from the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) and other relevant organizations were analyzed. This included a review of reports covering the period from 2018-2022, which documented nearly 2,000 incidents across Pakistan.
- **Literature Review:** Scholarly articles, reports, and previous studies on honour killings, cultural practices, and the legal framework in Pakistan were reviewed to contextualize the findings from the case study.

Data Analysis:

Thematic Analysis:

- A thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring patterns and themes related to the causes, justification, and societal responses to honour killings. This included coding the interview transcripts and secondary data to highlight key themes such as the influence of tribal customs, economic motivations, and legal challenges.

Comparative Analysis:

- The study compared the incident in North Nazimabad with other documented cases across different provinces in Pakistan, particularly focusing on the distinctions and similarities between urban and rural cases.
- Regional differences in the prevalence of honour killings were analyzed, with particular attention to the role of local customs such as Karo-Kari in Sindh and the influence of Baloch traditions in areas bordering Balochistan.

Validation of Findings:

- **Triangulation:** The study employed triangulation by cross-verifying data from multiple sources, including interview responses, observational data, and secondary sources, to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the findings.
- **Expert Review:** The initial findings and analysis were reviewed by legal experts and human rights activists to validate the interpretation of the data and the conclusions drawn.

Ethical Considerations:

- **Confidentiality:** The identities of interview participants and witnesses were anonymized to protect their privacy and ensure their safety.
- **Informed Consent:** All interviewees provided informed consent before participating in the study. They were informed about the purpose of the research, the use of their responses, and their right to withdraw at any time.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** The study was conducted with cultural sensitivity, respecting the local customs and traditions while critically analyzing their impact on human rights.

Limitations of the Study:

The study is limited by the availability of reliable data on honour killings, as many incidents go unreported or are misclassified. Additionally, the sensitive nature of the topic may have influenced the willingness of some participants to openly discuss their views and experiences.

Results:

Overview of Honor Killings in Pakistan (2018-2022):

From 2018 to 2022, Pakistan saw a deeply troubling number of honor killings, with approximately 1,961 incidents publicly reported across the country. These incidents led to the deaths of 2,537 individuals, shedding light on the pervasive nature of this violent practice.

Honor killings are typically committed under the guise of protecting family honor, often in response to behavior deemed inappropriate by societal or familial standards. The gender dynamics of these crimes are particularly alarming, with women being disproportionately affected. The total number of reported incidents was 1,961, resulting in 2,537 victims. Of these victims, 1,679 were women, and 858 were men. This stark gender disparity reveals the entrenched patriarchal norms that often place women at greater risk of such violence. Women, who accounted for more than 66% of the victims, are often seen as the bearers of family honor, making them the primary targets in these crimes. A bar chart, represented as Figure 1, would provide a visual summary of the total number of honor killing incidents and victims over this four-year period, underscoring the scale of the issue.

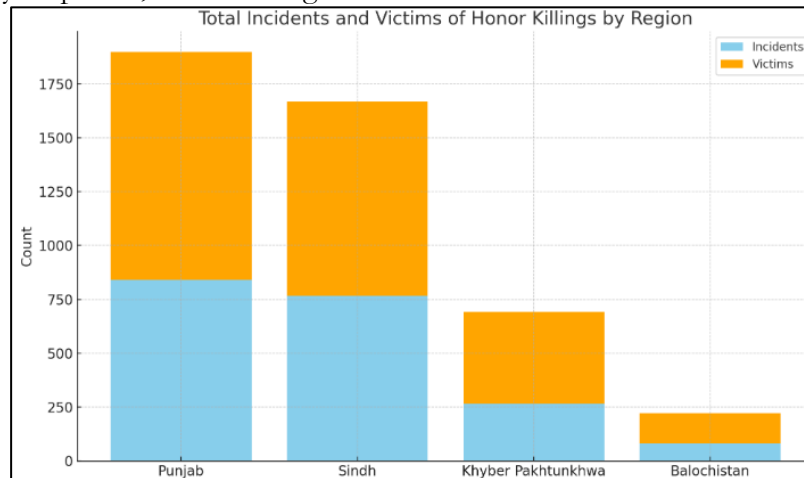


Figure 1: Total Number of Honor Killing Incidents and Victims (2018-2022)

Regional Distribution of Honor Killings:

Honor killings were reported across all provinces of Pakistan, with varying frequencies that reflected the cultural and demographic differences of each region. Punjab, the most populous province, recorded the highest number of incidents, but the crime was also notably prevalent in Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan. In Punjab, 841 incidents were recorded, leading to 1,058 victims, of whom 799 were women and 259 were men. Sindh followed with 766 incidents, resulting in 901 victims, including 553 women and 348 men. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reported 266 incidents, with 426 victims, comprising 240 women and 189 men. Balochistan, though having the fewest reported cases, still saw 83 incidents with 138 victims, including 82 women and 56 men. This regional data highlights how honor killings are not confined to a single area but are a nationwide issue. The variation in numbers between provinces also points to differing levels of cultural acceptance and enforcement of laws against honor killings. A table summarizing the regional distribution of these incidents and victims offers a clearer understanding of the geographic spread and the gender dynamics at play. Additionally, Figure 2, a pie chart, would visually illustrate the regional distribution of honor killing victims, showing where these crimes were most concentrated.

Table 1: Regional Distribution of Honor Killing Incidents and Victims (2018-2022)

Region	Number of Incidents	Total Victims	Men	Women
Punjab	841	1,058	259	799
Sindh	766	901	348	553
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	266	426	189	240
Balochistan	83	138	56	82

Gender Disparity in Honor Killings:

One of the most significant findings from the data is the pronounced gender disparity among honor killing victims. Women constituted the majority of victims, accounting for over

two-thirds of the total number. This disproportionate impact on women is a reflection of the deeply rooted gender biases in Pakistani society, where women's actions are often scrutinized and punished more severely under the guise of protecting family honor. The data underscores the need for urgent societal change to address and eliminate these biases. Figure 3, a bar chart showing the gender disparity among honor killing victims, would vividly depict this imbalance, reinforcing the need for targeted interventions to protect women from such violence.

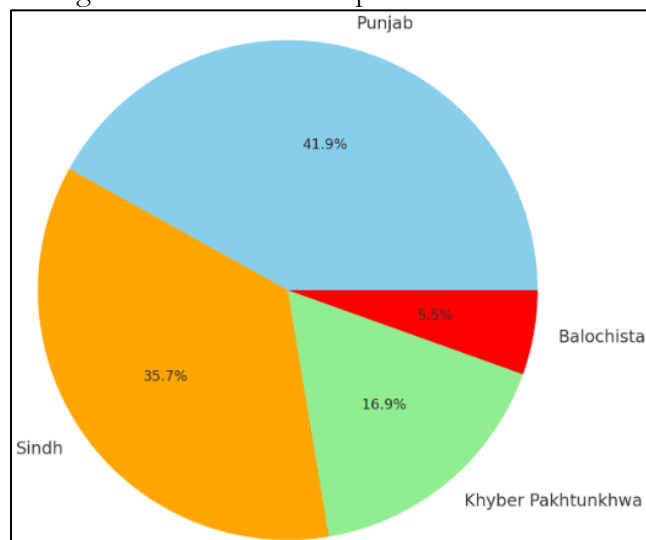


Figure 2: Pie chart showing the regional distribution of honor killing victims across Pakistan.

Table 2: Karo-Kari Incidents and Victims in Sindh (2018-2022)

Year	Number of Incidents	Total Victims	Men	Women
2018	98	109	43	66
2019	120	134	53	81
2020	135	148	60	88
2021	105	116	46	70
2022	94	102	39	63

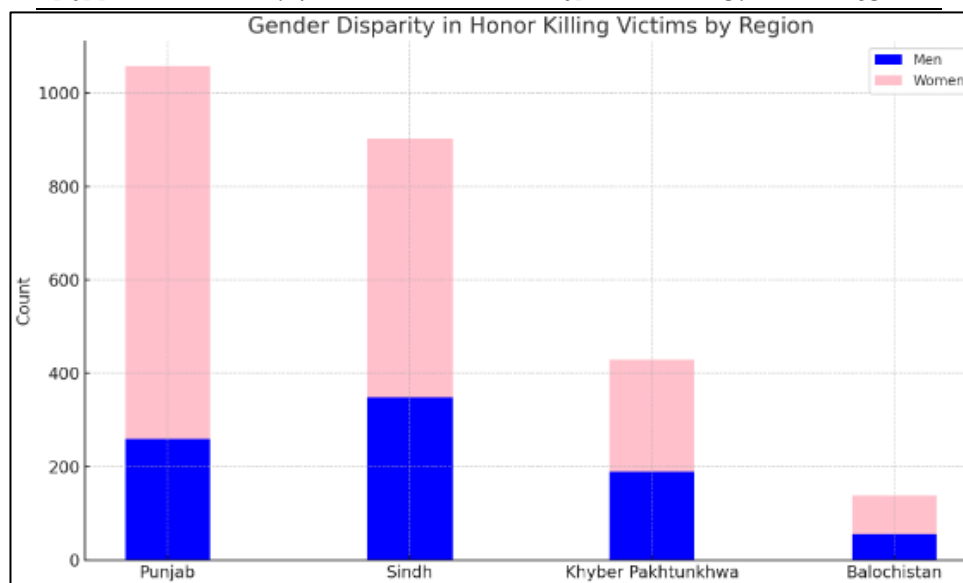


Figure 3: Bar graph showing gender disparity in honor killing victims.

The Rise of Karo-Kari Cases:

Karo-Kari, a specific form of honor killing prevalent in Sindh, represented a significant portion of the honor killings reported in this region. Between 2018 and 2022, there were 552 reported cases of Karo-Kari, resulting in 609 victims. Karo-Kari involves the killing of both a

man (Karo) and a woman (Kari) who are suspected of engaging in an illicit relationship. This practice is deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of Sindh and continues to be a major issue despite legal prohibitions. The 609 victims of Karo-Kari included 368 women and 241 men, further highlighting the gendered nature of honor killings in Sindh. Each year saw a relatively steady number of incidents, with a slight decline in 2022. This persistence of Karo-Kari cases indicates the challenges in eradicating such deeply ingrained practices. A detailed table showing the year-by-year breakdown of Karo-Kari incidents and victims in Sindh would provide a clearer picture of the persistence of this practice over time. A bar graph in Figure 4 would further emphasize the gender disparity in Karo-Kari victims, with women consistently being the majority.

The Impact of COVID-19 on Honor Killings:

The COVID-19 pandemic had far-reaching impacts on various aspects of life, including a noticeable spike in honor killings. During the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021, there was an increase in the number of honor killing incidents. The data suggests that the economic and social stressors brought on by the pandemic, particularly during the lockdowns, may have exacerbated the underlying tensions that lead to these crimes. Families under increased pressure may have resorted to violence as a misguided means of reasserting control and maintaining honor during a period of uncertainty. This trend during the pandemic underscores the complex interplay between social stressors and honor-based violence, highlighting the need for robust social support systems during times of crisis to prevent such tragic outcomes. Overall, the data collected from 2018 to 2022 presents a disturbing but crucially important understanding of the state of honor killings in Pakistan. The persistence of these crimes, particularly against women, calls for continued and intensified efforts to address the cultural, social, and legal factors that allow these atrocities to occur. The figures and charts mentioned would not only provide visual representation but also help in driving home the urgent need for societal change and justice for the victims.

Discussion:

The analysis of violence directed towards women over the past two decades highlights a disturbing persistence of gender-based and domestic violence despite global advancements in legal frameworks and societal awareness. The discussion of this issue has evolved to encompass a broader socio-economic context, acknowledging the complex interplay of historical, cultural, and political factors that sustain such violence. Scholars have documented the pervasive nature of domestic violence across all nations and social strata, illustrating how it transcends boundaries of time, place, and circumstance. The cases presented demonstrate that despite legal advancements, such as those seen in Portugal, there remains a significant gap between legislation and its implementation. The cases reveal how deeply ingrained gender biases in legal and cultural institutions can undermine the intent of progressive laws. For instance, the judicial decision to downplay the severity of domestic violence because the physical injuries were deemed minor, or because the violence did not involve weapons, reflects a troubling tolerance for certain forms of aggression within intimate relationships. This leniency suggests that societal norms still permit, or at least excuse, certain behaviors that perpetuate gender-based violence [21].

Moreover, the judicial rationale in these cases often reflects a reluctance to fully confront the implications of gender-based violence, particularly when it challenges traditional gender roles and hierarchies. The first case exemplifies how violence within a marriage was minimized because it did not result in severe or lasting physical harm. This approach ignores the psychological trauma and long-term consequences of sustained abuse, thus perpetuating a cycle of violence. Similarly, the second case illustrates a failure to recognize the seriousness of domestic violence, as the court dismissed significant physical and emotional harm as mere "minor infringements." The reference to "Manichean perspectives" in the court's reasoning

further underscores a reluctance to hold male perpetrators fully accountable, reflecting a bias that questions the credibility of female victims. The third case, involving the principle of human dignity, is particularly telling in its illustration of the societal and legal challenges faced by women who attempt to assert their autonomy. The court's justification for the actions of the male perpetrators, rooted in a historical and cultural context that rationalizes violence against women, reveals a deep-seated reluctance to fully embrace gender equality. The verdict, which suggested that the woman's adultery somewhat justified the violence against her, exposes the persistence of patriarchal values that continue to shape legal outcomes, even in cases of clear and premeditated violence.

The tragic phenomenon of honor killings remains a grave issue in Pakistan, deeply rooted in cultural and societal norms. The harrowing cases of women being killed by close relatives—fathers, brothers, uncles, or husbands—highlight the severe consequences of perceived dishonor. These killings are not isolated events but are reported frequently across every city and village in Pakistan. In rural areas, especially in tribal districts, even the slightest suspicion or an innocent conversation between a man and a woman can lead to brutal consequences. Unfortunately, the reality is that laws aimed at protecting women and preventing such violence often remain ineffective due to poor implementation. For instance, despite the existence of specific laws against honor killings, including the "kala kali" in Punjab, "karukari" in Sindh, "tor tora" in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and "sayakari" in Balochistan, these practices persist. The lack of enforcement is exacerbated by a societal structure that often prioritizes the protection of family honor over the lives of women [15].

The data on honor killings is alarming. Non-governmental organizations estimate that around 1,000 women are killed annually in Pakistan in the name of honor. These killings occur for reasons as trivial as a woman choosing to marry without her family's consent or even just using a mobile phone. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan reported 520 honor killings in 2022, with 323 women among the victims. The first half of 2023 saw 215 such cases, with 145 women killed. One of the most troubling aspects of these crimes is that they often go unpunished. The legal system, burdened by cultural biases and ineffective law enforcement, allows perpetrators to escape justice. The concept of "qisas" (retribution) and "diyat" (blood money) under Islamic law enables families to forgive the killers, who are often their relatives, leading to widespread impunity. This loophole undermines the very purpose of laws designed to protect women.

The problem extends beyond Pakistan's borders, affecting diaspora communities in Europe and America. Cases like the murder of Saman Abbas in Italy and the killing of two Spanish-Pakistani sisters in Pakistan demonstrate that the toxic concept of honor transcends national boundaries. These incidents underscore the need for a global approach to addressing the cultural roots of honor-based violence. Despite the grim situation, there are voices calling for change. Social activists and lawyers, like Mehwish Mohib Kaka Khel and Saima Munir, highlight the critical need for awareness and the proper implementation of existing laws. They emphasize the importance of educating law enforcement agencies about the legal protections available to women and ensuring that these laws are enforced effectively [22].

Ultimately, the battle against honor killings is not just a legal one; it requires a profound cultural shift. Until society as a whole rejects the notion that a family's honor is worth more than a woman's life, these tragedies will continue to occur. The government, civil society, and international organizations must work together to protect the rights and lives of women in Pakistan and beyond. Overall, these cases demonstrate that while legal frameworks may be in place to protect women from gender-based and domestic violence, the effectiveness of these laws is severely compromised by cultural norms and institutional biases. The societal acceptance of certain forms of violence and the failure of legal systems to fully enforce protections for women highlight the need for continued advocacy and reform. Addressing

these issues requires not only changes in legislation but also a fundamental shift in societal attitudes towards gender roles and violence, ensuring that legal protections are not just symbolic but are actively enforced to safeguard the rights and dignity of all individuals, regardless of gender.

In Summary:

In conclusion, this study underscores the persistent and deeply entrenched issue of honor killings in Pakistan, with a focused case study on North Nazimabad, Karachi, and a broader analysis of national trends from 2018 to 2022. Despite existing legal frameworks, the influence of tribal customs, financial disputes, and traditional assemblies like Jirgas continue to legitimize and perpetuate these heinous crimes. The research highlights a significant gender disparity among victims and reveals that cultural practices significantly undermine legal efforts to combat honor-based violence. The findings emphasize the urgent need for targeted interventions and comprehensive reforms that address the socio-cultural roots of honor killings. To effectively tackle this issue, it is crucial to enhance law enforcement training, increase societal awareness, and ensure a more consistent and rigorous application of the law. Addressing these challenges is essential for creating a more equitable and just society, where the rights and safety of individuals are upheld irrespective of traditional or cultural biases.

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