Between Traditional Practice and Secular Law: Examining Honor Killings in Modern Turkey

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Turkey
Research Questions

• Why do honor killings continue?
• How does Islam relate to honor killings?
• How has a traditional practice retained such deep roots in modern secular Turkey?
• What is the current legal and social status of honor killings in Turkey?
What is “Honor Killing”?

- Practice of killing girls or women in order to “cleanse” and restore male honor
- Not restricted to the Middle East
Islamic Position on Honor Killings

- **Orthodox** interpretations expressly forbid the practice of honor killings
- **Popular** interpretations draw beliefs from traditional practices, *hadith*, and commentaries
- “This is honor, what has that got to do with the Qur’an? … Men’s honor comes before the [Qur’an].”
- Impact of pre-Islamic patriarchal social structures
Honor in Tribal Culture

- Traditional tribal culture places highest value on male honor
- Male honor associated with women’s bodies, granting men the right to control female relatives
- Culturally-based patriarchal social structure reinforced by some interpretations of Islam
- Damaging familial honor equivalent to dishonoring God
Statistics

- 2002: 66 women killed
- January-July 2009: 953 women killed
- 4.5 each day; 34 per week
- Between 2002 and July 2009 15,564 people brought to trial for violence against women, 5,736 convicted
- Figures provided by Justice Minister Sadullah Ergin
Traditional Practice vs. Secular Law

- Legal reforms, 2002
- New Turkish criminal code, 2004
- Honor killings placed in “most severely punished category of qualitative murders”
- Rise of “honor suicides”
Solutions

• Education of children and women
• Education of judges, policemen, and leaders in tribal regions
• Change in traditional honor-based value system
• Legal support system for women
• Stricter enforcement of laws concerning honor crimes
• Continued social activism to raise awareness
Bibliography


