

# Coverage of Honor Killing: A Content Analysis of English Language Newspapers of Pakistan

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## Abstract

Pakistan is considered as one of the most dangerous and unsafe country for women in the world, because of the increasing rate of crimes against women in the shape of honor killing and honor related violence. This study attempted to determine how English newspapers of Pakistan give coverage about Honor Killing crime to escalate awareness among general public. This research adopted quantitative approach of content analysis for a period of five months from 1st July 2017 to 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2017. This study population comprised of 306 editions of Dawn and Express Tribune of Pakistan two most largely circulated English newspapers. The result of the findings shows that newspaper's coverage remained negligible in dignifying information of honor killing crime. Dawn and Express tribune both remain unsuccessful in maintaining balance between news function and editorial function of the newspaper.

**Keywords:** Pakistan newspapers; Honor Killing crime; Issues representation; Content analysis; press consciousness

## Introduction

Killing girls and women in the name of honor has emerged as a rising phenomenon and difficult challenge for the world. Pakistan observed its 71th independence anniversary in 2018 with the women and girls of Pakistan left wondering how many more decades it would take before they were treated as equal citizen. It is mentioned in Article 25, 27, 35 and 37 of The Constitution of Pakistan that "All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law. There shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex. Nothing in this Article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for the protection of women and children. No citizen otherwise qualified for appointment in the service of Pakistan shall be discriminated against in respect of any such appointment on the ground only of...sex... Nothing in clause (1) shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children. Steps shall be taken to ensure full participation of women in all spheres of national life. The state shall protect the marriage, the family, the mother" [1]. Seemingly It is also stated in the UN National Sustainable Development Goals Framework that State should "end all form discrimination against all women and girls everywhere" [2]. In Pakistan violence against women is widely perceived as acceptable. According to United Nation Population fund 25% of the total world honor killings occur in Pakistan. A survey conducted by Thomas Reuter in 2011 ranked Pakistan as the third most dangerous country for women in the world after Afghanistan and Democratic Republic of Congo [3]. Worldwide media is as a prime source of information for crime and safety for the major proportion of the world's population. The media can help to improve the state of violence and crime in society, especially for women and children. Media coverage of violence against women began taking force in the 1970s such coverage has led to heightened social awareness, policy for protection of women and girls (adoption of CEDAW), expansion of social services for female victim support, and a rise in the number of reported cases [4]. Partnership is found in the collaboration between the Ontario Police and Fire Services and the media by using commercials, public advertisements, and special activities, such as a magazine publication, to spread awareness on crime and reduce incidents in neighbor hoods [4]. Vandoost in 2012 conducted a study on The News Coverage of Honor Killing in Canadian Newspapers. Findings of the research showed that media stories ignored the context of honor killing and also created strong

signs of othering that supports the culture divide between the Muslim (immigrants) and the majority Canadians [5]. Seemingly a study Honor killing of Women: A comparative study of Pakistan Print Media conducted in 2016 by Raza and Liaquat the findings of the investigation suggested that reports should have some ethical guidelines for covering honor killing crime [6].

It has been widely noted that very few work has been done on the coverage of honor killing crime in the English newspapers of Pakistan regarding creating awareness about women legal status and rights in the society. This study will help media organization to prioritize their coverage policies about prevailing honor killing crime in Pakistan.

## Objective of the Study

The research is poised to evaluate how English newspapers of Pakistan give coverage to escalate the awareness about Honor Killing crime in Pakistan. Thus, this study investigates the role of two major English newspapers namely Dawn and Express Tribune in retaining balance between news function and editorial function of the newspapers on such sensitive issue of the society.

## Statement of problem

Human Right Watch report of 2017 stated that Pakistan's Human Rights NGO's estimated that there were about 1000 honor killing every year. According to Human Right Commission report of Pakistan 1266 women were murdered in 2017. As there are no official figures on honor killings the real figure could be much higher. There is a clear state responsibility to uphold women's right and ensure freedom from discrimination in which state of Pakistan is totally failed. Therefore in such situation media can work as a prominent tool which makes people

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aware about the current situation of this brutal crime Honor killing in Pakistan.

## Research questions

QR1=How much coverage was given to Honor Killing issue in Dawn and Express Tribune?

QR2=What were the placements of stories in newspapers for highlighting Honor Killing?

QR3=How many editorials were published in newspapers on Honor Killing?

QR4=How descriptive stories were covered in terms of paragraph on Honor Killing in newspapers?

## Hypothesis

Dawn and Express Tribune does not maintain the balance between the news and editorial functions of the newspapers on honor killing as well as both newspapers covered ineffectively the severity of the issue.

## Methodology

This research adopted quantitative approach of content analysis. A descriptive content analysis was conducted on both newspapers coverage from five month period July 1, 2017 to November 30, 2017. Amount of stories covered on Honor Killing, length of stories, placement of stories and editorials on honor killing were among the categories reviewed via content analysis method. Rhetorical analysis focuses on how much messages are delivered and with what intend or actual effect [7].

## Study Population

The study population of this research comprised of 306 editions of two daily English newspapers Dawn and Express Tribune of Pakistan for a period of five months. Selection of the newspapers was totally depended on the circulation and readership of Dawn and Express Tribune. What informed the choice of this period of time is the fact that there was no major day in Pakistan in connection with women equality except International day for the Elimination of Violence against Women that took place on November, 25.

## Unit of Analysis

As it is stated in Mass Media Research book by Dominick and Roger that unit of analysis is the smallest element of content analysis but also one of the most important. In written content the unit of analysis might be a single word or symbol, a theme or an entire article or story [8,9]. In this study following are the unit of analysis:

- All news stories on Honor Killing
- All Editorials on Honor Killing.

## Data Collection Tool

Data for this study was collected from July 1, 2017 to November 30, 2017 from Express Tribune and Dawn of Pakistan. Total 306 editions of newspapers were examined page by page to identify all published items on Honor Killing. The newspapers were sourced from the Archive room of Department of Mass Communication, University of Karachi.

## Results and Discussions

Krippendorff [7] suggested that tables are more useful tool for

researcher to simply the textual data. He characterized tabulation as “by far most common technique used to render data comprehensible”. Thus the data for this study are presented in tabular form (Tables 1-5).

In this paper only 32 Honor Killing content were found out of 306 newspapers editions. As much as this paper considers honor killing as a social problem that affect society in different way, it however believes that honor killing issue should be deliberately and substantially discussed. First of all total coverage of the issue was inadequate. Table 1 indicates that two largely circulated newspapers Dawn and Express Tribune published only 32 honor killing items in a period of five months. Table 2 shows the number of news stories covered by Dawn which was 20 and by Express Tribune which was 09, while Dawn gave 3 editorials and Express Tribune gave 02 editorials on honor killing issue, these data suggest that Dawn and Express Tribune misjudge seriousness of honor killing crime or are not convinced with the severity of the issue and therefore place the coverage of this evil crime lower down in their coverage priorities. Iyenger and Kinder in their book News that Matters offered an idea of position of a story, according to them lead stories had a great impact on audience where as Dawn and Express Tribune gave zero coverage of honor killing issue on the front and back pages of the newspapers those are consider as the most viewed pages of any newspaper. Table 5 represents the number of paragraphs of honor killing items published in Dawn and Express

Newspapers	Frequency	Percentage
Dawn	23	71.87%
Express Tribune	09	28.12%
Total	32	100%

**Table 1:** Distribution of honor killing content in newspapers from July 1, 2017 to November 30, 2017.

Genre	Frequency	Percentage
News stories	20	86.95%
Editorials	03	13.04%
Total	23	100%

**Table 2:** Distribution of honor killing content by genre of dawn.

Genre	Frequency	Percentage
News Stories	7	77.77%
Editorials	02	22.22%
Total	09	100%

**Table 3:** Distribution of honor killing content by genre of express tribune.

Pages	Frequency	Percentage
Front	0	0%
Back	0	0%
Inside	27	100%
Total	27	100%

**Table 4:** Appearance of honor killing news stories on front, back and inside pages of express tribune and dawn.

No. of Paragraph	Frequency	Percentage
1-5 paragraph	16	50%
6-10 paragraph	09	28.12%
11-15 paragraph	04	12.5%
16-20 paragraph	02	6.25%
21 or more	01	3.12%
Total	32	100%

**Table 5:** Distribution of honor killing content by no. of paragraph in express tribune and dawn.

Tribune. The item published on honor killing were short some as short as of two paragraphs 16 honor killing content was of only maximum 5 paragraphs out of 32. Therefore, majority of them looked like filler stories used to fill space left over after placing major stories.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

In Pakistan English newspapers are consider as the most popular, credible and responsible member of mass media. It has special status and prestige in the field. People rely on English press for in depth understanding of different current and social issues with the help of the news coverage and editorial as editorials are the echo of a newspaper and the reflector of the newspaper policy.

The analysis of the selected newspapers' coverage of honor killing indicates that newspapers pay implausible attention to honor killing issue. The result shows that newspapers coverage remained negligible in dignifying education or information of honor killing crime. Dawn and Express Tribune both newspapers remain unsuccessful in maintaining balance between news function and editorial function of the newspaper. A level of education of journalists which does justice to their high level degree of responsibility is the major lack in Pakistan's Journalism institution and is the most important factor of unprofessional practices in media. This issue of honor killing needs to be covered extensively. This means that journalists and editors needs to prioritize honor killing stories in order to eliminate all negative and harmful customary practices and newspapers should guarantee transparency of institution specializing in crime prevention and safety.

So it is concluded that for press in Pakistan the stakes are very high and they may be expected to lead in the struggle against misrepresentation of women's issues especially Honor Killing. Newspapers should devote more space or have specific edition or page to discuss the severity of Honor Killing crime in depth because

news coverage has powerful impact on public behavior and legislative institutions.

## Limitations of the Study

This research design has some limitation which should be canvassed. Firstly the study population is very small that covers only two English newspapers, therefore to generalize the result study should also have to involved more newspapers. Another limitation is the language of newspapers this study selected only English newspapers, however Urdu newspapers have great readership and circulation that should also be included in similar studies in the future. Lastly since the newspapers were examined by the researcher herself, it is unavoidable that in this study certain degree of subjectivity can be found.

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