

## **Killing for Honour**

**Author:** [Ziyad Khalaf](#)

Officials and activists voice concern at the number of women being murdered by their own families.

Faeq Ameen Bakr, director general of Baghdad's Institute of Forensic Medicine in Baghdad, often writes "killed to wash away her disgrace" in the many autopsy reports and investigations that cross his desk.

The number of so-called honour killings - where a woman is killed by family members because they believe she has in some way shamed them - is said to have increased in Iraq since the fall of Saddam Hussein.

Iraq is a tribal society where honour killings are an accepted practice, but cases have been increasing because conservative attitudes have grown.

Bakr said it is difficult to track the number of such killings because they often go unreported.

Sometimes women will try to take their own life rather than face the wrath of their families.

While an IWPR reporter was on his way to Bakr's office, he noticed a crowd on the Bab al-Muadham bridge in Baghdad. A young girl had apparently jumped off, and when a rescuer brought her out, she opened her eyes and told onlookers, "I am pregnant. They will kill me."

She was taken to the capital's Medical City hospital, where she had an abortion and was discharged, according to an emergency room doctor.

Bakr told IWPR that there are different motives for honour killings - such as when a woman refuses to accept her family's choice of marriage partner, marries someone they disapprove of, or has been raped.

According to a study conducted by the ministry of women's affairs, more than 400 women have been raped since the fall of the Saddam regime - and more than half were later murdered in honour killings.

The authorities say they treat honour killings seriously, but punishments are not severe as those for pre-meditated murder which carry life sentences.

In one case, a police captain told IWPR he was imprisoned for one month and docked a month's pay after he provided a gun to a friend, who later used it to murder his unmarried and pregnant sister.

The policeman claimed that his friend told him that he wanted the weapon to protect himself, as he had recently been threatened. The murderer received a six-month prison sentence.

Women's rights activist Amaal al-Mualimchi says women are so fearful of falling victim to honour killings that that have become virtual prisoners in their own homes.

“So women have two choices - exposing themselves to the threat of rape, after which they will be killed by their families, or house imprisonment,” she said.

Jwan Ameen of the women’s affairs ministry is now trying to help women who face honour killings by establishing safe houses for them.

Women’s groups are also calling for the protection of women to be included in the new constitution, which will soon be drafted by the National Assembly.

“But we are still facing difficulties in implementing all of this because we don’t have a budget for it,” said Ameen.

The Women’s Freedom Organisation, a non-governmental organisation, has established a shelter for women trying to escape honour killings and other forms of violence.

Worker Nada al-Bayati said that in one recent case, a woman came to their shelter because she had been sexually abused by an American soldier. Her family, who found out about it, wanted to kill her.

The shelter asked for compensation from the American forces on behalf of the woman and the organisation also sought asylum for the woman in another country, but none of these requests were granted. Eventually, the woman’s sister came and took her home, saying she would protect her.

“The number of honour killings is such that that we cannot afford to keep silent,” said al-Bayati.

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