

PSYCHOSOCIAL CAUSES OF THE CRIME OF MURDER IN PAKISTAN[#]

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The present research was conducted to investigate the psychosocial causes underlying the crime of murder in Pakistan. A total of 100 randomly selected convicts of murder were interviewed from the Central Jail Kot Lukhpat, Lahore. The typical personality profile of a murderer as shown by the data was a young, poor, unskilled, and uneducated man with no history of crime and imprisonment. The breakdown of psychosocial causes of the crime of murder into different categories showed that the greater number of murders were committed due to petty affairs, while old enmities and property disputes had also their major share among the causes. The findings revealed that most of the homicidal acts occur in interpersonal contexts. The use of guns as the most commonly employed weapon for killing others indicates that the license issuing authorities should be more vigilant in permitting the license. The involvement of otherwise normally functioning individuals in the heinous act of murder suggests that with proper education and counselling as well as social reforms many of the terrible acts may be avoided.

Homicide is the killing of one human being by another. Behaviourists, criminologists, and sociologists have multidimensional views about the homicides due to variations in the causes and the motives behind killing, the methods used to cause death of the other person, role of different social variables in promoting homicidal attempts, etc.

Homicidal attempt is the result of extreme aggression. Studies on homicides indicate that homicides often take place between the persons who have been in social interaction with each other, and usually at home of the either. Rogde, Hougen, and Poulsen (2000) studied homicide in two Scandinavian capitals, Oslo and Copenhagen. They concluded that 78% of women, and 49% of the men killed were murdered in their own homes, and the most common circumstance was family row. One of the main reasons of homicide was that many of the victims had actually irritated the social interaction that led to the homicidal response, in a direct or subliminal way. According to Wolfgang (as cited in Bartol, 1980) it is the victim who, by insinuation, bodily movement, verbal

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incitement, or the actual use of physical force, initiates a series of events that result in his/her own death. In his study, Luckenbill (1977) examined the organization and development of 70 transactions ending in murder. In all 70 cases, murder was the culmination of an interchange between an offender and victim, a confrontation in which opponents sought to establish or maintain 'face' at the other's expense by remaining steady in the face of adversity. According to Luckenbill, the transaction took a sequential form: a) the victim issued what the offender deemed an offensive move; b) the offender typically retaliated with a verbal or physical challenge; c) a 'working' agreement favouring the use of violence was forged with the victim's response; d) battle ensued leaving the victim dead or dying; and e) the manner of the offender's exiting was shaped by his relationship to the victim and the move of the audience. Moreover, the means of commission of the act, and location vary with relational distance, from closest relatives (lover, spouse) to total strangers. In a recent study, Vanamo, Kauppi, Karkola, Merikanto, and Rasanen (2001) showed that in Finland during the period of 1970-1994, child homicide occurred in familial context; the offender was the mother in 61% cases, and the father or stepfather in 37% cases.

Financial controversies and economic problems too lead to the violent behaviour, resulting in homicide. Barata and Riberio (2000) studied the correlation between urbanization, poverty, and income inequality and homicide rates in the state of Sao Paulo, Brazil, in 1996. They found a strong, direct, and significant correlation between homicide rates and income ratio. Other studies have also shown low socio-economic status as one of the major causes of disputes between spouses resulting in homicide.

While investigating homicides in Scandinavia, Rogde, et al. (2000) identified multiple reasons of homicide. The most frequent motives, they found, were fights, family rows, financial rows, or jealousy. The cause of the crime may also be linked to certain areas of investigation. For example, in certain countries one important and common cause of murders is 'honour'. In such cases, the victims are most often the women and the offenders are parents and brothers. To determine the causes of death as reported in court files of the women victims, Hadidi, Kulwicki, and Jahshan (2001) found 16 cases of honour killing in Jordan. The majority of murders were committed by the victims' brothers.

Disputes over lands and property also lead to homicides. It is the most important cause of murder in agrarian society. Studies conducted in Pakistan on causes of murders have shown a higher frequency of these due to land disputes, and old enmities over lands (Tariq & Durrani, 1983). This also has been found a predominant cause of murders as

reported by newspapers. In a content analysis study of daily newspaper *Jang* for two-years, Suhail and Khalid (2002) found that among the major causes behind the murders were old enmity and dispute over property; theft, petty affairs, and illegitimate sexual affairs were the other important causes of murder. It has also been reported that in case of women murderers, the major cause underlying such a homicide was matrimonial affairs, and the victims were mostly husbands (as cited in Tariq & Anila, 1993).

Studies showing weapons of murders are not consistent in their findings, because these vary as a result of gender, ethnicity, and country of residence. Bartol (1980) described four classical studies, which showed that Blacks were particularly likely to use knives, whereas White offenders more commonly beat their victims to death. Moreover, women most frequently employed cutting instruments, usually a kitchen knife. A few studies conducted in Pakistan revealed that women committed crimes of murder by methods, which were very bold and aggressive such as hammering victim to death or killing with knives (see, for example, Hashmi, 1974; Malik, 1958; Rizvi, 1962).

Panichabhongse, Smativat, Watanakajorn, and Kasantikul (1999) studied 4,122 cases in Bangkok and found firearms, sharp-force, and blunt-force in combination as the most commonly used weapons, accounting for 92% of the deaths. From San Antonio, Texas, DiMaio (2000) reported different means of homicide, which are relatively unusual, for example, foreign material being pushed into the victim's mouth, hanging, and drowning the victims. Another study by Rogde et al. (2000) on 141 homicides revealed blunt force, sharp force, and strangulation as the most common methods. Head injuries, drowning, and suffocation have also been identified as the most frequent methods in other studies (Vanamo et al., 2001).

It is a well-documented fact that anger turned inward can take the form of suicide and if it turns outward can be a very aggressive act. Many studies have reported greater number of committed suicides in younger people. In an archival research, spreaded over two decades, Suhail and Qurat-ul-Ain (2002) found the highest suicide risks in people of 25 years of age or less. It has been suggested that the economic and educational pressures have contributed to the increasing social and health problems among children and adolescents (WHO, 2001).

Although the literature highlighting psychological and social factors of homicide is extensive, not much work has been reported from Pakistan. Many of such researches have derived conclusions on the basis of old records. Moreover, majority of the work included all crimes (see, for example, Ameer, 1998; Kiani, 1986; Zahara, 1985), and thus

conclusions drawn about the crime of murder were based on limited number of cases. Using a prospective method of investigation, the current work was carried out with 100 convicts of murder, waiting for their death sentence, to understand the psycho-social causes of the crime of murder in Pakistan.

METHOD

Sample

The sample of 100 men convicts was taken from the Central Jail Kot Lakhpat Lahore. At the time of the interviews, there were 412 prisoners in that jail who had been sentenced to death. A method of random selection was adopted for obtaining sample; from the jail record register a list was prepared and every fourth convict was interviewed. Thus, a sample of 100 convicts was selected. Convicts of murder in this study refer to those for whom death sentence was declared regardless of their statement about the murder and the fact whether they had actually committed the murder or not. The death warrants were issued to 93 convicts, while the date of hanging was announced for the remaining seven. Seventy nine of those who were issued death warrants had filed an appeal against the punishment, and the appeal of 13 was rejected.

Instruments

A semi-structured questionnaire was prepared by the researcher to identify the main variables of the study including causes and details of committed murders. The questions were open-ended consisting on two sections:

1. Section A of the questionnaire asked about demographic and crime details. The demographic information was generated about age, marital status, birth order, number of siblings, education, and family income. The crime history was obtained about number of crimes committed before the current episode as well history of any previous drug use.
2. Section B asked about cause(s) underlying the crime of murder, weapons employed, and relation of the convict with the victim.

Procedure

As a first step, an application was submitted to the Deputy Commissioner Lahore to get permission for interviewing the prisoners of

death sentence. In order to obtain more accurate and complete information, interview technique was used as the mode of collecting data from the convicts. The informed consent was obtained from all those who were selected to participate in this study. Only one person refused to participate. To keep a total sample of 100 convicts, one participant was obtained using the same procedure of random selection. The jail authorities and the participants were assured that the identity of the interviewees would not be disclosed, and the data would not be used other than the research and academic purposes. Moreover, the interviewees were guaranteed that whatever information they provide would not be communicated to the police, court, or any other authority, where it might affect their legal status in any way.

As the convicts of murder were all men and were considered '*dangerous*', a constable and a lady matron were deputed during the interviewing process for the safety of the researcher as well as to prevent any unpleasant happening.

To make the conversation comfortable and easy for the convicts, the interviewees were not kept hand-cuffed or behind the bars. Instead they were interviewed in the yard of their blocks in open air, while the safety guards were placed at a distance so that the interviewees could talk without any hesitation.

Before starting with the formal questioning, the rapport was established by showing an accepting attitude toward the convict. The initial resistance was dealt with care and caution. There were times where the researcher had to deal with the emotional swings, particularly of crying and hatred. The resistance in the interviewees was dealt with using basic counseling skills-empathy, unconditioned positive regard, emotional support, silence, explanations, and persuasion.

In general, the prisoners of death sentence had very hospitable attitude toward the researcher, inviting her for tea and at meal times for food. Their cooperation showed their desperate need to talk and to speak out. Nearly all of them were ready to provide any sort of information. Many, however, expressed their concerns in the beginning that their statements might be used against them. This concern was dealt with providing assurance.

RESULTS

A series of chi square analyses were conducted to determine the significance of difference between expected and obtained frequencies in each variable of the study.

Table 1

Demographic and Crime Data (N = 100)

Variables	<i>f</i>	χ^2	df
<i>Formal Education</i>			
Illiterate	52	17.18*	2
Secondary	29		
Tertiary	19		
<i>Birth Order</i>			
Elder	37	4.90	2
Middle	40		
Youngest	23		
<i>Occupation</i>			
Professional	18	39.87*	3
Skilled workers	6		
Unskilled workers	49		
Farmers	26		
<i>Marital Status</i>			
Married	56	1.44	1
Never Married	44		
<i>Crime history</i>			
None	78	31.36*	1
One or more	22		
<i>Imprisonment History</i>			
None	93	160.34*	1
One or more	7		
<i>History of Drug Abuse</i>			
None	73	71.54*	2
Alcohol	10		
Other (cannabis, opiates, etc.)	17		
<i>Weapons employed for killing</i>			
Gun/Revolver	9	139.56*	3
Knife	6		
Fire/bomb	5		
Stabbing	8		
Other (not included in analysis)			

* $p < .000$

Table 1 shows demographic and crime data of all convicts. Majority of the convicts were illiterate, married, and unskilled workers. The monthly income of the sample had a wide range, varying from 600 to 300,000 ($M = 14652.8$; $SD = 39321.93$) rupees per month. This table also shows crime, imprisonment, and drug abuse history of the convicts.

Majority of the convicts of murder did not have any previous history of crime, imprisonment, or drug abuse. Among all, 59 confessed that they had committed the murder, whereas 41 denied that they had committed such an act. Out of these 41, 28 convicts reported that as they were present at the murder spot, they knew about the cause of murder. Thirteen convicts even denied of being present at the murder spot. According to their statements, they were unaware of the reason of the murder for which they had been considered guilty.

Major causes underlying the crime of murders have been presented in Table 2 in the order of frequency.

Table 2

Psycho social causes of murders as identified by the convicts (N = 87)

Variables	<i>f</i>	%
Petty affairs	22	25.29
Old enmity	20	22.99
Property	17	19.54
Honour	11	12.64
Family dispute	7	8.04
Theft	6	6.90
Terrorism	2	2.30
Self defence	3	3.45

The Table 2 shows that the greater number of murders was committed due to petty affairs, while old enmities, and property disputes had also their major share among the causes. The total data points in Table 2 are less than the actual number of convicts as some of them claimed that they had actually not committed the murder and were wrongly being involved in the case. A cross-tabulation of different types of murders (in relation to underlying causes) and weapons employed showed that gun/revolver was the most commonly used method for murder committed for property, enmity and even for petty affairs. This categorization is not separately shown in any table as gun was the preferred means of killing in nearly every type of murder. This is apparent in the use of gun in 72% of cases.

Table 3

Data about victim's identity

Variables	<i>f</i>	%
Gender of the victim (N=100)		
Men	74	74
Women	21	21
Gender not identified	5	5
Relationship of the victim with the convicts (N=98)		
Immediate family	16	16.33
Other relatives	15	15.31
Neighbours	9	9.18
Friends	5	5.10
Acquaintance	22	22.45
Strangers	31	31.63

Table 3 shows the gender of the victim and then relationship with the murderer. Majority of the victims was men (74%). Most of the victims were related (31%) to the convict by being either an immediate family member (16%) or other family member (15%), while a considerable number of victims had no relationship (28%) or had little acquaintance (22%) with the convict. In other instances, victim was either a neighbour (9%) or friend (5%). Five per cent of the convicts declared that they even did not know who was murdered. The most commonly employed methods for the criminal act were gun and revolver (72%), followed by knife (9%) and other means including fire, hitting, suffocation, etc. It is important to point out here that chi square analyses were not conducted in the case of causes of the murders and identity of the victims, as this analysis only provides meaningful information on limited number of categories.

DISCUSSION

The present study has several strengths over previous studies conducted in this area in Pakistan. Firstly, this work was concerned only about the crime of murder, hence provided opportunity to generalize the findings from a much larger and homogenous sample. Secondly, interview was adopted as a method of data collection which reduced the

possibility of faking and omission of responses. Although self-reports are open to all types of manipulation, and require corroboration from other sources, self-reports generated through face-to-face interview are more reliable due to the fact that interviews provide an opportunity to observe the interviewee at the same time. Moreover, the interview methods are more likely to generate answers from the resistant participants using empathetic and persuasive attitude. Thirdly, the random selection procedure to draw sample for this study maximized generalizability and validity of the findings. One limitation of this work, however, was that data was collected from one jail, hence representing only Lahore and neighbouring areas.

Crime is a major social problem in Pakistan and other parts of the world. However, crime concerns us only when it touches our lives. In Pakistan, research on crime has been quite sparse. The present work was undertaken to highlight the major causes and modes of these brutal acts in Pakistan as described by the convicts themselves. The findings of the study provided an insight into the social, economic, and cultural factors underlying the crime of murder in Pakistan.

The typical profile of a murderer as shown by the data was a young, unskilled, and uneducated man with no history of crime and imprisonment. The last segment of this profile is especially alarming as it shows the involvement of otherwise normal and apparently harmless persons (78%) being capable to commit the height of a brutal act. 93 per cent of convicts had no imprisonment history, whereas only 5% were imprisoned twice or more. Among the convicts, 73% were those who did not report substance abuse. Although 39% of these were in the habit of cigarette smoking, that was excluded from the drug abuse category as the use of cigarette is quite common in Pakistan.

Most of the murders according to our findings were unplanned; 59% of the convicts confessed their act before the interviewer and among them, 85% exclaimed that they did not commit the act purposefully but it was rather a sudden provocation. This report from the convicts is consistent with majority having no crime or imprisonment history. The literature on homicide indicates that most of the murders are unpremeditated and are committed in the heat of the moment within an argument or dispute with an acquaintance or family member. Aoulakh (1996), too, is of opinion that in Pakistan, the crime of murder by majority of convicts is not premeditated. According to Tariq and Durrani (1983), however, most of the crimes against person are premeditated and that the confession is high among the convicts who commit crimes under social value pressure, and at times, there is a tinge of pride and honour rather than guilt and shame in their feelings while confessing their crime.

Our findings, consistent with those of Aoulakh (1996), indicate that majority of murders are not planned in our society but are caused due to sudden provocation. Zahara (1985) conducted in-depth interviews with 40 criminals to understand the psychological aspects of crimes, and found that many of the crimes of murder were committed due to accidental, and not planned matters. This again indicates that the atrocious acts of murder are not always committed by the habitual criminals. May be because of this 64% of those who confessed committing a murder in the current sample expressed that now, when the crime was over, they could see the other alternatives; 58% of those confessing the act of murder also expressed guilt feelings over their act.

The current findings showed that the majority of the murderers were considerably young with 50% of the convicts being less than 30 years of age. This finding also has been reported before. Kiani (1986) conducted a study in District Jail Lahore to understand psychosocial aspects of criminal behaviour and found that 40% of the convicts of murderers were between 21-30 years of age. According to Tariq and Durrani (1983), in Pakistan 30% of the crimes against person are committed by the convicts between 21 and 25 years of age, while 68% of total crimes were committed by convicts of 30 years or below. Their study showed a negative correlation of age with the crime rate, and indicated the youth is at higher risk for committing the heinous acts. Tariq and Durrani (1983) indicated that physically broken homes, psychologically disrupted homes, adverse control and support by parents and lack of affiliation may be the important reasons underlying the findings. They also showed that of those who commit crime against person 56% come from broken homes against 45% who come from intact homes. However, as majority of the studies are subject to many methodological weaknesses, this always remains the possibility that some findings may have been the function of the sampling procedure rather than representing the true populations of murderers.

The highest rate of murders in lower socio economic class (unskilled workers) reveals greater social pressure and stress on this class in Pakistan. Bartol (1980) also reported higher rates of murders being committed by the lower socio economic class. Kiani (1986) showed that 52% of all crimes in Pakistan are being committed by people belonging to low social class. This finding has also been reported previously from studies conducted in Pakistan; Kiani (1986) reported 54% of illiterate convicts in their sample, while Ameer (1998) found 36% of illiterates in a sample of 100 convicts. It was also observed in the current data that the convicts belonging to different classes attempted murders for different reasons, for example, the lower social class committed murders more because of poverty and deprivation as they committed murders during the

crimes of theft, robbery, cattle lifting, etc. On the other hand, a few youngsters of high social class committed murders for thrill. Although, majority of the convicts of the murder were illiterate (38%), it is a matter of great concern and a point to be noted that a considerable number of murders were committed by the educated ones (19%); 16% and 3% were educated up to college and university level respectively.

At the question whether they would again commit the murder, in the same situation if they got a new life, majority replied in negative. Nearly 80% of the convicts, confessing their crime, expressed their repentance on their act. Among the remaining ones, 19% expressed joy at their act, and only one person denied any feelings. Feelings of remorse over one's acts in this sample reveal that even after committing gruesome acts of murders, the conscience within human mind does not totally die, and the good side of man's nature stays with him despite adverse circumstances. This also indicates that with proper education and counseling as well as social reforms, many of the terrible acts may be avoided.

It is also very alarming that the majority of the murders were committed for the petty insignificant matters, for example, on children's play quarrels, grievances over small disputes, minor neighbourhood problems, etc. This finding is consistent with a previous report from Pakistan in which Tariq and Durrani (1983) showed that 28% of the murders were attempted due to petty brawls the highest figure in their findings. Surprisingly, theft and burglary were not the major causes of murders. That is why, only 28% of the victims were not related to the convicts. It is a matter of concern that all other murders were committed between relatives, friends, and neighbours. Adler, Mueller, and Laufer (1995) differentiated four categories of homicides: (1) those within the family, (2) those among friends and acquaintances, (3) stranger homicides associated with felonies, and (4) stranger homicides not associated with felonies. According to Tariq and Durrani (1983), comparison between those who committed crimes due to social value pressure and those who committed no such crimes, reveal that crime committed under the social value pressure are mainly against person. The overwhelming majority of such crimes include hurts, murders, and sometimes kidnapping too. Moreover, majority of these crimes occurred in interpersonal contexts.

A number of murders, as reported by the convicts of the current study, were attempted due to land disputes, old enmities, honour, and intra-familial problems. This shows that crime against person particularly murder mostly occurs in rural area. The data indicate that 20% of the murders were caused due to the disputes on property and irrigation of the land, and 23% due to the old enmities between the families. According to

the research findings of Tariq and Durrani (1983), land disputes caused 20% of the murders. Similar findings have been reported from another study using a different methodology. In an archival data analysis, Suhail and Khalid (2002) collected rates of murders as reported in daily newspaper 'Jung' for two years (1982 & 2001). They found that the causes for committed murders were very similar across the years, with 21% of the murders being committed for enmity, 20% for property, 12% for petty affairs, and 15% were committed for illegitimate sexual relationships. A rate as high as 13% of all murders being committed in the name of honour in the present data is thought provoking. However, these rates are not consistent with the data reported in media (Suhail & Khalid, 2002), where a relatively low incidence of honour killing was reported. This may be an indicator of the power of influential people able to stop publicity of such news. The use of pistol and guns as the most frequent method of homicide also suggests that license issuing authorities should be very vigilant and careful while determining the eligibility to issue such license, also to the influential ones.

CONCLUSION

The present work provided an insight into the social, economic, and cultural factors underlying the crime of murder in Pakistan. The data suggest that the extremely violent acts of homicide are not always committed by habitual criminals, social pressures and stressors may sometime compel 'normally functioning humans' commit such acts. The findings indicate a great need for social and economic reforms to shed some of these burdens from the mind of people. This also refers to the active role of psychologists in educating people to control their anger in provocative situations.

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