

**UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF HONOR AND ECONOMIC STABILITY FROM THE
PERSPECTIVE OF PAKISTANI MEN AND WOMEN**

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Understanding The Concept of Honor and Economic Stability from The Perspective of Pakistani Men and Women

Abstract

The main rationale for the present Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was to highlight how Pakistani men and women make sense of the concept of honour, their perceptions, and experiences living in the society. The study also focused on understanding how the concept of honor in Pakistani society affects women autonomy.

The main aim of the present study was to help Pakistani society understand the call for deconstructing any discriminatory concepts prevailing in the society that seek to reinforce the socially acceptable masculine roles and expected behavior to retain a status in the society since a woman's life and behaviour are explicitly and profoundly associated with a man's honor in Pakistani society. For this purpose, a sample of 10 men and 5 women between the age range of 26-40 years were purposively selected from Lahore for conducting semi-structured interviews. IPA analysis revealed four themes including, socioreligious construct, gender role strain, peer pressure and social transformation. The study concluded with an emphasis on gender equality and empowerment of women in Pakistan.

Keywords: Honor, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), Women's Autonomy

Introduction

Honour is a multi-faceted concept that has been defined as the value of a person in his/her own eyes as well as in the eyes of his/her society, an estimation of his/her worth, claim to pride, its acknowledgement and recognition by society (Pitt-Rivers, 1965). However, the notion of honor is subject to vast variation depending upon the socioeconomic conditions, political situation, moral standards and the sex-role conventions of a community (Gilmore, 1982; & Herzfeld, 1980). The concept was first introduced in social science in a book titled *Honor and Shame, The Values of the Mediterranean Society* by Peristiany (1966) that describes the concepts of both honour and shame in the Mediterranean society. This work helped to highlight the role of societies in promotion of a cultural logic of honor such as in, Latin America, Middle East, North Africa and South Asian regions particularly in those locations where resources are scarce and the situation of rule of law is weak and poor (Edgerton, [1971](#); & McWhiney, [1988](#)).

In these societies, some social psychological tools help individuals gain a reputation for endurance, strength and a willingness to fight back in case of threat to their reputation in the society. In such societies, one's view of themselves (self-worth), social reputation (social-worth) and the societal expectations work to shape an individual's perception of honor (Uskul et al., 2023; Cross et al., [2014](#); Peristiany, 1966; & Pitt-Rivers, [1965](#)). Honor in such societies is observed as being socially fragile, it can be lost as a result of an individual's actions and once lost, it becomes very difficult to regain it. Consequently, the individuals in such societies and cultures always feel internally and externally motivated to uphold and protect their honor through positive and negative reinforcement. Their willingness to vigilantly watch for any attack to their honor and readiness to promptly responding to any threat to their honor actively forbid others to antagonize them (Uskul et al., 2023). Honor not only plays an active role in restraining others to attack someone's honor but it also helps shape a person's negative and positive behaviour, and these individuals influence and shape the honor of their close ones or in-group members. This means that any spill over in the in-group

member's behavior can pose a threat to them or any positive act can even strengthen their honor (Mosquera et al., [2014](#); & Uskul et al., [2012](#)).

Honour is a multifaceted concept deeply embedded in social, cultural, and historical contexts. In Pakistani society, honour is a central element shaping individual and collective behavior, norms, and values. Pakistan's understanding of honour is significantly influenced by its historical and cultural context. Historically, the concept of honour in South Asia has been shaped by a blend of Islamic principles and gender identity. Within the Islamic notion of honour, it often intertwines with family reputation and moral conduct, emphasizing on tribal and familial honour. Moreover, one of the most discussed aspects of honour in Pakistani society is its relation to gender. Honour is often associated with female chastity and male control over female behavior. Studies indicate that women's actions are closely monitored and controlled to preserve family honour, leading to practices such as forced marriages and honour-based violence (Iqbal, 2022; Nazar, 2020; Naveed, 2019). As argued by Vandello and Cohen (2003) that women in such societies/cultures often strive to maintain and protect reputation for loyalty and chastity. The emphasis on female modesty and compliance is a means of upholding family honour, which is believed to be jeopardized by perceived deviations from traditional norms. One such concept is explained under the masculine honor beliefs in which men are needed to earn, defend, maintain and uphold the honour often by aggression directed towards women (Katzman et al., 2024).

Gender-based violence, including honour killings, remains a significant issue. Research shows that these acts are rationalized through cultural and social norms that prioritize family honour over individual rights (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987). Despite legal reforms aimed at addressing these issues, societal attitudes continue to perpetuate practices that compromise women's rights in the name of honour (Shahid et al., 2024). In a scholarly analysis by Kanwal (2021), it was highlighted that the honour killings are a persistent phenomenon within Pakistani society. Lari (2011) also conducted a pilot study to assess the effectiveness of anti-honor killing laws in Pakistan passed in 2004 and compared the incidents of honor killing pre-and-post 2004. Comparing the facts and figures available, the researcher concluded that there was no difference in the motives behind honor killings that in fact increased due to some exemptions given in the very anti-honor killings laws.

Moreover, socio-economic status plays a crucial role in how honour is perceived and enacted. In many cases, lower socio-economic groups are more rigid in adhering to traditional honour norms due to limited access to education and legal recourse. Studies have found that in economically disadvantaged communities, honour-related violence and practices are more prevalent, reflecting a correlation between poverty and the perpetuation of traditional honour norms. Conversely, among higher socio-economic classes, there is a gradual shift towards more progressive views on honour, influenced by increased access to education and exposure to global human rights norms. This demographic often engages in a negotiation between traditional honour codes and modern values, resulting in a more nuanced understanding of honour that accommodates individual autonomy. (Dayan, 2021; & Qasrani et al. 2016).

The role of media and modern communication technologies can introduce a new dynamic in the perception of honour in Pakistan. Media portrayals of honour-related issues, such as honour killings and gender roles, can help spark public debates and raise awareness (Huda and Kamal, 2017). However, media is playing both positive and negative role towards honor killings in Pakistan without much attention to promotion of a cause to end it through raising public awareness. In Pakistan, the concept of honor frequently results in violence against women. Honor killings are known locally as karo-kari. Amnesty International reported that

1,100 women were killed in honor killings in 2015. In 2008, under international and domestic pressure, Pakistan enacted a law that made honor killings punishable by seven years imprisonment or by the death penalty in the most extreme. In 2016, Pakistan repealed the legal provision of seeking pardon to avoid the punishment in honor killing cases. Therefore, this paper takes an important task of understanding the social construct of honor in order to present a case for calling deconstruction of any such notion that affects gender relations and female autonomy. By honor, the present study means the self-respect and integrity of both men and women.

Theoretical Framework

The concept of honor can be broadly viewed from three perspectives (Hellden & Carbin, 2010). From cultural perspective, it is rooted in cultural values and the gender perspective that explains men's superiority over women. Miller & Petro-Nustas (2002) believe in the cultural and gender perspective, and that 'so called' honor violence is rooted in old traditional patriarchal and tribal cultures, where the family is a respected institution. They can also see a link to religion, but Faqir (2001) argues that the tribal and patriarchal values have developed into religious values and therefore the two have been intertwined (Abu-Lughod, 2011). The perception of honour in Pakistani society is a complex interplay of historical, cultural, gender, and socio-economic factors. While traditional norms continue to exert significant influence, modern influences and socio-economic changes are gradually reshaping the understanding of honour. Addressing honour-based practices requires a multifaceted approach, including legal reforms, educational initiatives, and shifts in societal attitudes towards gender equality and individual rights. The present study is grounded in a phenomenological paradigm, aiming to uncover the essence of participants' lived experiences and perceptions of honour. IPA has been used to explore how individuals make sense of their experiences and the meanings they attach to honour within Pakistani cultural and social contexts.

Research Objectives

- To understand how the concept of honor is perceived by Pakistani men and women.
- To understand how the concept of 'honor' affects women's autonomy.
- To understand the personal and cultural meanings of honour for men and women in Pakistan.

Research Problem

What does honor mean to modern Pakistani men and women?

Research Questions

Q1: How is the concept of honor is perceived by Pakistani men and women?

Q2: How is the concept of 'honor' affects women's autonomy?

Research Methodology

The purpose of the present study was to explore and understand how the concept of honour is perceived by men and women in Pakistan. In order to achieve this goal, the present study employed a Phenomenological Interpretative Analysis (IPA) approach, in which in-depth face-to-face interviews with a diverse sample of 15 participants (10 men and 5 women) were conducted. Since, the present study undertook an in-depth examination of personal experiences and meanings attached to honour within the Pakistani sociocultural context, there IPA methodology was adopted.

Sample

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who could provide rich, relevant insights into the concept of honour within the context of Pakistani society from their personal experiences and perceptions. Therefore, this is non-probability sampling method is appropriate for IPA, as it focuses on individuals who have direct experience with the phenomenon being studied. The sample consisted of 15 participants from Lahore, Pakistan, including 10 men and 5 women within the age range of 26 to 40 years, chosen to ensure a diverse range of perspectives. Participants were selected based on the following criteria:

- Residency in Lahore, Pakistan, ensuring contextual relevance.
- Age 26 to 40 years, to capture mature perspectives.
- A range of socio-economic backgrounds to enrich the data.
- Willingness to engage in in-depth interviews about personal experiences related to honour.

Tool

Data were collected through self-constructed semi-structured face-to-face interviews. This method allows for flexibility and depth, providing participants with the opportunity to express their views and experiences in their own words while allowing the researcher to probe deeper into specific topics. An interview protocol was developed to ensure consistency while allowing for the exploration of individual experiences. Key areas of focus included the following:

- Personal definitions and understandings of honour.
- Experiences and examples of honour-related practices or events.
- The role of honour in personal and social relationships.
- Gender differences in perceptions of honour.
- Influences of socio-cultural and religious factors on honour.
- The impact of concept of honor on women's autonomy in Pakistan.

Procedure

- **Recruitment:** Participants were recruited through social networks, and referrals. Informed consent was obtained from each participant at the beginning of each interview.
- **Interview Setting:** Interviews were conducted in a comfortable and private setting to facilitate open and honest dialogue.
- **Duration:** Each interview lasted between 40 to 90 minutes.
- **Recording and Transcription:** Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

a) Analysis

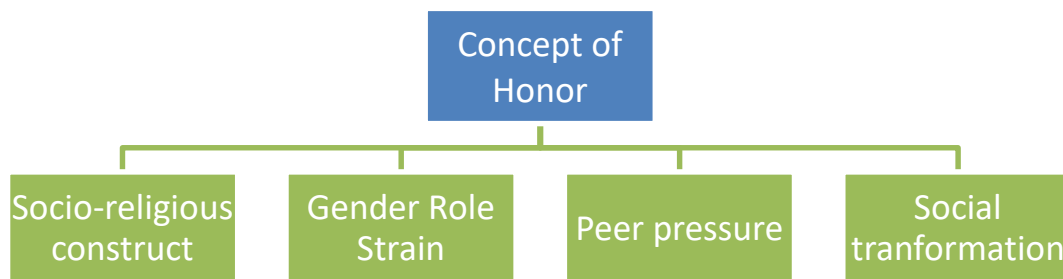
After conducting all the interviews, the interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method as given by Smith and Osborn (2007) was used to analyze the interview data. IPA focuses on exploring how individuals make sense of their experiences and the meanings they attach to them. The analysis involved the following steps:

- **Reading and Re-reading:** Immersing in the data to gain a comprehensive understanding of each participant's experience.
- **Initial Noting:** Identifying and noting initial observations and interpretations of the data.

- **Developing Themes:** Organizing notes into themes that capture the essence of participants' experiences with honour.
- **Connecting Themes:** Analyzing themes across individual cases to identify patterns and variations in perceptions of honour.

Findings and Discussion

Figure 1: The four major themes emerging from the IPA:



The below section discusses each major theme of the study in light of the interviews with the participants of the study:

1. Socio-Religious Construct

The first major theme to emerge was that the concept of honor was seen as a ‘socio-religious construct’ by the respondents as it was found that nearly all the respondents, both men and women, associated their understanding and experience of honor stemming from a socio-religious perspective. It was emphasized by the respondents that both religious teachings and interpretation as well as the society in which they are living played a significant role in constituting their core beliefs about the concept of “man’s honor” such as they said:

P3: “our religion, our society, parents, they teach us about our honor”

P7: “Our religion sets our beliefs. There are certain matters wherein, we have to react seriously from the religious perspective too.”

P5: “We observe the beliefs of our parents, grandparents who train us...”

P2: “I think society teaches us 90% of our beliefs about our self-worth”

Upon being inquired, what they think the concept of honor means, the respondents interestingly shared that it was like a value being attached with their family, they associated it with their personal duty to protect

their families' reputation from any potential harm. This finding completely resonates with the argument presented by Pitt-Rivers (1997) who stressed upon a similar concept of 'family honor' internalized by both sexes (231). A verbatim is quoted below for reference:

P12: "I see the concept of honor from both personal and collective perspectives. It is about both my personal integrity and also about how I contribute to my family reputation. For me, it really means being honest and loyal to my family and the community I live in."

Another respondent further highlighted the role of culture in nurturing the concept of honor and emphasizing on upholding the family's reputation which strongly indicates towards the role of culture and society in inculcating the importance of honor in ones' life.

P1: "Honour is deeply rooted in our culture. For me, it's about upholding the family's reputation and living in a way that reflects well on my family. It's about respecting traditions and showing strength in maintaining our values. It's something that's passed down from generation to generation. If I do something that my family sees as dishonorable, it affects everyone, not just me."

P6: "Honour, for me, is very much tied to how I present myself and how my actions reflect on my family. Growing up, I was always taught that my behaviour, especially in public, should be impeccable. It's like there's a constant awareness that every action I take could either uphold or tarnish my family's honour."

Further, it was also revealed that the concept of honor is also an integral part of all the important decisions and choices the respondents made in their lives. They indicated that they always assessed their decisions in the backdrop of honor of their families. One such verbatim is given below for example:

P14: "Sure. I remember when my sister wanted to marry someone from a different social class. It was a big issue for my family. They believed that marrying within our class was important to maintain our family's honour. In the end, we had to make a compromise to respect both her wishes and the family's expectations. It was a difficult situation, but we managed to find a middle ground that preserved the honour of the family while still respecting her choice."

Others Said:

P8: "When my daughter wanted to pursue a career in a field that wasn't traditionally seen as suitable for women, it was a difficult decision for us. We had to consider not just her wishes but how it would be perceived by our community. In the end, we supported her, but it was a challenging balance between maintaining our honour and supporting her ambitions."

P4: "Absolutely. A few years ago, I wanted to pursue higher education abroad. My family was supportive, but there were concerns about how people might perceive a woman studying overseas. There was a lot of discussion about how it might affect our family's honour. In the end, they supported me, but it was clear that honour was a significant consideration in their decision-making process."

It was observed that bringing up the subject of honor killings made nearly all the respondents a bit uncomfortable. Although, some shared their personal views and experiences quite explicitly indicating towards how deep the impact of a socially-constructed concept of honor can have in Pakistani society:

P13: “You see honor killings in our country? Why do women and men become victims of such crimes? Why don’t they just involve their families and get married? Well, because it’s not simple. It is complicated. It is a matter of family reputation in their respective tribe, caste and area. Women exercising their right to choose a partner is unthinkable there...particularly where women’s freedom is synonymous to a threat to their family’s reputation”. (Female, 40 years)

P5: “I knew a girl who was my class fellow at the medical college. She was from Mianwali. She was a third-year medical student. Very beautiful, always smiling, bright in studies. She fell in love with another class fellow. As she was being spied by her strictly conservative family during her studies at the university, she was silently called back home and we never heard a word from her, we never knew why she never returned. Long before her mysterious disappearance, she’d shared with me about her paternal aunt being allegedly buried in her home by her father just for liking someone.” (Female, 38)

Therefore, it can be inferred from the afore-described findings that both society and religion play a pivotal role in inculcating the core beliefs regarding self-worth and family reputation. Often, this can adversely affect women’s right to education, marriage and even life. This finding is supported by the socio-religious framework given by Cinthio & Ericsson (2006).

2. Gender Role Stress

The second major theme to emerge was gender role stress. It was also found that majority of the respondents associated the concept of honor with masculinity. They believed that honor is a core constituent of the masculine characteristics from shaping their personality and behavior to inculcating a sense of masculine responsibility to protect their women as a sign of preserving their masculine values. As quoted below too that these findings are strongly backed by a previous study by Chalman et al. (2021) and Baugher and Gazmararian (2015) that highlight the association between masculine gender role stress and violence against women.

One of the respondents said:

P4: It affects almost everything. From the way I interact with people to the decisions I make, I’m always conscious of how my actions reflect on my family. Even in business, I’m aware of how important it is to maintain a good reputation. Honour shapes my decisions, and I think it’s something that keeps our family and community together” (Male, 36 years).

P1: “the concept of honor is associated with masculinity”

Likewise, majority of the female respondents believed that a man's honor was triggered by perceived immoral actions of their female family member and it becomes necessary for them to protect their masculinity in such situations:

P14: "It is generally believed that if a wife misbehaves, it triggers the masculinity of a man. if a sister tries to assert her opinion in a loud voice or dresses as per her accord, it triggers the masculinity of a man"

Both male and female respondents believed that a man's honor was rooted in protecting his masculine image.

P10: "A man's honor is a synonym of masculinity... it means self-respect of a man...it is a shield to protect masculinity"

P8: "A man does not like an imitation of his masculine characteristics by a perceived weaker sex"

The finding reveals how honor is perceived and experienced by both genders in our society and corroborates the existence of the concept of masculinity as an integral part of man's honor as found in previous studies by Brett (2012) and Callie (2021). Moreover, majority of the male respondents agreed that they feel compelled to perform what their social roles demand from them and they cannot avoid it since they have internalized their social role of a "protector". They said that they become alert in wake of a situation demanding their intervention. The respondents shared that they want to avoid being called 'beghairat' (shameless), weak, failure or being isolated/dejected by the society. This fear keeps them forced to perform their role as a protector whether they like it or not, whether they agree with it or not. So, this finding does help in highlighting how modern Pakistani men feel like about the pressure they feel about their socially expected roles and the its potential adverse impact on women's autonomy. This finding is confirmed by previous studies by Chalman et al. (2021) who found that men's honour is associated with how they react to a threat to their honour and to avoid any shame and embarrassment, they assume it a 'man's duty' to react.

As said by them:

P1: "Preserving my honor is the demand of my social role. I feel pressurized by the demand of my role as I feel that it is the demand of my role as a man, it is the demand of a man's honor to react to survive in the society as a man... I become conscious... just because I have to. This is what is expected from my social role as a man."

P4: "A man is perceived as "shameless" if he does not perform his duty of protecting his women. I want to avoid it. Society has assigned me this role of a protector so the burden of this responsibility is always there. I am just performing my duty even if I don't feel like. It's not a personal choice." (Male, 36)

P11: "It makes me more cautious. I'm aware that people might judge my family based on my actions. This means I often feel the need to conform to traditional expectations, even if it

conflicts with my personal desires or modern views. It's a constant negotiation between personal choice and family expectations."

P9: "I think it is my duty to protect my women and I feel the force or a sort of urge to do so. As a man I fear that my movement in the society would not be possible if I fail to perform my role as a man...Yes I feel that sometimes our actions can restrict women's autonomy. They are the ones who compromise."

P7: "It means I have to be very mindful of how I behave and what I say. There's a lot of pressure to adhere to social expectations and to not do anything that could be seen as dishonourable. It affects everything from how I dress to how I interact with people."

This finding provides an important insight into how powerfully the perceived social roles play their part in affecting gender relations and limiting women's autonomy in the society as found earlier by Richmond (2003), Nazar (2020) and Callie (2021).

3. Peer Pressure

The third major theme to emerge was the peer pressure. For majority of male respondents, one of the great impetuses of protecting their honor comes from the need to save their reputation among their friend circle. These findings are strongly corroborated by a previous study by Chalman et al. (2021) that argues that masculine honor beliefs are associated with positive perception of men who react aggressively to any threat to their honor by women and also with negative perception of men who ignore or do not react to such threats. A few verbatim are quoted as below:

P4: "My friends...they are very important to me. I have a reputé among them that I feel like preserving all the time. If my daughter won't behave, or my wife won't listen to me, it will damage my reputation among my friends' circle so I must not let that be." (Male, 36)

"I think the men who resort to violence against women are actually under immense pressure of saving their face among their peers. When women are not behaving, close relatives and friends start gossiping around, they start calling men, shameless, "non-masculine" so men face the social pressure. It is a face-saving mechanism around friend circle you can say."

"How will I face my friends in such cases...Honour is very much about family and community reputation. It's something that dictates a lot of my actions. I'm very conscious of maintaining a certain image, not just for myself but for my entire family. The pressure to uphold these standards can be overwhelming."

Therefore, this finding reflects another important role society plays in invoking violence against women which should be curtailed. The finding has been supported by previous studies on social perspective of honor (Zia Ullah, 2010 & Nazar, 2020).

4. Social Transformation

When asked about the solution of what could be done to improve the gender relations and women's autonomy in our society, all respondents stressed upon the need for revising the social construct of honor. They called for seeing it equally important for both men and women. As said by them:

“If the concept was perceived differently in society, the situation would not have prevailed like this today...it is generally believed that only men have “honour”, nobody believes that a woman can have “honour” too, her honour can be hurt too. If Allah has created both man and woman in the same manner, the concept of honour could be the same too.” (Female, 27)

“What if women were taught to protect their honour?”

To rule out the tendency to take law in hands, both men and women could be taught about honor alike. Society can teach about the honor of women too.”

“There are definitely shifts, especially among younger people. There's more emphasis on individual choice and less on strict adherence to traditional norms. However, change is gradual, and many people still hold on to traditional views of honour.”

“In some ways, yes. Younger generations are more open to new ideas, and there is some flexibility now compared to the past. But traditional views are still strong, and there's a lot of pressure to conform. It's a balancing act between modernity and tradition.”

“I think there are definitely some changes, especially among the younger generation who seem to be more open to new ideas. However, traditional views are still prevalent, and there's often a struggle between adhering to old values and adapting to new ways of thinking.”

“Yes... I think there is a growing acceptance of different viewpoints. As more people are starting to question traditional norms and explore what honour means in a contemporary context. It's a positive shift, yet met with resistance from more traditional odds.”

This finding is an extremely important one in calling for a more enlightened gender-balanced society dismantling any rigid concepts associated as a normal social role of a particular gender. No previous study ever stressed the need to revise gendered concept of honor in the society.

Conclusion

The concept of honor is profound and multifaceted having social, cultural, and historical roots within Pakistani context determining and defining appropriate/acceptable behaviour for both men and women. This study has tried to highlight some core concepts associated with a man's honor in Pakistani society such as, socio-religious construct, gender role strain, peer pressure and social transformation from the personal perspective and experiences of the Pakistani men and women. The objective of the present study was to help society understand the need to deconstruct and revise the concept of honor as a powerful subject matter to free both genders from the shackles of cruel and ambiguous social norms since, a woman's life and honor are linked with a man's honor in our Pakistani society. In light of the findings, it can be

emphasized that there is a need for strong social, cultural, political and legal transformation, reforms and commitment at individual level to ensure uprooting any discriminatory social beliefs, practices, behaviour and attitudes that violate the rights of women to life and freedom.

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