



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

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Honour killings in Turkey

The *US Department of State* reports:

"Persons convicted of honor killings receive life imprisonment. The Turkish National Police reported 39 honor killings and 9 attempted honor killings through September 30. The HRP reported there were 53 honor killings in 2007 and 1,000 honor killings between 2003 and July 2008, mainly in conservative Kurdish families in the southeast or among migrants from the southeast living in large cities. Because of sentence reductions for juvenile offenders, observers noted that young male relatives often were designated to perform such killings.

Due to penalties for honor killings, family members increasingly pressured girls to commit suicide in order to preserve the family's honor. Between 2005 and 2006, 1,985 women were reported to have committed suicide or have been killed, according to women's rights advocacy group AKDER. Government officials worked with advocacy groups such as KA-MER to hold town hall meetings and set up rescue teams and hotlines for endangered women and girls.

KA-MER, the leading women's organization in the southeast, reported that from 2003-07 a total of 198 women from eastern and southeastern Anatolia contacted it to report that their family had threatened them with honor killings. Of these cases, three of the women died from injuries sustained in the attacks, one committed suicide, and 27 were pressured to commit suicide. The father or husband decided the fate of the woman in the vast majority of the cases. The report observed that 76 of these "decision makers" were illiterate, while 47 had no education beyond junior high school. Increased education levels correlated with a drop in the rate of such crimes.

"Disobedience," variously defined as refusing to marry the person the family had chosen, refusing to have sex with a brother-in-law or father, not agreeing to prostitute oneself, not fulfilling the demands of male family members, and interrupting man-to-man conversations was determined to be the most frequent justification of honor killings.

In April, 24 year-old Leyla Gok was beaten to death in Siirt's Eruh district, apparently on account of an alleged affair she had with a married man. The woman had returned to her family after living with her boyfriend for some time. The family reportedly did not take the body from the hospital, and the victim was buried by municipal officials. After testimonies, Gok's brother Hayrettin was released and her boyfriend Sukru Batuhan was detained in connection with the death. The case continued at year's end." (US Department of State (25 February 2009) *2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Turkey*)

Freedom House reports:

"...Domestic abuse and so-called honor crimes continue to occur; a 2007 study from the Turkish Sabanci University found that one in three women in the country was a victim of violence. The 2004 penal code revisions include increased penalties for crimes against women and the elimination of sentence reductions in cases of honor killing and rape. Suicide among women has been linked to familial pressure as stricter laws have made honor killings less permissible. A 2006 national poll found that Turks hold deeply conservative values, including disapproval of homosexuality and the cohabitation of unmarried couples." (Freedom House (2 July 2008) *Freedom in the World 2008 – Turkey*)

Amnesty International states:

"Laws and regulations designed to protect women and girls from violence were inadequately implemented. Insufficient funds and inaction by government departments undermined a 2006 circular from the Prime Minister aimed at combating domestic violence and preventing "honour" crimes. Limited progress was made in providing shelters for women survivors of violence to the extent stipulated by the 2004 Law on Municipalities – at least one shelter per settlement with a population of over 50,000." (Amnesty International (28 May 2009) *Amnesty International Report 2009 – Turkey*)

The *UK Home Office* reports:

" 1.25 "Honour killing" is a practice whereby [generally] women are murdered by male relatives for allegedly bringing shame on their family name. Such shame may be incurred by matters such as adultery, having a child out of wedlock, or even being the victim of rape.

1.26 In the World Bank 2003 report 'Bridging the Gender Gap in Turkey' it was noted, "...honor crimes constitute another very severe form of violence against women. They occur mostly in the eastern and south-eastern regions of the country or among those who have migrated from these regions to urban areas. A proper definition of the honor crime is, the murder of a woman suspected of having transgressed the limits of sexual behaviour as imposed by traditions, for example engaging in pre-marital relationships or having extra marital affairs." (UK Home Office (23 July 2008) *Report of Fact Find Mission 11-20 February 2008 Turkey*)

The same report also states:

"The Special Rapporteur added: "What distinguishes honour-related killings from other forms of violence against women is the way they are organized and executed. A family council, which may also include members of the extended kin, decides upon and organizes the murder. A young man or boy is often assigned to commit the crime because it is hoped that the young offender will receive a more lenient sentence. Such murders are often presented as acts of retribution against a woman who supposedly committed an act of grave immorality. However, the demonstrative manner in which they are carried out reveals that

they serve mainly to terrorize women as a group in order to uphold patriarchal privilege.” [29a] (page10)

1.29 In the same report of 2006 by the Special Rapporteur, it was noted that, “In the past, courts granted reduced sentences for honour murders considering that the perpetrators had been unjustly provoked by the victim’s ‘inappropriate behaviour’. Article 82 of the Penal Code now stipulates that killings in the name of töre have to be considered as a case of aggravated homicide and the perpetrator(s) must be sentenced to life imprisonment.” (Ibid)

The same report also states:

” Women for Women’s Human Rights – New Ways (WWHR) said that honour killings tended to be more prevalent in South East and Eastern areas of Turkey (e.g. Diyarbakir and Van), particularly in Kurdish ethnic/ religious communities. However, WWHR noted that honour killings were not confined to this section of the community/ geographical area; the issue also affected women such as those in immigrant communities in Istanbul. WWHR also advised that honour killings were unknown in the Alevis community and certain geographical areas, including provinces in the East such as Tunceli.” (Ibid)

The *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* state:

”Honour killings of those suspected of being involved in extra-marital illicit relationships is a widespread practice in southeastern and eastern regions of Turkey inhabited mainly by Kurds (Off Our Backs Mar. 2000). According to The Guardian, the southeastern region of Turkey, where “female[s] fall victim to customs dating back generations” is where honour killings most often occur (5 July 2004).

A human rights activist interviewed by Radio Netherlands stated that honour killings are widely practised within Turkey, and indicated that “[o]ver the past year [2003], at least 10 cases were covered by the media, and these are only the ones we hear of in public. There are lot which probably do not reach us.” (1 Sept. 2004).

In 2004, a 24-year-old unmarried woman from the poor and conservative south-east region of Turkey was shot to death allegedly by her brother, because she was pregnant out of wedlock (Women’s Enews 23 July 2004). In 2003, a 22-year-old woman from south-east Turkey, who was denied police protection, was shot to death because she was involved in an extra-marital relationship (The Observer 12 Sept. 2004).” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (28 September 2004) *Turkey: Forced marriage in Turkey; outcome when a woman refuses to marry the designated man; outcome when a woman elopes with another man; attitude of state and availability of state protection (July 2001 -September 2004) TUR43000.E*)

The Independent reports:

"All Elif had done was simply decline the offer of an arranged marriage with an older man, telling her parents she wanted to continue her education. That act of disobedience was seen as bringing dishonour on her whole family – a crime punishable by death. "I managed to escape. When I was at school, a few girls I knew were killed by their families in the name of honour – one of them for simply receiving a text message from a boy," Elif said.

So-called "honour killings" in Turkey have reached record levels. According to government figures, there are more than 200 a year – half of all the murders committed in the country. Now, in a sinister twist, comes the emergence of "honour suicides". The growing phenomenon has been linked to reforms to Turkey's penal code in 2005. That introduced mandatory life sentences for honour killers, whereas in the past, killers could receive a reduced sentence claiming provocation. Soon after the law was passed, the numbers of female suicides started to rocket. "(The Independent (27 March 2009) *Women told: 'You have dishonoured your family, please kill yourself'*)

The *New York Times* reports:

"For Derya, a waiflike girl of 17, the order to kill herself came from an uncle and was delivered in a text message to her cellphone. "You have blackened our name," it read. "Kill yourself and clean our shame or we will kill you first."

Derya said her crime was to fall for a boy she had met at school last spring. She knew the risks: her aunt had been killed by her grandfather for seeing a boy. But after being cloistered and veiled for most of her life, she said, she felt free for the first time and wanted to express her independence.

When news of the love affair spread to her family, she said, her mother warned her that her father would kill her. But she refused to listen. Then came the threatening text messages, sent by her brothers and uncles, sometimes 15 a day. Derya said they were the equivalent of a death sentence." (The New York Times (16 July 2006) *How to Avoid Honor Killing in Turkey? Honor Suicide*)

The *Sydney Morning Herald (Australia)* reports:

"The European Parliament expressed concern this year at an apparent rise in "honour killings" - murder of someone deemed to have brought dishonour on a family or clan by a member of that family or clan. Just this week, a wedding reception was left a battlefield of scores of dead - many of them women and children - after a woman married against the wishes of another family.

The United Nations identified grisly honour killings as the most significant continuing challenge for womens' freedom in Turkey, and spreading from villages to cities with the conservative cultural values of migrating workers." (Sydney Morning Herald (9 May 2009) *Caught in the crossfire*)

Also in the same article:

"Meltem Agduk, of the UN Population Fund in Turkey, says shelter numbers are insufficient because local government is reluctant and counselling is under-funded. While the rise in honour killings in Turkey - to 200 a year - might partly reflect greater alertness by police, health and religious workers, Agduk says, criminalisation of the practice has pushed up the number of honour suicides.

"The families don't want to kill the women . . . they are pushing the women to kill themselves," she says, emphasising that honour killing is an issue of culture, not religion, and that Turkish religious agencies support attempts to break the cycle of violence." (Ibid)

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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