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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# HONOR KILLINGS IN INDIA: A STUDY ON THE STATE OF UTTAR PRADESH

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### ABSTRACT

The present study has been conducted through phenomenological methodologies. The study aims to highlight how inter caste marriages or marriages against the wishes of one's parents results in honor killings in many parts of India. This study focuses on one state on particular, the state of Uttar Pradesh. The situation is further aggravated when elopement comes into the picture. The people involved in such honor killings involve the mother, father, brother and even uncles and close relatives and family friends. There have also been cases reported wherein contract killers have been hired to proceed with the murders. It is an observable fact that honor killings have become a frequent trend and has been prevalent in society for many decades. This is mainly due to the non-acceptance of the society towards the choices made by their daughters and sons due to differences in caste, or other norms made by society. Also, laws against honor killings are comparatively lenient as of now. It is not only required to change the laws to become more stringent, it is also required to change the mindset of the patriarchal societies to become more tolerant towards the choices made by the newer generations.

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## INTRODUCTION

The norms of society have been accepted by man for centuries and have become the definition of what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong. They have been accepted by everyone and anyone who questions these norms has been subjected to the ire of society. Such socio- cultural customs have been known to control the behavior of man. What is permissible and what is forbidden have been laid out by such customs. The norms of society have been accepted by man for centuries and have become the definition of what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong. They have been accepted by everyone and anyone who questions these norms has been subjected to the ire of society. Such socio- cultural customs have been known to control the behavior of man. What is permissible and what is forbidden have been laid out by such customs.

### *The concept of Honor Killings*

There exist various views of experts regarding the precise meaning of the term honor killing. One such view is that honor killings are the acts of vengeance, usually death, committed by family members towards those members who are held to have brought dishonor upon the family. It is a phenomenon which is not only restricted to India, but also other parts of the world such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bangladesh,

Sweden and Germany. Within India, such cases are most prevalent in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. According to the Honor Based Violence Awareness Network (HBVA), approximately 5000 honor killings take place internationally per year, in which 1000 honor killings occur in India, 1000 occur in Pakistan and 12 honor killings take place per year in the UK. Trends in honor killing indicate that such acts of violence are often premeditated and planned by several family members.<sup>1</sup> People who commit such violence believe that their conduct is justified and receive support from their community.<sup>2</sup> Women are usually the victims of such honor violence. Honor violence occurs in patriarchal communities where male status and family status are prioritized above all else.<sup>3</sup> The law enforcement rarely enforces penalties for honor violence. If a man is arrested, he often receives a reduced sentence.<sup>4</sup> Honor violence is a complicated phenomenon which has been differently construed by different societies and cultures. Researchers and practitioners differ as to how honor violence should be reported and studied. Honor killings of the women in a household are more common given the widely accepted perception that the social standing of the family members is

<sup>1</sup> "Ethics Guide, Honor Crimes", BBC, 2012.

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/honorcrimes/crimesofhonor\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/honorcrimes/crimesofhonor_1.shtml)

<sup>2</sup> Honor Violence – What is Honor Violence? Ayyan Hirsi Ali Foundation, <http://theahafoundation.org/issues/honor-violence/>

<sup>3</sup> "Culture of Discrimination: A Fact Sheet on "Honor" Killings", *Amnesty International*,

2012  
<sup>4</sup> Ibid

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decided by the behavior of its female members. Such honor killings have been found to arise mainly due to the woman's insistence to marrying someone of her choice rather than what her family has chosen or would approve of. This is aggravated with elopement of the woman. Honor killings are a family collaboration and it is estimated that two-thirds of such killings worldwide are by family members. Murder by the family was highest at 72 per cent in the Muslim countries while it was the lowest in North America<sup>5</sup>. Most of the honor killings take place with the younger population. While they are more concentrated to women and girls, they have also been extended to men. They can be caused due to a variety of reasons, including the will to marry the man of her own choice, indulging in an extra marital sexual relationship, or even having a conversation with another male who is not a relative or within the same caste. In many cases, mere suggestion and a lack of solid proof is enough to commit such acts of violence. Hannana Siddiqui of Southall Black Sisters argues that using the term 'honor' is a misnomer and that there is nothing honorable about such crimes. The concept of honor plays a part in perpetuating violence against women in the sense that is being used by perpetrators as an excuse or a mitigating factor when they commit acts of violence against women. Something to note about the concept of honor is that the fear of 'shame' prevents the victims, in particular, women, from seeking outside help when affected by honor violence. Even rape victims are perceived to have brought disgrace to the family. Since socio- culturally the honor belongs to men, they deem what act may be termed honorable and what cannot.

While honor killings have elicited considerable amount of attention and outrage, human rights activists argue that they should be treated as a much larger problem of violence against women<sup>6</sup>. The four types of frequently discussed honor violence are forced marriage, honor-based domestic violence, honor killing and female genital mutilation<sup>7</sup>.

Forced marriage is a concept wherein the marriage takes place without the consent of either party. This is not the same as an arranged marriage, in which both parties consent to help from family members in order to look for a suitable partner. The lack of consent of the parties in the case of forced marriage may be due to multiple reasons such as the young age of the partner, desire to choose a partner of their own choice, or pressure from family members to marry.

Honor based domestic violence takes place when the family members believe that they are in a risk of losing their honor because of the behavior of one of the family members. Such behavior could include defying the elders of the family, indulging in affairs, rejecting marriage proposals, or doing drugs and/or alcohol. This abuse is either emotional or physical or both.

Honor Killings are those acts of violence that occurs when the family members believe that their honor has been ruined due to the conduct of their family members. They believe that their

honor can be restored only when the one who has damaged their honor is killed. Such acts of violence are generally pointed towards the women and girls of the family, although men have also been subjected to such violence.

Female Genital Mutilation occurs primarily in, although is not limited to, Africa. It is the act of medication of a woman's genitalia for cultural and religious reasons. Such mutilation is intended to preserve family honor.

Honor killings in India have been prevalent since centuries. Within India, most cases of honor violence have been reported in Haryana, Rajasthan, Western Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. Because of the complexity in socio-cultural patterns, it is difficult to attribute the primary cause of honor killings, although one of the major reasons is due to inter caste marriages and the intolerance of upper caste families to such marriages, and the defiance of the youth towards these norms. Cases of marriage into the same lineage have also been a cause, with some societies considering it incest. Besides inter and intra caste marriages, inter- religious marriages have also been termed one of the causes for these killings. Such honor killings receive the support from the patriarchal society as well. They denounce the role of state and the law to prevent honor killings by considering it an unacceptable interference into their socio-cultural values. To combat the epidemic of honor killings requires understanding what makes these murders unique. They differ from plain and psychopathic homicides, serial killings, crimes of passion, revenge killings, and domestic violence<sup>8</sup>.

#### ***Constitutional Provisions in India***

The constitution of India allows freedom of choice independent of caste, religion or gender. The constitution lays out some laws in relation to honor killings which are as follows:

Honor Killings are cases of homicide and murder which are grave crimes under the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Homicide not amounting to murder comes under Section 299 and 301 of the IPC while Section 300 deals with murder. Honor killing amounts to homicide and murder since the intention is to murder the victims. The perpetrators can be punished as per Section 302 of the IPC, which states,

*"Punishment for murder.—whoever commits murder shall be punished with death, or [imprisonment for life], and shall also be liable to fine."*<sup>9</sup>

Instigating suicide by the khap panchayats or family members can also be booked under Section 302 of IPC. Such killings also violates Articles 14, 15 (1) & (3), 17, 18, 19 and 21 of the Constitution of India. Article 14 of the Indian Constitution guarantees to every person the right to equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws. Every person, whatever is his or her status or situation is subject to the jurisdiction of the ordinary courts. This right to equality is thus documented as one of the fundamental features of the Indian Constitution. Honor Killings are against this Constitutional Right provided for the protection of Indian citizens. Honor killings are mainly

<sup>5</sup> "Worldwide Trends in Honor Killings", Phyllis Chestler, *Middle East Quarterly*, 2010

<sup>6</sup> "Thousands of Women Killed for Family Honor", Hillary Mayell, *National Geographic News*, 2002

<sup>7</sup> Brandon and Hafaz, 2010

<sup>8</sup> "Worldwide Trends in Honor Killings", Phyllis Chestler, *Middle East Quarterly*, 2010

<sup>9</sup> Constitution of India, The Indian Penal Code.

directed towards women and thus give rise to gender violence<sup>10</sup>.

### **Objectives of this Study**

1. To observe the cases of honor killings in Uttar Pradesh.
2. To discuss the socio- cultural profile of the victims and the accused and recognize the relations of the accused with the victims.
3. To examine the reasons and magnitude of honor killings in Uttar Pradesh.

### **Hypothesis**

The patriarchal society in Uttar Pradesh restricts the women in the family to make their own marital choices. The societal norms dictate the ways in which the youth have to behave and going against the predefined norms results in honor killings.

## **METHODS OF RESEARCH**

The main purpose of this analysis is to observe the patterns and attributes of honor killings in Uttar Pradesh. The study has been conducted through phenomenological methodologies. This analysis has been conducted using content analysis which is a qualitative and quantitative analysis which aims at analyzing books, research articles and magazines. We have highlighted our analysis with the help of case studies and graphs. The graphs are a compilation of 50 cases of honor killings that have taken place in Uttar Pradesh. Tables have been compiled with this information as well. The findings of this study have been determined in the rest of this study.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Honor Killings is very prevalent in the state of Uttar Pradesh for many decades. Uttar Pradesh comprises of a more patriarchal society where people are engaged in agriculture in the more rural parts. In spite of rapid economic growth, the norms of this society have still not changed. In this state, honor based violence, and in particular, honor killing is not a new phenomenon. Certain communities consider 'honor' a very significant and important part of their culture, due to which anyone who hurts this honor is punished. Thus there have been traditions of turning to violence and killing for reinstating the lost honor. Even in the present such killings are still caused because of lost honor.<sup>11</sup> If the woman of the family is disrespected, teased, harassed or exploited sexually by other man, it is considered as an attack on the honor of the male family members and it may result in violence against the accused and may result into his killing as well. There are also circumstances in which the married woman indulges in extra-marital relations with other man which is considered disrespect to the Husband's honor. Another form of honor related violence is the willingness of the girl to marry the boy of her own choice. She is considered as hurting the honor of the family. The situation is aggravated when the boy belongs to an

inferior caste, or another religion, or if they decide to elope. This may result in the killing of the boy as well as the girl who has harmed the family's honor. The present study deals with this type of honor killings in the state of Uttar Pradesh.

### **Proportion of the Killings of Girls and Boys**

Honor killing emerges to be a gender based crime more in the state of Uttar Pradesh. On analyzing the 50 honor killing cases in the state of Uttar Pradesh, we infer that the girl alone is killed 60 per cent of times while the boy alone is killed only 24 per cent of times. The girl and the boy both were killed in 16 per cent cases.

**Table 1** Proportion of the Killings of Boys and Girls

Gender	%
Killing of Girl only	60
Killing of Boy only	24
Killing of Girl & Boy Both	16

From the cases, it is established that the girls are mainly murdered and targeted in incidents of honor killings. The boy involved to the girl is also murdered in most of the cases which makes it not an exclusive crime against women. The case studies reveal that the girl is not always murdered. In many cases the paramours are murdered but the girls are exempted by the family members. It has been observed while studying the cases thoroughly that these 10 per cent cases comprise majority of those circumstances in which the romantic relationship of the girl (particularly inter-caste, inter-religious, same gotra) comes into the knowledge of family members and there is no happening of any elopement or covert and unaccepted marriage. The girls' family members inculcate, warn and threaten the girl not to further pursue the relationships with the boys in such cases. In case of the boys and the girls decide to continue the relationship, the unacceptable relationship is ended by the girls' family by killing the boy involved and marrying the girl to the boy of their choice against her own will.

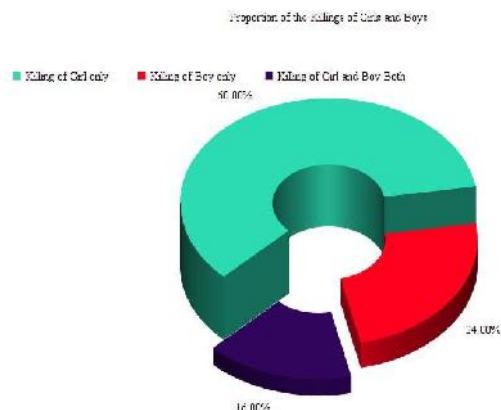
In some cases, the family members of the girl are aware of her relationship with the boy. If she continues the relationship with the boy regardless of their threats and warnings, the family members take the matter into their own hands and close the matter by executing the coldblooded murder of girl and end the matter for once and for all. In these cases, the family members assume that by murdering the girl, they would be able to conceal the relationship of the girl and the boy from the community and hence protect the honor of the family in the community. In some cases, these coldblooded murders are not performed secretly. The family members tell the entire communities about it and even in some cases parade the dead body or parts of the deceased to prove their point that if anybody goes against the rules of the community, the consequences will be disastrous. It is believed that by doing so they try to restore their honor in the community. They try to prove that they stick to their grounds and anyone going against the rule will meet with disastrous consequences. Further, the cases involving the killing of both the girl as well as the boy are those in which the couple gets eloped or get married to each other ignoring the objections and warnings of the girl's family

<sup>10</sup> "Honor Killings and Law in India", *Puneet Kaur Grewal*, 2012

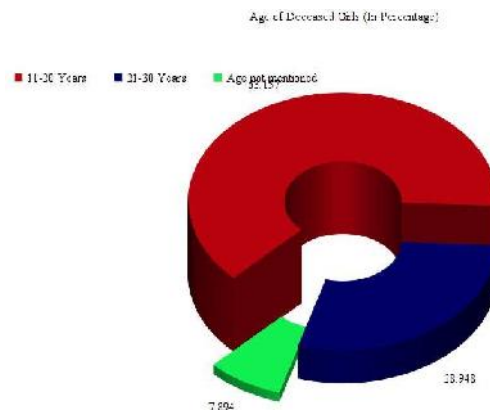
<sup>11</sup> "Honor Killings in Haryana State, India: A content Analysis", *Satnam Singh Deol*, 2014



members. Both the girl and the boy are murdered in those cases.



marrying the males of their own choices, against will of their families.



### Age Variables of Girls killed for Honor

Uttar Pradesh is divided mainly in to two categories of the age groups, i.e. 11-20 and 21-30 to find and examine the most probable age of girls killed for honor in Uttar Pradesh. The age groups are decided after studying the sample cases, based on the minimum age and maximum age of the girls killed for honor in the state of Uttar Pradesh. On evaluating the 50 sample cases, we conclude that the minimum age of victim of honor killing in Uttar Pradesh was 14 years. On the other hand, the maximum age of the victim was found to be 29 years. In 63.157 per cent cases, the girls killed for honor belong to the age group of 11-20 years, while in 28.948 per cent cases the deceased girls belong to the age group of 21-30 years. In 7.894 per cent cases, the age of the deceased was not mentioned.

**Table 2** Age of Deceased Girls

Age Group (in years)	%
11-20	63.157
21-30	28.948
Not mentioned	7.894

Majority of the girls belonged to the age group of 11-20. They were not killed mainly because they want to marry boys of their choice against the wish of their family but because their relationship with the boys comes to light and the community disapprove of it.

The girls of 11-20 years of age are generally considered psychologically and physically mature as they are in the process of parting their childhood. But that is not the case in Uttar Pradesh. In Uttar Pradesh, they are not pardoned by their own family members. During the age of 11-20 years, the girls are physically more involved to the males as they are going through natural psychological changes. However, in Uttar Pradesh, the girls between the ages of 11-20 years are not only considered immature but also subordinate, inferior and irrelevant members of the family who can be killed for continuing unacceptable relationships with the males. This is one of the reasons why practices of child marriage is still practiced by numerous rural masses and advocated and patronized by the social, political and economic elites of the region in Uttar Pradesh. The majority of the girls belonging to the age group of 21-30 years are murdered by their family members as they get married, get eloped or radically insist on

### Age Variables of Boys killed for Honor

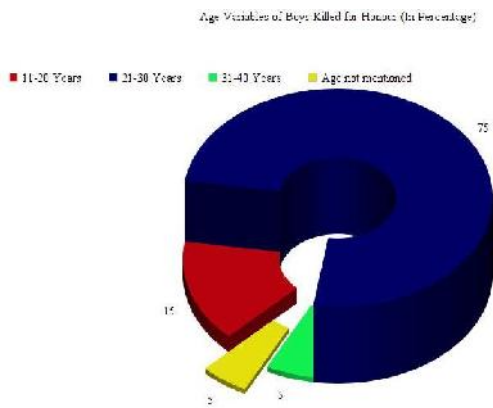
In Uttar Pradesh, the boys killed in the name of have been categorized into three age groups, i.e., 11-20 years, 21-30 years and 31-40 years. It has been observed while examining 50 sample cases that 17 years is the minimum age and 34 years is the maximum age of boys/males killed by the girls/females families in the incidents of honor killings. In the observed 50 cases of honor killing in Uttar Pradesh, 15 per cent belong to the age group of 11-20; worryingly, 75 per cent belong to the age group of 21-30, while the remaining 5 per cent belong to the age group of 31-40 years. 5 per cent belong to the category where the ages of the boys/men were not mentioned.

**Table 3** Age Variables of Boys Killed for Honor

Age Group (in years)	%
11-20	15
21-30	75
31-40	5
Not mentioned	5

In Uttar Pradesh, the intolerance towards the male and female relationship exists to the extent of brutality. The study of the sample cases reveal that one in every three cases in which the boy is murdered, the teenage boy belonged to the group of 21-30 years. These boys are generally murdered by the family members of the girls.

The deceased boys belonging to this age group are those who established relationships with the girls belonging to the age group of 11-20 years. It corroborates that in Uttar Pradesh, the intimate relationships developed by the boys with the girls, classmates in schools, their companions in their village or neighborhood are not taken as casual conduct during this age group but these acts by the immature boys are considered as non-compensable dishonor to the girls' families. The males belonging to the most vulnerable and the least vulnerable age group of 31-40 years majorly comprise of those who get the girls eloped, get married to the girls rebelling against the girls' families or insist on marrying the girls at any cost ignoring hostility and warnings from the girls' families.



**Affiliation of the Killers**

The fact that honor killings are executed by the girls’ family members is an obvious reality. But the relevant query is to know the exact affiliation of the killers with the deceased girls.

**Table 4** Affiliation of the Killers with the Girl/Boy

Relationship	%
Involvement of Fathers	26.66
Involvement of Brothers	16.66
Involvement of Uncles	5
Involvement of the lovers family	28.33
Other family members	23.34

The study of the sample cases reveals that in 26.66 per cent cases father of the girl is personally involved in murdering his daughter or probably even her paramour or husband. In 16.66 per cent cases the brothers of the deceased girls are directly involved in honor killings. In 5 per cent cases, the paternal or maternal uncles are also involved in the coldblooded murders. The study of the sample cases also discloses that whole family as well as relatives and even family friends are unanimously and passionately involved in killing the targeted girls or the couples. The main culprits of honor killing in Uttar Pradesh are the male members of the family including the brothers and fathers. The elopement or unsolicited marriage of the girl within the inferior caste or different religion is considered as a massive social embarrassment by the paternal and maternal uncles and hence they participate in the execution of honor killings. Even though only in minimal cases, the mothers are personally involved in killing their daughters. It has been observed that in the planned and organized incidents of honor killings, there is assistance of relatives and family friends but the cases in which the girl and the boy are killed immediately on the spot after finding out about their relationship or marriage, the killings are practiced probably by the father and/or the brothers of the girl, in a few cases (3 per cent) with the assistance of mothers also. In 28.33 per cent cases, the boy was killed by the girl’s family.

**Causes of Honor Killings**

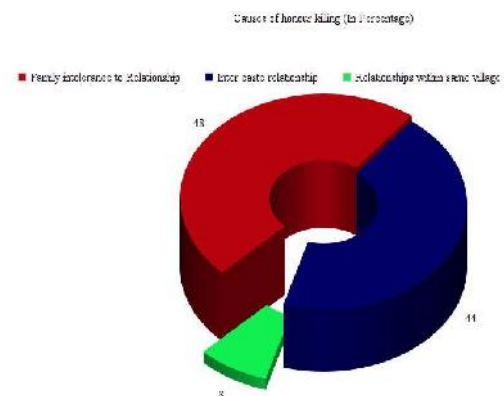
The study divides the cases into three main causes of honor killings in Uttar Pradesh. In 48 per cent cases, the family intolerance of the relationship prevails as the dominant cause, while inter caste relationship results into the honor killings in 44 per cent cases. In other 8 of per cent cases the relationship

of the girl with the boy of same village becomes the reason for honor killings.

**Table 5** Causes of Honor Killings

Alleged Cause	%
Family intolerance to Relationship	48
Inter caste relationship	44
Relationships within same village	8

In Uttar Pradesh, inter-caste marital relationships are firmly forbidden, especially among its rural masses, just like in other parts of India. Stratification of the society on the basis of gotras and caste is very common and rigid in the State of Uttar Pradesh. The caste and gotra based Khaps (Caste councils) have been patronizing the endogamy relationships among castes and gotras since centuries. In these scenarios, when the girls and boys establish inter-caste relationships and insist to marry each other, their wishes are rejected, and when the couples rebel against these bigot social conventions, they are brutally murdered. In the same manner, intimate relationships and matrimonial relationships among same gotras are strictly restricted. Thus, when the girls and boys develop relationships among same gotra and remain adamant to establish matrimonial relationships, their persistence results into the honor killings. Brutal intolerance towards male-female relationships can be witnessed as the extent of socio-cultural prohibitions towards male-female relationships. This is a common and typical Indian mind-set to disregard, oppose and refuse the relationships among girls and boys. But so-called supreme castes in Uttar Pradesh consider it as a huge dishonor to the family and the clan. The possible threat of reprove by the community excites the barbaric and culturally crude people to murder the girl, the boy or both. Again, in almost all parts of India, the inter-religious marriages are not accepted. But in Uttar Pradesh, the act of inter-religious relationships among girls and boys and their desires to get married may also result into the killings of girls. And if the couple performs inter-religious or intersect marriage secretly in resistance to the girl’s family, it may possibly result into their killings.



**Dimensions of Relationship between the Girl and the Boy**

The previous finding exposing the causes of honor killings in the region had disclosed inter-caste or inter-religious relationships, relationships within same gotra or same village and intolerance to intimate relationships as three main causes of honor killings in the region. Furthermore, it is also inevitable from the viewpoint of a comprehensive study, to examine the extent and various dimensions of relationships between girls

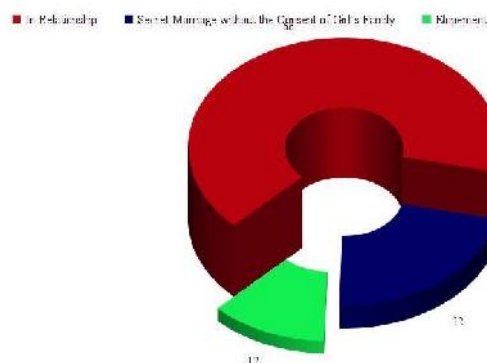
and boys that irritates and hostiles the family members of the girls to the extent that they decide to execute the vicious crime of honor killings. In 12 per cent cases, honor killings are committed by the girls' families after the elopement of their girl and in other 22 per cent cases, the girl or the couple has been murdered after they get married to each other without the consent of the girls' families. In 66 per cent cases, the couple or mostly the girl is murdered when the girl's family finds out about the relationship between the boy and the girl.

**Table 6** Dimensions of Relationship

Nature and Extent	%
In Relationship	66
Secret Marriage without the Consent of Girl's Family	22
Elopement	12

The girl certainly elopes or gets secretly married to the boy of her own wish when her family member do not permit the marriage due to the inferior caste, different religion of the boy, or the girl and the boy belonging to the same gotra or the same village. The elopement of the girl and afterwards in several cases her getting married and living with the boy belonging to the inferior caste, different religion or belonging to same gotra or same village has been considered as matter of huge embarrassment in the community. And since centuries, the community has established the practice of killing the girl or the couple to reimburse the dishonor to the family. The killings executed after the elopement or unsolicited marriages of the couples are the planned and organized crimes.

Dimension of the Relationship (In Percentage)



## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the practice of honor killing is prevalent largely in the state of Uttar Pradesh and the women are more largely subjected to such violence, which is preceded by killing of only men. The minimum age for girls subjected to honor killings is 14, whereas the maximum age found through 50 cases in Uttar Pradesh was 29. Most girls killed for honor were between the ages of 11-20 years. As for the age variables for boys killed, the minimum age was found to be 17 years and the maximum was found to be 34, and most boys killed for honor were between the ages of 21 to 30, making a majority of 75%. When it came to the involvement of family in these killings, the involvement of the lover's family made a majority of 28.33% preceded by the involvement of fathers at 26.66%. Furthermore, the alleged cause of honor killings was highest due to the family's disapproval towards the relationship,

making a total of 48% of total cases. The nature and extent to which the boy and girl were related was limited to being in a relationship in most cases, making up 66% of the total cases reported and analyzed. The study confirms that such acts of violence in the name of violence is due to the more patriarchal society which has predefined norms and cultures wherein the family believes that its honor lies in the way the youth of their family, in particular the women, behave. These norms have been existent in many areas of Uttar Pradesh for many decades. If they defy these norms, it is the belief in such societies that the only way to regain the lost honor is to conduct honor violence. It has been observed that approximately 25% of the honor killings in India take place in the state of Uttar Pradesh.

The only way to tackle the problem of honor related violence is to first identify the exact meaning of honor violence and killing and what makes such killings unique from other homicides, serial killings and crimes of passion. The motivation for honor related violence is different, determined by what culture or religion dictates. The problem can be addressed not only by proper law enforcement, but also by changing the mindset of the societies to become more open minded and accept the matrimonial choices that the youth of the family make, especially towards inter-caste and inter-religious marriages. Having noted that, it is also important to understand that it is a challenging task to change the common mindset of regions and communities whose people have been having such beliefs for centuries now.

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