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Figures Show a Rise in Homicides Against Women in Idlib and Hama

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*Six women, including mothers, were killed for different motives
during September and October 2019*

Introduction:

At least, six killings of women have taken place in different areas of Hama and Idlib provinces, in September and October 2019. The crimes were motivated by different reasons; honor defense, robbery or were responses of refused marriage proposals.

Those incidents were shocking for the locals, especially the two crimes whose perpetrators suicided after the commitment.

The Al-Ziyarah Subdistrict in western rural Hama, controlled by the armed opposition,¹ witnessed a gruesome murder on September 17, 2019, which victim was Rawa A., 33, who is married with two children. Rawa was killed by several bullets from the gun of a man called A.k. after her refusal to marry him; and the latter committed suicide directly by shooting his head. Rawa's children; Omar, 4, and Ghaith, 6, has no one to take care of them, knowing that their father has also passed in a shooting a few years ago.

A similar incident occurred in the regime-held city of Salhab on September 26, 2019, when a guy in his 40s killed the 24-year-old woman Sandy Ali al-Juneid while on her way to the kindergarten, where she works at as a teacher, for her refusal to marry him. The murderer fired her head with several bullets and then killed himself.

Further, the two sisters Hind and Nemat Hamad were killed in the government-held city of Hama on October 26, 2019. The victims were found slaughtered in their apartment and their jewelry were stolen with an amount of money.

Further, STJ field researcher verified the occurrence of two "honor killings"; the first took place on October 12, 2019 in western rural Hama-controlled by the opposition- against Mona A., 27, who is married with four children. The reason for the killing was a denunciation by a villager who saw her talking with her former lover and told her husband, who in turn told her family which killed her under the pretext of "defending its honor".

The second "honor killing" occurred in the city of Harem in rural Idlib-controlled by HTS- on October 1, 2019. Its victim was Mariam, 26, who was shot dead by her father and brothers under the pretext of defending the family's honor after she refused to marry her cousin and tried to run away with another guy.

STJ has earlier verified the occurrence of ten "honor Killings" in several regions of Syria including the provinces of al-Hasakah-under the Autonomous Administration's control- and As Suwayda- controlled by the regime- during the first half of 2019.²

STJ also verified the occurrence of three "honor killings"; one of which occurred in Turkey against a girl child while the two others perpetrated in northern rural Aleppo- under the control of the Turkish-backed National Army- in the first half of 2019.³

¹ Mainly HTS and Turkistan Islamic Party.

² "Ten 'Honor Killings' in al-Hasakah and As Suwayda Since Early 2019", STJ, August, 12, 2019 (last visit: November 21, 2019). <https://stj-sy.org/en/ten-honor-killings-in-al-hasakah-and-as-suwayda-since-early-2019/>.

I. He killed her and himself after she refused to marry him:

The ongoing Syrian conflict produced new challenges in the coexistence of the mixed societies- clan and civilian-. Several incidents of violence and abuse have occurred in the Sahel Al-Ghab/ The Ghab Plain area in western rural Hama, particularly in the Al-Ziyarah Subdistrict that is outside the control of the government and governed by the tribal laws, as there are in Al-Ziyarah the tribal of (Bokhamees, Jeess, Al-Naim, Tei and others).

On September 17, 2019 Al-Ziyarah Subdistrict witnessed a murder of a married woman who has children. The kill was committed by a man from the town who suicided immediately after the commitment. That was a great shock for the residents of that town.

The victim's brother R.A. said to STJ that the news of this crime hit his family hard:

"A.K., 53, was the husband of my sister, who passed away about a year ago. A.K. proposed to my second sister, 33, whose husband died four years ago and has two children Ghaith, 6, and Omar, 4.", he said.

The victim's brother added that his family accepted A.K.'s proposal to his sister Rawa, but the latter strictly refused the marriage, especially that A.K. has Osteogenesis Imperfecta (OI) and can't manage to walk without a stick. Months passed within Rawa continued to refuse his repeated proposals, until one day in middle September; A.K. asked to meet Rawa in her family's house to discuss the marriage matter and to know her reason for rejection:

"On the noon of September 17, 2109, I was sitting with my parents in the house yard, while Rawa and A.K. were sitting alone in a room opposite us-at the latter's request- and suddenly, we heard gunshots from there. We rushed to that room and saw they both covered with blood with a gun in A.K.'s hand. It was obvious that the latter shot my sister dead and killed himself by firing his head. It was catastrophic, my sister was killed for no reason more than refusing to marry her former brother-in-law."

Rawa was transferred with her killer to the nearest medical post, where the doctors confirmed the cause of their death according to the forensic report. Members of HTS security force came then and handed over the bodies to the civil defense which in turn delivered them to their families.

However, one of the Al-Ziyarah Subdistrict dignitaries told STJ that A.K. was living in poverty and in a bad health condition, and said that A.K. must have feelings towards Rawa and that's why he insisted to propose to her despite her continued refusals.

³ "Syria: Girl, Two Women Murdered in Alleged 'Honor Killing'", STJ, July 5, 2019 (last visit: November 21, 2019). <https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-girl-two-women-murdered-in-alleged-honor-killing/>.

The same witness added that the killer was too poor to buy a gun or even to support himself; that begs the question, how did A.K obtain the gun. And he goes on to say that such a crime is considered a "honor crime" by the tribal custom, as many tribes are spread over the region, pointing to the possibility of holding accountable the family of A.K for the death of Rawa, in order to obtain financial compensation for her family.

The impact of this crime was heavy on the people of this area, which governed by rigid clan customs. The greatest impact, however, was felt by Rawa's children, according to Rawa brother, who added that his sister's children are feeling lonely after her death and went on to say:

"In 2011 Rawa got married to a member of some military group. However, in 2015 the latter shot dead by unidentified gunmen on the Jabal al-Zawiya-al-Ghab highway. Since her husband's death, my sister suffered much to provide for her children, without any support from her husband's family, knowing that she was living in our family's house. Today, her two children live in dramatic circumstances due to the absence of their parents; they are living with us outside our hometown, as we left it after the crime."

Rawa's children aren't yet aware enough to understand life properly. They have no one to take good care of them after they lost their parents; they move between the houses of Rawa's four brothers every two days, the thing which will have disastrous consequences for their upbringing and education.

II. Sandy's killing and the suicide of her killer:

Not far from the Al-Ziyarah Subdistrict, a similar incident took place in the government-held town of Salhab, western Hama, on September 26, 2019; a man in his 40s, killed Sandy Ali Junaid, 24, by shooting her head several times, and immediately killed himself after that. Pro-government media reported the incident saying that a young man, who was most likely a member of the National Defense Militia, killed Sandy while on her way to a kindergarten, in the town of Salhab, in the Sahel al-Ghab/ Al-Ghab Plain area, where she worked as a teacher.⁴

According to local sources, Sandy had graduated from the College of Education, and then worked as an educator, for more than 3 years in a kindergarten. And the young man who killed her, had proposed to her several times, but the victim refused to marry him, which made him harass her more than once.

⁴ For more info please check: <https://www.facebook.com/msyaf.news/posts/2984314974911908>.

According to statements made by the victim's maternal aunt to pro-government Facebook news pages, Sandy had previously been harassed by this young man, as he tried to run over her with his motorcycle twice in the town's market, and insulted her in front of her colleagues in the kindergarten- her workplace. The aunt added that Sandy's students have the most to lose by her death as they used to consider her their second mother.

In turn, a colleague of Sandy commented on a page that reported the victim's death, saying that 11 children refused to attend their class at Al-Izz kindergarten after the death of Sandy due to their attachment to her, and stressed that the children were likely have a mental complex due to the loss of Sandy, who was their teacher and nanny. This will have a negative impact on their current educational attainment and their perception of learning due to the loss of the girl who was more like a mother and a nanny at the same time.



The victim Sandy Ali Junaid. Credit: Social media.

III. Causes and implications of homicides against women:

Recent killings of women and subsequent suicides, in both regime- and opposition-controlled areas in Hama province, shocked the local population, and arose fears among them from such incidents to become a phenomenon.

Ola M., a psychologist from Hama, said to STJ that the ongoing war in Syria led to drastic changes in the principles and the way of the thinking of many Syrians, who got used to death and blood scenes and as a result dropped every humanitarian or social deterrent, which caused an increase in the number of murders. She added:

"The recent killings and suicides, which were motivated by marriage refusals, are a result of a major change in the structure of the society caused by the ongoing war. Suicides linked to love relations used to be committed by one of the parties or both of them when there is an impediment preventing their marriage. However, now if someone refused a marriage proposal, that would cause his/her death, which puts us in front of a serious development in the criminal thinking of some people. "

In the same vein she added:

"Children are the biggest losers of such incidents, especially those who have family ties with the persons killed or committed suicide and aware of what is going around them. Apart from the family disintegration and social alienation that a child may suffer after the loss of one of his parents, the crime scene and its reasons would always be stuck in the child's head, and that would cause him a serious psychological crisis which he may suffer all his life. It's much harder when the murdered is the mother, as according to the traditions and customs of society, the child will ask about the reason for his mother's death when he becomes an adult, and link it to the "family's honor" on the basis of the traditions and social legacies."

On the other hand, the lawyer Ali Hamidi saw that the recent killings and suicides, which have prevailed in society in Hama province, were caused by the unregulated proliferation of arms and weapons. In the areas under the control of the armed opposition, arms' shops are widely spread, like any other shops. These unauthorized stores sell deadly and sophisticated weapons at prices not that high, especially since the prices of weapons in the rebel-held areas have witnessed a significant decrease in recent times. He continued:

"As for the areas under the Syrian government's control, weapons are in the possession of militia leaders-affiliated with the regime- and they distribute light and medium weapons to agents loyal to them, regardless of their age or their aggressive inclinations. It suffices to be loyal to a well-known militia commander in the area to obtain a weapon and take it up in public like members of the security

forces and the police. The uncontrolled proliferation of weapons may lead to massacres, especially since some of those carrying weapons are no more than 18 years of old."

IV. Separate killings and "honor killings" in Hama and Idlib:

After Sandy and Roy were killed, another killing incident rocked the city of Hama, which is controlled by the Syrian government forces, but this time the motive was different. On the morning of October 27, 2019, the two sisters Hind and Neamat Hamad, were found slaughtered in their apartment after an attempt to steal them, but the Criminal Security Branch managed to arrest the perpetrator, and said that the killer had a relationship with the two victims, as he came to their home on the pretext of buying an electrical device, and brought with him juice bottles mixed with a sleeping pill and gave them to the ladies. After making sure they slept, he called his partner and asked him to come to carry out the crime. They stabbed the ladies several times, then stole their jewelry and an amount of more than three million Syrian pounds.

STJ field researcher also verified the occurrence of two "honor killings" in Hama and Idlib suburbs; on October 12, 2019, one of them occurred in the village of Horta in the western rural Hama, its victim was Mona A., 30, married with four children. STJ learned from one of her relatives that she was killed after a villager saw her talking to her former lover while herding sheep, and told her husband immediately, who in turn told her family that their daughter had betrayed him. Her father and brothers couldn't control themselves, so they went and slaughtered her, making her children orphans. HTS detained the victim's brother, but released him shortly after.

On October 1, 2019, another crime took place under the pretext of honor, in the city of Harem in rural Idlib, against the young woman Maryam A., 24, whose family forced her to marry her cousin against her will. Local sources told STJ that Maryam was in love with a guy residing in Turkey, and they planned to run away, and he came to Syria to take her. At about 11:00 PM that day Maryam got out from home to flee with that guy, but one of her relatives saw her, and told her family, who in turn rushed to bring their daughter and locked her in the house. She tried to escape again, but her father caught her and shot her in the middle of the city of Harem, and she died immediately. As a reaction, HTS detained the father from his house and took him to the police station in Harem but he may be released shortly, according to information obtained by STJ field researcher.



History

Syrians for Truth and Justice was conceived during the participation of its co-founder in the Middle-East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program, who was driven by a will to contribute to Syria's future. Starting as a humble project to tell the stories of Syrians experiencing enforced disappearances and torture, it grew into an established organisation committed to unveiling human rights violations of all sorts.

Convinced that the diversity that has historically defined Syria is a wealth, our team of researchers and volunteers works with dedication at uncovering human rights violations committed in Syria, in order to promote inclusiveness and ensure that all Syrians are represented, and their rights fulfilled.

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