

May 2021



Under the Guise of Honor: Women Continue to Fall Victims to Violence Across Syria

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Executive Summary

Even as populations across Syria continue to suffer large-scale violations at the hands of all authorities in charge, women still struggle to survive a specific type of violence: crimes committed in the name of family honor. Monitoring gender-based violations throughout the country, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) documented at least 24 incidents of domestic violence against women which resulted in the deaths of 22. STJ recorded that 16 of these victims were killed by a spouse or other male family members on the pretext of bringing shame on the family. The remaining six were killed for unidentified reasons, but their murders were likely shame-motivated as well.

This report covers the period between January 2020 and February 2021, documenting only the cases that STJ could access and gather evidence for. However, these cases remain a fraction of the likely greater number of crimes and violations committed against women in Syria.

In Idlib province— almost entirely controlled by the military faction Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)—STJ documented five honor killings, committed in the villages of Salqin, Atmeh, and Killi, among others.

In the northern countryside of Aleppo— controlled by the Turkey-backed Syrian National Army (SNA)— STJ documented at least seven honor killings, mostly committed in the areas of Azaz, Afrin, Jarabulus, and al-Bab.

In Daraa province—dominated by the Syrian government forces— STJ's field researcher documented at least two honor killings. He recorded a third similar crime in the nearby province of As-Suwayda.

The stories and information obtained by STJ indicate that security chaos, absence of the rule of law and the spread of weapons, have contributed to the increase in honor killings in various areas throughout Syria, enabled by deeply rooted principles of the honor culture.

In this report, STJ recounts the stories of women and girls murdered by spouses, brothers, or other male family members. To put an end to alleged family “shame”, women in the documented cases were shot, stabbed, and even burned alive.

Additionally, STJ covers the legal response of de facto authorities to honor killings in this report. For instance, in Idlib, the HTS-run courts sentenced perpetrators to a maximum of 10 months in prison. In Aleppo's countryside, the SNA-run courts addressed similar crimes only theoretically, supposedly putting into effect laws mirroring those of the 1949 Syrian Penal Code.

Female and male field researchers with STJ overcame serious challenges as they collected testimonies and documented the reported murders because honor killings remain a highly sensitive issue within Syrian society. Information obtained by a female researcher confirms that the actual number of shame-triggered crimes is actually greater than the figures reported here or known by the community, particularly since numerous murders are documented in

police reports under other names, including involuntary manslaughter and other criminal offences to which family members, fearing social stigma, usually claim responsibility for.

The honor killings reported herein are part of the vicious circle trapping women across Syria. In 2019, STJ documented at least 10 honor-motivated murders in al-Hasakah province, controlled by the Autonomous Administration, and As-Suwayda province, controlled by the Syrian government forces. STJ recorded an additional 10 similar killings over the first half of 2019, one occurring in Turkey, killing a teenage girl, and two murders in the SNA-held northern countryside of Aleppo.

Methodology

This report draws on a total of 21 interviews, mostly from sources close to the victims' families, in addition to eyewitnesses from the province of Idlib, the northern countryside of Aleppo, and the province of Daraa, south of Syria.

Pertaining to the factors that contributed to the rise in the number of honor killings in the covered regions, STJ interviewed an Idlib-based social researcher and a Daraa-based women's rights defender.

Furthermore, STJ reached out to informed local sources, who relayed the responses of the de facto authority's legal systems to these crimes in Idlib and rural Aleppo. Additionally, STJ obtained a commentary from a Daraa-based legal researcher regarding the crimes committed in the southern province.

STJ's field researchers conducted these 21 interviews with sources either online or in person between January 2020 and late February 2021, consulted several open sources that addressed the crimes, and conducted thorough information crosschecks. Due to the report's highly sensitive subject matter in the communities where reported incidents occurred, pseudonyms will be used throughout the report.

1. Honor Killings in Idlib and Aleppo's Countryside

In Idlib province, STJ's field researcher documented at least five honor killings. In the countryside of Aleppo, the field researcher recorded at least seven honor killings. These crimes occurred in the areas of Azaz, Jarabulus, Bulbul, and Afrin, as well as in the region where camps have been established for the internally displaced.

A. "He shot his little girl, allegedly for taking off her hijab."

On 24 February 2021, in the Abu Dafneh Camp, set up in Killi town in Idlib's countryside, Muhammad K.—displaced from Homs' countryside with his family—shot and killed his daughter Rahaf K., 16, for allegedly taking her hijab off on the street and bringing dishonor to his name. A relative of the family recounted the details of the murder to STJ:

"I never thought that a father would actually kill his own daughter, especially if she has mental impairment and cannot truly understand what is going on around her. The victim

used to live with her parents and brother in the Abu Dafneh Camp. Their financial situation was extremely poor. At 6:00 p.m. sharp, on the day of the murder, the father quarreled with his daughter, allegedly because she was taking her hijab off in the street. He first beat her, and when she ran away from him, he followed her and shot her. One bullet hit her head and killed her on the spot. Witnessing this tragedy, the victim's mother fainted. The father managed to escape and remains at large. The HTS security services still have not captured him."

B. "He stabbed his daughter, a widow and a mother of six."

On 15 November 2020, in Ein Elsoda village, in Idlib's countryside, a father stabbed and killed his daughter Suwad B., 25, for bringing dishonor upon the family name because she became pregnant after an affair. A relative of the family told STJ:

"Suwad lost her husband to airstrikes on the town three years ago. She and her six children have been living with her parents ever since. Helped by her parents, she made a living for herself and her children. Her paternal cousin fell in love with her and used to secretly sneak into her house. She got pregnant and her parents did not notice it at first. Eventually, her pregnancy became visible, and she wanted to keep the baby. Her father finally noticed and asked her to visit a female gynecologist. When the pregnancy was confirmed, the father could not take it and stabbed Suwad several times. HTS security personnel arrested him, and Suwad's dead body was taken to the coroner. The cousin fled town, fearing arrest and death at the hands of the victim's family. The father was later sentenced to three months in prison."

C. "He set fire to his wife, who was eight months pregnant."

In January 2021, in the town of Atmeh on the border with Turkey, Malik H., 35— displaced from Daraa—set fire to his wife Hiba M., 20. The young wife was pregnant and already a mother of three children, the oldest of whom was barely four years old. The husband also deliberately set the house ablaze, most likely to hide evidence of his wife's murder. Commenting on the incident, an informed local source told STJ:

"Malik, his wife, and three toddlers lived in Atmeh town on the border strip [with Turkey]. On the day of the murder, a fire broke out in their house and Civil Defense teams were called to the site. The teams put out the fire, but it consumed the house almost completely seriously burned the husband. He was transported to the Atmeh Hospital. When the fire was finally extinguished, the Civil Defense teams discovered the body of the wife. The wife's body was charred, her legs and arms both tied. She was eight months pregnant. Interrogated about the incident, the husband confessed to setting fire to his wife's body for honor-related reasons and to committing arson, alleging he was under the influence of drugs."

D. “He fired a load of bullets at his sister’s body.”

In January 2020, a young man, Nouredine Sh., shot and killed his sister Rahaf Sh., 26. He emptied a load of bullets into his sister’s body, killing her on spot, allegedly for having “an affair.” A source close to the family said that the brother did not attempt to hide after he committed the disturbing murder. Instead, he stayed in his tent until the camp’s police—operating under the Ministry of Interior of the Syrian Salvation Government (SSG)—arrested him. The source added that after a month and a half the court finally sentenced the brother to only nine months in prison. Nouredine served the term in the Sarmada Town Prison, operated by the HTS security services. The perpetrator was released in October 2020 and travelled to Turkey, escaping the gaze of his grieving mother and criticism from his community.

In another shooting incident, on 27 August 2020, Ahmed R., 60 years old from Salqin city, killed his daughter Duaa R., 24, and his son-in-law Said R. The father summoned the two victims to his farm on the outskirts of Salqin city and shot them with his AK-47. A source close to the family said that the father and the victims had a row about the people visiting their home, whom the neighborhood residents considered of ill repute. The source added that the father later confessed to the honor killing and was subsequently sentenced to several months in prison.

E. “He killed his mother and sister at his father’s request.”

On 3 July 2020, in Shamarin camp, located about 8 km north of Azaz city near the border with Turkey, young man Ahmad A., from Hayyan town in the northern countryside of Aleppo, killed his mother, 50, and his sister, 19, at the direct request of his father. He shot and killed the two victims to “wash away the shame” they brought upon the father’s name. The source of shame was a swelling in the sister’s abdomen. Narrating the details of the incident, a source close to the family told STJ:

“Ahmad fired five bullets at his mother and sister, three of which hit his sister and two his mother. The camp’s police station received a report of the murder and started searching for him after he fled towards the city of Azaz. The Criminal Security Department recorded the incident, and the report was then referred to the Public Prosecutor’s Office that requested an autopsy of the two bodies by a coroner.”

The source added that the coroner’s report demonstrated that the swelling of the sister’s belly was due to ovarian cysts. The report was shocking to the family, particularly the father. Consequently, the brother surrendered himself to the police, confessed to the murder, and was sentenced to several years in prison.

F. “She was misdiagnosed; he entered her room and shot her dead.”

On 16 May 2020, the young man, Abdunnasser M.—displaced from Idlib province to Ras al-Ahmar town in Afrin countryside—killed his sister Malak, 20, for allegedly bringing dishonor on the family. A source close to the family said that the victim’s mother noticed a swelling in

her daughter's belly and took her to a midwife, who told her that her unmarried daughter was "pregnant." The source added:

"The mother was horrified by the news and the girl fell into a fit of sobs. The mother broke the news to her husband and son. The brother rushed to his weapon, stormed into his sister's room, shot, and killed her. He then fled home. The police took the young woman's body to the coroner for an autopsy. The coronary report confirmed that the victim's belly swelling was caused by ovarian cysts. The police arrested the brother and subsequently released him. The family asked the police station to close the case."

G. "After strangling and burying her, he reported her missing."

On 13 October 2020, in Sharran sub-district, the Military Police discovered the body of Rahaf B., a mother of four displaced from rural Idlib to Afrin. A source close to the victim said that Muhammad R., the husband, strangled his wife to death, buried her, and then reported her missing. Citing the report by the Evidence and Forensic Medicine Department, the source said that the wife's body was buried four months before it was discovered. The source added that the Sharran Military Police managed to capture the murderer, who confessed to the honor killing and was subsequently transferred to the Afrin Military Police Department to be brought before the court.

H. "They tricked, handcuffed, and finally shot her."

On the morning of 8 June 2020, in Azaz city, residents found the body of a woman, 27, who was killed and dumped on the road between al-Fayruziyah town and Azaz city. The coronary report demonstrated that the victim was shot in the head with a 9 mm gun and died on the spot.

A source informed of the case said that the body of the victim, Bayan M.—displaced from the al-Kalasah neighborhood in Aleppo city and a resident in Bab al-Salameh camp—was found among olive trees. She was a divorcee and a mother of three. The source added that the bullet pierced her skull at a short range, hit the victim's brain, and immediately killed her. Commenting on the investigation into the murder, the source added that the bullet, scanned for fingerprints, confirmed that the victim's uncle, Khaled H. and his wife were both involved in the crime. They later confessed to the honor killing, alleging that the victim was practicing "prostitution." The source said that the wife tricked the victim and managed to bring her to their home, where they handcuffed her and took her to the place where her body was located. Both husband and wife were arrested and transferred to the al-Ra'i City Central Prison to carry out two-year sentences

On 4 July 2020, in the al-Nour Camp, set up in the Shamarin area, a young man, Amer M., shot and killed his wife Fatima M., 25— a mother of two— and a man called Ahmad A. using an AK-47 and escaped. An eyewitness told STJ that the husband was arrested three days later on the Azaz-Souran road and brought before a judge. The witness added that the murderer confessed to the honor killing, accusing his wife of having an affair with the other victim. STJ's

field researcher reached out to several of the victim's relatives, but none agreed to narrate additional details on the murder.

On 11 August 2020, STJ's field researcher monitored another honor killing. The police discovered the bodies of Khawla Kh., 23, and her cousin, Bakr S., 14, in the Dayer Sawwan town, the countryside of Aleppo. The victim's husband, Barazi S., killed the pair, accusing his wife of having an affair.

Jarablus city, in Aleppo's eastern countryside, also had its share of honor killings. On 3 January 2020, the security services found the body of a woman in her twenties. The woman was drowned in a stream of the Euphrates River which passes through the city. Local sources confirmed that security forces arrested the victim's brother and transferred him to court without mentioning other details about the murder. Sources believe the murder was likely honor motivated.

I. Additional Female Killings in Idlib and Aleppo's Countryside— One Woman Stabbed 12 Times

In Idlib province, STJ documented the murders of at least two women. In the countryside of Aleppo province, STJ recorded another four crimes against female victims, one murder-robbery and three others committed for unknown reasons.

On 17 July 2020, in Sarmada city, in Idlib's countryside, four teenagers under the age of 19 killed Halima B., 63 years old from Sarmada, intending to steal her jewelry and the money she kept at home. The teenagers stabbed the victim twelve times in the back, stomach, chest, and neck, before fleeing. A local source informed of the murder's details said that neighbors went to check on the victim the next morning and found her alive but heavily bleeding. The victim was transported to the hospital and died there. The source added that the perpetrators were all arrested and subsequently brought before court.

On 16 April 2020, in al-Bara town, in the southern countryside of Idlib, local sources said that Subhiya A., 63, went missing near a joint checkpoint of the HTS and the Turkistan Islamic Party. Her relatives searched extensively for her but failed to find any clues as to her whereabouts. It was not until 10 days later, on 26 April, that residents found her dead body in one of the farms surrounding the town. No further details were obtained regarding the incident, including the motive behind her murder.

On 21 November 2020, in the countryside of Jindires city, the northern countryside of Aleppo, local sources reported that a group of civilians found the body of a woman abandoned on a farm among olive trees. The woman was shot and killed with an AK-47 on the road between the villages of Kojaman and Qurbê in the countryside of Jindires city. The victim was identified as Aisha M., 35 years old and displaced from Rastan city, in Homs' northern countryside. Her family reported her missing to the city police after losing contact with her for nearly three days. The sources added that security forces have not identified or arrested the perpetrators.

On 29 April 2020, in Qatmeh town, Sharran district in the countryside of Afrin, Civil Defense teams found the dead body of a woman in her thirties, abandoned on the roadside between Qatmeh and Sharran city center. The teams failed to verify the woman's identity or her murderers.

On 19 June 2020, in Telar al-Gharbiyah town, Akhtarin region, Criminal Security teams found the body of a dead woman, 60. The victim had a wire tied around her neck, suggesting she was strangled. The teams said that the murder was most likely motivated by theft, especially since money and gold were stolen from the victim after she was killed. The teams, however, were unable to capture the perpetrators.

On 12 August 2020, in al-Bab city, the northeastern countryside of Aleppo, the Civil Defense teams found the body of a woman in her twenties. The body was dumped in a sealed barrel on the road between al-Bab city and Qadiran village. The teams delivered the body to the al-Bab National Hospital. No additional details were available on the incident.



Image 1- The Civil Defense teams revealing the body of a dead woman dumped in a sealed barrel in al-Bab city.
Credit: the al-Bab Civil Defense.



Image 2- The Civil Defense teams revealing the body of a dead woman dumped in a sealed barrel in al-Bab city.
Credit: the al-Bab Civil Defense.

2. Security Chaos is a Key Factor Contributing to the Rise in Honor Killings

Honor killings are not new to Syrian society, enabled throughout history by deeply rooted norms and traditional codes. However, the number of these crimes have significantly increased as the armed conflict in Syria escalated, particularly in the areas outside the control of the Syrian government in governorates such as Idlib, mostly controlled by the HTS, and the countryside of Aleppo, controlled by the Turkey-backed SNA. Commenting on the steep rise in honor killings in Idlib, researcher Zumurouda D. said that crimes reached unprecedented levels in 2018.

While dozens of honor killings were committed, many are recorded under different names in police reports, like involuntary manslaughter or other criminal offences, which family members prefer to claim responsibility, fearing social stigma. For example, a family might commit an honor killing, but in order to avoid being shunned by the community, the family might blame the murder on a juvenile member and claim a quarrel between siblings spiraled out of control and resulted in murder. However, other families are more open about honor killings, which they consider praiseworthy. These families pride themselves on murders which restore lost honor and wash away shame, especially in communities that regard femicide as a manifestation of masculinity and an act of bravery for which the perpetrator should be rewarded.

Zumurouda D. attributes the increase in honor killings, particularly in the past four years, to a number of factors, including the absence of rule of law and state control, rampant insecurity, the spread of weapons, and the fact that many perpetrators have escaped justice and accountability. These combined factors, enabled by the war and its consequences, have contributed to the acute increase in the number of honor killings.

Furthermore, Zumurouda D. added that these crimes are also becoming widespread due to the fanatic mindsets that extremist realities and ideologies have lately imposed on Syrian communities. In Idlib province, for example, a large number of children are taught at centers and schools run by hard-liner groups, raising children to believe that actions taken by their mothers' and sisters' which run counter to religious and dogmatic codes should be punished. The punishment inflicted on these women, on many occasions, might result in an honor killing.

Additionally, Zumurouda D. noted that heterogeneous communities are being brought together, particularly in the camps. In a rush to prepare camps for the thousands of internally displaced, the camp's constructors and designers were heedless of the deep differences between the displaced peoples, many with different cultures and traditions, and the consequences of condensing them in a small area. This unprecedented situation has created several issues within IDP communities, among them honor killings, especially when the murders committed involved both male and female victims.

3. The Legal Response to Honor Killings in Idlib and Aleppo's Countryside

In Idlib province, northwestern Syria, the HTS is seeking to boost its profile as a fully-fledged administration. HTS has established the so-called Syrian Salvation Government (SSG) which runs several ministries, notably the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Development and Displaced People Affairs, and the Ministry of Interior and Justice. A source informed of the HTS and the SSG structures and administrative policies in Idlib province said that these ministries follow the commands of HTS-affiliated security services, especially the justice ministry, which has offshoot judicial entities administered mostly by Arab jihadists, or Syrians who worked within HTS departments and attended 50-day ideological rehabilitation sessions, called sharia courses.

Pertaining to the legal sources of reference of the HTS-run justice entities, the source said that these entities resolve disputes based on the individual judgment of the person in charge of each separate case, based on his interpretation of sharia and available legal texts. Honor killings are among the key cases the HTS judiciary is concerned with. The source added that the legal system in Idlib is lenient with honor-related murders, especially if the crime is committed by a father or a brother against a sister or a daughter. However, the source added that if the honor killing's victim is a wife, the system pursues a long legal process.

To put the HTS legal system's working approaches in perspective, the source said that the verdict and the way the perpetrator of an honor killing is treated depends on who the victim is. When the victim is a sister, the concerned judiciary department would ask for a coronary report to confirm that the victim is "a virgin." When the report proves that the victim actually had an affair, the department often shows additional tolerance with the perpetrator, sentencing him to a maximum of 10 months in prison. The judiciary is also less strict with perpetrators in cases backed by witness accounts that the victim was involved in an affair, particularly since in honor killing legal cases there are no plaintiffs as families are unlikely to file a lawsuit against one of their own members.

The source added that the approach differs when the victim is a wife and therefore depends on the husband's ability to obtain proof of infidelity. The judiciary treats the victim's murder as voluntary manslaughter when the husband fails to provide the court with visual evidence of infidelity, such as a video, or back his allegations with witness testimonies. Consequently, the husband is sentenced to prison for a period between months, a year or more, depending on each judge's estimations. The husband, however, is sentenced to a maximum of 10 months if he manages to obtain a video or witness accounts to corroborate his allegations that his wife was having an affair.

Regarding the legal measures that the SNA adopts in addressing honor killings in Aleppo, a local source said that the SNA-run legal system functions by the Syrian Penal Code of 1949, to be detailed in the sections below.

4. Two Honor Killings in Daraa Province

In southern Syria, especially in Daraa province, controlled by the Syrian government, women continue to suffer due to a wide range of violations, including honor killings, domestic violence, and child marriages.

Commenting on the status of women in Daraa province, Marwa A.A., a women's rights defender, told STJ:

"A large segment of women in Daraa are vulnerable to persecution, exploitation, and violence, in domestic and non-domestic spaces. At home, a male figure, husband, father, or brother, tends to beat the family's women, and frequently deprive them from pursuing an education, or prohibit them from leaving home at the slightest whim. Outside home, the situation is equally bad. Women are at the risk of sexual extortion, harassment, kidnapping, murder, or theft, because thieves realize that ransom-kidnapping is a winning opportunity to demand from the victim's family whatever they want because perpetrators are always certain that the family will not inform the authorities or let anyone know of the incident for reputational concerns. When it comes to child marriages and honor killings, there is a heartbreaking story in every house and neighborhood. The security chaos and dire living conditions have led families to force their daughters out of school and marry at a young age."

After STJ published this report, we received several comments and questions for Marwa concerning her statement on the prevalence of child marriages, honor killings, and domestic violence in Daraa province. When we shared people's comments with her, she replied:

"Just as in many other areas in Syria, a large percentage of women in Daraa province are too frightened to disclose the violations committed against them. However, I do not mean to generalize the experiences of the entire province. Most the violations committed against women are concentrated in the western countryside, especially in those areas which were under the control of militant Islamic factions."

Marwa added her own testimony on the issue of the child marriage, telling STJ how she was presented by her family with her sister, who was 16 at the time, to suitors. In other words, her intention was not to claim that a child marriage or literal honor killing occurs in every home, only violations committed against women are widespread, and we often do not have the information needed to accurately document them.

She added that tribal and family dynamics govern social relations in Daraa. The majority of the province's population count themselves among prominent and ancient families which live by historical tribal and religious codes. Daraa's families have repeatedly engaged in honor-driven bloody disputes, which have increased due to the security chaos gripping the province.

A. “He shot her and escaped.”

In June 2020, in the Lajat area, Daraa province, a man murdered his wife Rana M., allegedly for honor related reasons. The victim’s husband is a former fighter of al-Omari Brigades, which operated while the armed opposition was in control of Daraa. He signed the 2018 Daraa settlement agreement with the Syrian government and subsequently enlisted with the government’s 4th Division. A woman close to the victim told STJ:

“It was midnight when the husband returned home. Rana was asleep. Everyone in the neighborhood knows her husband's mood — he is constantly high on drugs and hashish. On the night of the murder, his friends said he had taken several narcotic pills before he returned home. We heard a gunshot at about 10:00 p.. One bullet was fired. My brothers rushed to Rana's house. The bullet hit her in the chest. The husband escaped home immediately. We tried to save her, but she was already dead. The relationship between the couple's families tensed, and they exchanged fire several times, resulting in injuries. To get himself out of this mess, the husband claimed that Rana was having an affair and that is what motivated him to kill her.”

The source added:

“We knew Rana growing up. We always lived in the same neighborhood. She was a religious person. Her house is just next to ours. It was impossible for anyone to get in or out without us seeing him. Additionally, everyone knows that her husband has a violent history. He once shot at friends under the influence of drugs. As if it is not bad enough that he murdered and accused her of infidelity, the husband also escaped accountability. He managed to flee to Lebanon.”

B. “It was a snakebite that killed her, the family said.”

In late 2020, in a small village near Inkhil, north of Daraa, 10th grader Shaimaa K.’s life was brutally cut short. The family, ultra-conservative, claimed that the victim died from a snakebite. However, several eyewitnesses close to the victim said that Shaimaa was likely killed “for honor”. One witness told STJ:

“The family are not originally from the town. They came from eastern Daraa ten years ago and settled here on the outskirts of Inkhil town. They frown at women’s engagement in outdoor activities, including shopping, working, or even going to school. Still, they allowed Shaimaa to pursue a high school diploma, which was a good thing. I knew Shaimaa very well; she was my daughter’s age. They were classmates. Shaimaa was polite and well-behaved. One day, a female relative told Shaimaa’s father that his daughter was in a relationship with a young man. I know this young man — he is a soldier from the town. My daughter told me that every time he returned home on leave, he would wait for Shaimaa on the [way from school]. He even asked to speak with her once, but she refused. He insisted, so she just stood with him for a few minutes and left.”

The eyewitness added:

“My daughter said that the young man told Shaimaa that he loved her and that he would propose to her once he is demobilized from the army. Shaimaa was happy. When her father and siblings found out, they hit the young man, who was taken to the hospital. A week later, we heard that Shaimaa died. Asking about her death, they said that a snakebite killed her. The townspeople know that Shaimaa was murdered and that her only guilt was that she innocently fell in love. After the incident, the family abandoned the town in secret. No one knows where they are today.”

5. Two Murders, One an Honor Killing, Documented in As-Suwayda Province

On 7 November 2020, As-Suwayda province witnessed a horrifying murder. The local Facebook news page *Suwayda24* reported that police arrested a man and a woman who were trying to conceal the body of a woman, Amal Z., 36.¹ The victim was a divorcee of several years and lived with her only son, 17. The man and woman were taken to the police department for interrogation and the victim's body was transported to the National Hospital. The hospital report revealed that the woman's death resulted from severe blows to the head with a hammer. The detainees, who turned out as being the victim's mother and uncle, confessed to the crime of their own accord, claiming that the murder was honor motivated.

In a separate incident, on 2 January 2021, *Suwayda24* reported the murder of another woman, Nujood Kh.,² in the countryside of As-Suwayda. The victim was shot four times and killed at her uncle's house. Her husband was a key suspect. The news page added that the victim was from Dama village, in the northwestern countryside of As-Suwayda, and was dead when she arrived at the hospital. Her husband, R Kh., was accused of killing her because she refused to get a divorce. The page added that the murder weapon was an AK-47 rifle and that her husband went into hiding after the incident.

6. Honor Killings According to Syrian Law

According to a Daraa-based legal researcher, Syrian Law today provides stricter legal guidelines on addressing honor killings, especially after the People's Assembly approved³ to abolish Article 548 of Law No.148 of the Syrian Penal Code for 1949 on 12 March 2020.⁴ The

¹ “Disturbing Murder on Pretext of Honor: A Woman Killed by Her Mother and Uncle!” *Suwayda24*, 7 November 2020 <https://suwayda24.com/?p=15433>, (Last visited: 20 April 2021).

² “Husband Accused of Killing His Wife in Northwestern As-Suwayda, and Two Deaths Near Shahba,” *Suwayda24*, 2 January 2021 https://www.sana.sy/?p=1122224&tg_rhash=d4b381eabcd5f1 (last visited: 20 April 2021).

³ “The People's Assembly Approves Three Bills, including the Abolition of One Penal Code Article on Honor Killings,” SANA, 12 March 2020 https://www.sana.sy/?p=1122224&tg_rhash=d4b381eabcd5f1 (Last visited: 22 April 2021).

⁴ “Penal Law No. 148 of 1949 Amended by Legislative Decree No. 1 of 2011, Issued by Legislative Decree No. 148 of 1949,” the Syrian Government Website-the People's Assembly

article allowed a “mitigating excuse” to perpetrators to “[h]e who catches, by surprise, his wife, one of his relatives, distant relatives, or a sister in the acclaimed crime of adultery or vulgar sexual intercourse with another person, then he killed or harmed one or both unintentionally,” or that “[he] who catches his wife, one of his relatives, distant relatives, or sisters in a suspicious situation with another person.”

The law distinguishes between a mitigating and an exempting excuse. In Syrian law, an exempting excuse applies to cases whereby a perpetrator of a crime is exempted from penalty under certain circumstances. The researcher added that owing to the abolished mitigating excuse the minimum penalty for honor killings became two years in prison. Even though the punishment for honor murders was capped at a maximum of seven years, compared with hard labor for 20 years for other murders, the laws of the Syrian Penal Code are now addressing honor killings with the same seriousness they oversee other crimes subject to their scope.

7. Women Battered by Fathers and Husbands in Daraa Province

In addition to honor killings in Daraa province, STJ’s field researcher documented cases of domestic violence committed by husbands or other male family members against women. One of the victims developed chronic health related issues, and eventually lost her life.

A. “He tied her legs and arms with a chain.”

Intisar B., 42 years old from the Lajat area, was a victim of severe battery. She suffered domestic violence at the hands of her husband throughout their marriage and died in mid-2020. A woman relative told STJ:

“Intisar’s husband was extremely cruel. He often bragged about beating her for trivial or no reasons at all. When she messed up a thing or she failed to do the work on the farm, he used to tie her legs and arms with a chain and lock it. He got a huge special lock for that purpose. I still remember that day. He tied her to a pole in front of their home and left her there the whole night. When the neighbors attempted to intervene, he kicked them out of the house, telling them it was a personal matter. Intisar did not have a family. She was raised an orphan at her uncle’s home, a thing that her husband took advantage of and the reason why he abused her at times.”

She added:

“In early 2018, Intisar forgot to lock the sheep barn. She was exhausted and slept. That day her husband hit her till she lost consciousness. She spent three days in pain, moaning the whole time. This prompted neighbors to take her to a doctor, who, in turn, referred her to Damascus. The husband refused to send her because Damascus was controlled by

<https://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=201&nid=12278&ref=tree&> (Last Visited: 22 April 2021).

the armed opposition back then. He only gave her painkillers. Intisar was so changed after the incident she could not summon enough strength to work as before. She complained about having pain in the places where her husband beat her. Her health kept deteriorating. They woke up to find her dead in bed one morning. Her husband announced her death and said it was by natural causes. However, everyone knew that it was her husband that caused her death.”

B. “He hit her on the head with a wrench and gave her a concussion.”

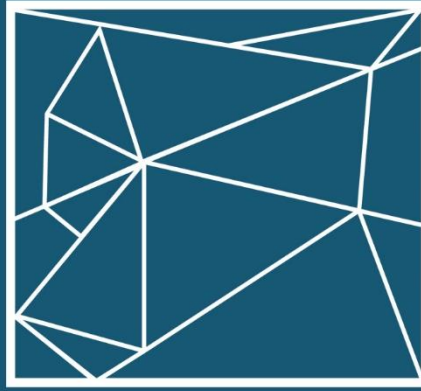
Reem N., 27 years old from al-Muzayrib town, in the western countryside of Daraa, suffered domestic violence at the hands of her husband. Her husband gave her a concussion which caused her speech impairments. Her mother told STJ:

“Reem was 19 when she got married. She spent eight years with her husband, living in a modest house, with a tin roof. She was unhappy, for her relationship with her husband was not going on well. She asked for divorce repeatedly, but her father hit her and forced her to return to her husband every time. They believe that everything is the wife’s fault because the husband is always right. In March 2020, Reem asked her husband to take her to a doctor, but as usual he got angry and started beating her. This was not the first time he hit her with some sharp tool, but this time he hit her on the head with a wrench. The attack gave her a concussion and a gash so large it gaped open. Reem nearly lost her ability to talk after the incident. She can keep her balance when walking and suffers from memory loss. Despite this, her father refused to report her husband to the police and instead told them that she fell off the stairs.”

Reem’s mother added:

“Her husband did not contribute to her treatment expenses. We paid for everything. About a month ago, he divorced her and denied her all her legal financial rights.”

سوريون
من أجل
الحقيقة
والعدالة
Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



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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