

Syria: 185 Cases of “Honor Killing” since 2019

Women and girls in Syria are subject to ongoing gender-based violence. Since 2019, 20 deaths and 561 cases of physical abuse have been documented as a result of domestic violence



Syria: 185 Cases of “Honor Killing” since 2019

Women and girls in Syria are subject to ongoing gender-based violence. Since 2019, 20 deaths and 561 cases of physical abuse have been documented as a result of domestic violence

1. Executive Summary

Eleven years of the Syrian conflict increased the suffering of women and girls. They are subjected to a wide range of violations and various forms of gender-based violence (GBV), including but not limited to “honor killing”, domestic violence practiced by husbands or male members of their families, sexual extortion, and early marriage.

In this report, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) aims to shed light on “honor killing” committed by husbands or male relatives, and to publish the latest numbers of these murders. Moreover, STJ aims to highlight the incidents of domestic violence, whether those that prompted some victims to commit suicide or led to their intentional killing.

This report covers various Syrian regions under the control of different parties: the Syrian Government (SG), the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA), and the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES). It covers the period from the beginning of 2019 until November 2022.

STJ, in cooperation with other two organizations; Musawa and Sara, recorded more than 185 cases of “honor killing”, more than 20 victims who were killed as a result of domestic violence, in addition to more than 561 other domestic violence incidents that included beatings and physical abuse.

The information gathered for the purpose of this report indicates that the real numbers of “honor killing” are likely to be much higher, taking into consideration that not all cases are reported due to fear, to avoid stigma, or to protect male perpetrators.

In a previous report, STJ discussed the role of domestic violence and child marriage in increasing suicide rates among children and women in Syria, after it recorded more than 350 suicides since the beginning of 2021.¹

Moreover, in January and February 2022, STJ has documented seven murders of one female child and six women committed by their first- and second-degree relatives.²

STJ was able to obtain statistics of domestic violence only in the AANES areas. However, it was unable to reach accurate numbers in other regions, except for several cases of “honor killing” and domestic violence that led to death.

2. Recommendations

- To issue a new law to eliminate gender-based violence and any physical, moral, or sexual assault committed against women in Syria.
- To clearly stipulate the full and equal rights of Syrian women, prevent, and criminalize any violence or discrimination against them in the new Syrian

¹ “About 350 Syrians have Died by Suicide since 2021”, Syrians for Truth and Justice. Published 14 September 2022, available at:

<https://stj-sy.org/en/about-350-syrians-have-died-by-suicide-since-2021/>

² “Syria: Seven Female Homicides Recorded in January & February 2022”, Syrians for Truth and Justice.

Published 08 March 2022, available at:

<https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-seven-female-homicides-recorded-in-january-february-2022/>

Constitution (to be written in Geneva). Then, to reform existing laws, enact new gender-sensitive legislation, and repeal any article that normalizes violence against women, including the articles on “honorable motive”.

- To cancel the [reservations](#) of the Syrian state to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and to amend Decree No. 230 of 2017 on the cancellation of Syria’s reservation to Article 2 of the Convention by deleting the phrase “in a manner that does not contradict with Islamic Sharia”.
- To cancel all articles of Syrian family laws, which allows child marriage, and to impose severe penalties on accomplices.
- To adopt a comprehensive approach while dealing with violence against women, based on addressing the various forms of violence, in different Syrian regions, to protect the victims.

3. Methodology

This report relies on fifteen testimonies and interviews, including four on “honor killing” that took place in different regions of Syria, six on domestic violence (one of the victims was killed and one committed suicide), and the testimony of Arzu Tammo, the spokesperson for Sara organization. Finally, the opinion of the legal consultant of STJ was taken regarding the legal analysis of the crimes.

These interviews were conducted between January 2021 and 14 November 2022. Five interviews were in person and ten were virtual.

Due to the sensitivity of the case, witnesses and sources are identified by pseudonyms.

STJ publishes this report on the [International Day](#) for the Elimination of [Violence](#) against Women.

4. Female Victims of “Honor Killing”

The rate of murders committed under the pretext of defending “honor” increased with the escalation of the Syrian conflict. The information obtained by STJ and other organizations participating in this report indicates that chaos, the absence of the rule of law, and the spread of weapons, in addition to the normalization with GBV, contribute to the high rate of “honor killing” in Syria.

4.1 Areas Controlled by the Syrian Government:

Despite the difficulty of documenting all cases, STJ and Musawa recorded more than 14 cases of “honor killing” that took place in the period from the beginning of 2019 until November 2022.

Rana, 26 years old, from Daraa governorate, was killed under the pretext of defending “honor” in June 2020. According to a close relative of the victim, Rana’s husband had

a reconciliation agreement with the SG and joined the Fourth Division of the Syrian Army in 2018. The source said:

“Rana's husband was known to use drugs continuously. On the day of the crime, he went home while his wife was asleep. We later learned from his friends in the battalion that he had taken narcotic pills before going home. That night, around 10 o'clock, we heard gunfire. My brothers rushed to Rana's house, and they found her covered in blood. Her husband ran away. We tried to help her, but she was already dead. As a result of this crime, tension escalated between the victim's family and her husband's family. Armed clashes took place and there were casualties. To escape his responsibility, the husband claimed that his wife was having an illegal affair with another man. He said that he killed her for that reason”.

The source added that Rana's husband was known in the neighborhood for his troubles, especially that he previously shot his friend while he was under the influence of narcotics. She emphasized that the husband not only killed the victim, but also accused her of a false accusation to cover up his crime. Finally, she mentioned that the husband fled to Lebanon.

Amna, 26 years old, from the western countryside of Daraa, was killed in Daraa under the pretext of defending “honor”. STJ interviewed a close relative of Amna who informed that the family of the victim shot her on the morning of 12 February 2022, after being accused -by a woman- of standing with a young man in the town. The source said:

“Amna was married for almost five years, and she had three children. Her husband was a vegetable seller. Amna's younger sister was married to Amna's brother-in-law, and they all lived in one house. On 11 February 2022, a woman in the neighborhood accused Amna of standing with a young man in the town. When the husband heard the rumor, he immediately divorced Amna and sent her to her family's house. Likewise, his brother divorced her sister and kicked her out of the house. Amna had a conservative family... the next morning they shot her dead”.

The source recounted that Amna's family killed her without any justification and without verifying the validity of the accusation. She indicated that the family escaped punishment, as no one from the police intervened in this incident, particularly with the absence of the rule of law in Daraa countryside which was [previously under the control of the armed opposition](#).

4.2 Areas Controlled by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham in Idlib:

STJ and Musawat recorded more than 21 cases of “honor killing” during the period covered by this report, in areas controlled by HTS (listed as terrorist group) in Idlib (in Ariha, Atmeh, Salqin, and Killi).

Rania, 27 years old, from Ariha city in Idlib countryside, became a victim of “honor killing” in July 2022. Her husband confessed to throwing her from the fourth-floor balcony of their house, under the pretext that she had an illegal affair. STJ interviewed one of the victim’s relatives. She narrated:

“Rania was married to one of her relatives and had two children. She had a diploma from a medical institute, and she used to work in a hospital in Idlib governorate. She was very happy because she had the opportunity to work. However, in the spring of this year, the fights with her husband started. Rania's husband asked her to stay home and stop working, but she refused and insisted on her job”.

The source added that the victim's husband used to work in car maintenance and was financially stable. Therefore, he did not want his wife to work. She added:

“Rania's husband was not happy with her job, especially that sometimes she had to work at night. He often accused her of having an illegal affair with one of her colleagues in the hospital. Rania was able to let him forget his doubts, until one day in May 2022, when Rania's husband followed her to the hospital. He had a fight with her in front of the employees. One of those employees tried to help her, which made the husband very angry. He took her home and hit her head. She had to stay in bed for twenty days”.

On the morning of 13 July 2022, Rania was found dead after she fell from the fourth-floor balcony of her house. According to another source close to the victim, her husband told several members of HTS that his wife committed suicide. However, during the investigation, he confessed to killing her, accusing her of having an illegal affair with a young man. The husband was arrested and imprisoned by HTS, but without an explicit ruling against him until the moment of preparing this report

4.3 Areas Controlled by the Syrian National Army:

STJ and Musawat recorded more than 21 cases of “honor killing” during the period covered by this report in Afrin, Jarabulus, al-Bab and Ras al-Ain.

Nofa, 18 years old, from Homs governorate, and displaced to al-Bab in Aleppo countryside, became a victim of “honor killing” in August 2022. Her brother-in-law, who works for the Sultan Murad division of SNA, shot her, claiming that she had an illegal affair. A source close to the victim spoke to STJ:

“Nofa got married in February 2022, and after about two months, her husband started a new job smuggling to Turkey. Nofa used to spend the day in the house of her in-laws, which is relatively far from her own. She used to return to her house at night. On the night of 22 August 2022, the neighborhood woke up to the sound of gunfire coming from Nofa's house. Upon entering the house, Nofa's body was found covered in blood, while her husband's brother was sitting next to the door holding his gun, claiming that she was home with a man, and that he (the brother-in-law) shot that man in the leg, but he ran away”.

The source informed STJ that the victim's brother-in-law was later arrested and imprisoned for only 3 months, and that the other alleged man was never found. The source also indicated that the murderer was released, and he moved to the city of Tal Abyad in Raqqa governorate.

4.4 Areas Controlled by the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria:

STJ has interviewed Arzo Tammo, the spokesperson for Sara organization that work on combating violence against women in northeastern Syria. According to Tammo, from the beginning of 2019 until July 2022, more than 129 cases of "honor killing" and 557 cases of beating and physical abuse were recorded in the areas of the AANES. Mainly, in the regions of Qamishli/Qamishlo, Hasakah, Ain al-Arab/Kobani, and Sarrin.

Moreover, STJ was not able to obtain accurate numbers from Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor.

STJ tried to communicate with several families of the victims in northeastern Syria, but most of them refused to testify due to the sensitivity of the issue.

5. Domestic Violence is One of the Most Dangerous Forms of Violence against Syrian Women

In addition to "honor killing", Syrian women and girls face different types of violations such as domestic violence practiced by their husbands or other male members of their families. In addition to physical and psychological harm, this violence led to the killing of several women and prompted some victims to commit suicide.

STJ was able to obtain statistics of domestic violence only in the AANES areas. However, it was unable to reach accurate numbers in the rest of the regions, except for several cases of "honor killing" and domestic violence that led to death.

5.1 Her Husband Stabbed her, Hided her Body in a Barrel, and Covered it with Cement

Manal, 34 years old, from Saraqib in Idlib countryside, was a victim of her husband. Since the end of 2019, Manal and her husband have been internally displaced to the Mashhad Rouhin camp in Idlib countryside. According to Manal's mother, she was a nurse in a hospital in Idlib governorate, with a salary exceeding \$300 per month. The source said:

"During their stay in the camp, Manal's husband used to beat her. The wounds and bruises on her face and body were visible. We tried to resolve the problems between them because we didn't want them to get divorced. We were afraid of stigma. My daughter was working as a nurse, trying to secure her life and avoid fights. She bought a car for her husband, and they agreed to

use it as a taxi. She wanted him to stay away from bad companions who were engaged in theft and drug abuse.

As the days passed, fights and violence increased, particularly when the husband started giving the car to his friends instead of using it for work. The victim's mother continued:

"Whenever my daughter complained about her husband's behavior, he beat her severely and humiliated her with insulting words. The neighbors were able to hear his voice. Later, my daughter sold the car and came to our house to escape the violence".

STJ spoke to one of the victim's neighbors who disclosed hearing the man beating his wife, mainly in January 2021, two months after buying the car. The source said:

"Sometimes the neighbors intervened to stop the violence. Finally, Manal decided to go to her family's house. Her husband tried several times to convince her to get back, and he made promises to fix the situation. Thus, by the end of February 2021, Manal went back to her husband's house, but she has since disappeared. Since that day no one has seen her. The victim's family filed a complaint against her husband accusing him of her disappearance. The man denied and claimed that she ran away from his house with her lover".

One of the victim's relatives told STJ that no one heard from Manal after she returned to her husband's house. At first, her family thought that Manal was busy with her job and life, then they decided to visit her house. Manal's neighbors informed her family that no one has seen her since her fight with the husband. The source continued:

"Manal's family went to a police station of HTS and filed a complaint. When the husband was interrogated, he claimed that his wife has fled with her lover. He claimed that he didn't tell anyone earlier because he was afraid of stigma. The police irresponsibly released him".

STJ interviewed another source who confirmed that HTS forces arrested a group of young men on charges of theft and drug use in Idlib countryside. He said that the victim's husband was one of the arrested men. He also added that one of them confessed during the interrogation that he helped the husband hide Manal's body after stabbing her with a knife in Mashhad Rouhin. The man said that they put her body in a barrel, took it by car to her husband's residence in the camp, and covered it with cement.

Finally, the husband confessed and was imprisoned, but without an explicit ruling being issued against him until this moment.

5.2 She Preferred Death to Life Under her Father's Abuse

Samar, 35 years old, from the western countryside of Daraa, was another victim of domestic violence. To stop her suffering, she ended her life on 29 September 2022. According to the testimony of the victim's close friend:

“In recent years, it was clear that Samar was suffering a severe psychological crisis. Her father is cruel and difficult. He rejected every man who proposed to marry her. This continued until Samar reached the age of thirty-five. She had to work the whole day. In the morning, she used to work in the plant nursery, while in the afternoon she had to take care of the cows and the land. Eventually, her father would take over her monthly salary”.

The source continued that the victim told her father a few days before her death that she wanted to take a long unpaid vacation at the plant nursery because she felt very tired. Her father refused and beat her severely. A few days later, Samar decided to commit suicide taking toxic substances intended for use as agricultural pesticides.

5.3 She Set her Body on Fire to Save it from her Husband's Violence

Elham, 33 years old, from Maarat al-Numan, is also a victim of GBV. At the end of 2021, she decided to end her life by pouring a flammable substance on her body and burning herself, hoping to put an end to her suffering from her husband's violence. One of the victim's relatives narrated:

“Elham was constantly abused and beaten by her husband who is known for his bad mood because of his addiction to alcohol. One day, she could no longer bear this suffering so she decided to burn herself with a flammable substance used in paint”.

The source added that Elham's family was aware of the violence and physical abuse, but they always advised her to be patient, even though her two kids, both under eight, were witnessing the violence.

The source also referred to the great fear that the victim had of the society in case she asked for a divorce.

5.4 She Was Deprived of her Children and Hospitalized for Several Days

Souad, 26 years old, from Idlib countryside, was married with three children. She spent several days in the hospital after she was severely beaten by her husband. STJ interviewed the victim who stated:

“I often asked my husband to get me a mobile phone to communicate with my family and friends, but he always refused. Therefore, my mother bought me one. One day, my husband came home while I was using the new phone. When he saw it, he severely beat me with his hands, then he started kicking me on my back. He took a stick and started hitting me hard all over my body until the neighbors came and saved me. I was bleeding from my nose and mouth”.

The victim added that she felt severe pain. Therefore, the next morning, her father took her to the hospital. She had a fracture in her right hand, in addition to other bruises, especially on her back. The victim added:

“I filed a complaint against my husband in a police station of the HTS, believing that he would be punished. However, the officer refused to register the complaint. He claimed that the judge would not accept a case of family dispute.

I am currently living in my parents' house, and my husband prevented my children from visiting me. I do not know if I will see my children again”.

5.5 A Victim of her Husband's Violence and her Fear of Stigma

Layal, 22 years old, from Hasakah, is another victim of domestic violence practiced by her husband. She is forced to stay with him despite all the pain because she is scared of the society that might label her if she gets divorce. STJ interviewed the victim who recounted:

“When I was eighteen, my family decided that I should marry. My husband was ten years older than me. After less than a year, he started beating and insulting me. Our ideas and goals were different because of the huge age difference. Every time I was beaten, a big fight would start between my family and my in-laws. Then the notables of our two families used to intervene to resolve the dispute. My husband promised not to beat me again, but he did. I decided to be patient and stay with my husband. I am scared of the society and the stigma associated with divorce”.

6. Legal Opinion:

The ongoing conflict since 2011 led to the emergence of several controlling forces in Syria. Some of them tried to partially apply Syrian laws, while other forces implemented the Islamic Sharia.

STJ plans to publish a report in 2023 that discusses the laws of the de facto authorities in Syria, in addition to the way they deal with “honor killing” and GBV. However, in this chapter, STJ discusses only the Syrian laws currently applied in the areas controlled by the SG (and applied partially in other Syrian regions).

6.1 Domestic/Physical Violence in the Syrian Legislation:

There are several articles in [the Syrian Penal Code](#) that prohibit and criminalize the beating in general, but they are not specified to GBV against women.

Articles 540, 541, 542, 543 of the Penal Code stipulate that hitting someone on purpose, leading to a disability that would force the victim to stop working for at least ten days, is punishable for a maximum of 6 months in prison. However, if the period exceeds ten days, the perpetrator is punished with imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year. Moreover, if the period exceeds twenty days, the perpetrator is punished with imprisonment from three months to three years. Furthermore, if the act leads to an amputation of a limb or a permanent disability, the perpetrator is punished with temporary hard labour for a period not exceeding ten years.

In conclusion, the Syrian law prohibits beating, regardless of the gender of the victim. The penalty increases if this beating leads to physical harm that affects the ability to move and work.

However, what is taken against this law is the absence of an explicit text that clearly and specifically criminalizes violence against women. Article 544 of the Penal Code is the only exception. It imposes a penalty of hard labour for a period not exceeding ten years for anyone who causes the abortion of a pregnant woman knowing that she is pregnant.

Women are often victims of physical violence. However, usually it is hidden by virtue of traditions and norms in many Syrian regions. Several local traditions blame a woman who reports a man that beats and abuses her. Accordingly, social norms and customs become above the law.

6.2 “Honor Killing” in the Syrian Legislation:

The year 2020 witnessed a shift in the Syrian legislator's view of “honor killing”. On 08 March 2020, [Law No. 2](#) was issued repealing Article 548 (of Penal Code) and its amendments related to granting a mitigating excuse for honor crimes.

Earlier in 2009, the aforementioned article was amended by [Decree No. 37](#) (the term “cancelled” was used) instituting a penalty of at least two years’ imprisonment.

Article 548 exempted a perpetrator of “honor” crimes from any penalty if he catches his wife, sister, mother, or daughter by surprise, engaging in an illegitimate sexual act and kills or injures them unintentionally. The article also allows for a lesser punishment if he finds them in a suspicious condition.

Despite the repealing of this article in 2020, its catastrophic effects on Syrian society and culture over the past decades cannot be ignored, as Syrian society still believes in the legitimacy of killing or persecuting women under the pretext of defending “honor”.

6.3 The Problem of “Honorable Motive” Mentioned in Article 192 of the Penal Code:

Article No. 192 of the Penal Code provides for reduction of sentences if the judge finds that the motive was ‘honorable’.

According to this article, the judge is allowed to excuse the perpetrator from penalty or to reduce their punishment (life detention or 15 years imprisonment instead of life imprisonment with hard labour, temporary detention instead of temporary hard labour, and simple imprisonment instead of imprisonment with labour).

Although article 192 is a general article and is not specific to “honor killing”, it provides for a reduction of sentences if the judge finds that the motive was “honorable”,

especially that the term itself is not defined by law. Nevertheless, the Court of Cassation defined the “honorable” motive as an unbridled psychological emotion that leads the perpetrator to commit their crime under the influence of a sacred idea.³

³ Syrian Court of Cassation, No. 1157 of 1982, Primary 928.



About Syrians for Truth and Justice - STJ

The idea of establishing “Syrians for Truth and Justice-STJ” was born to one of its founders, while participating in the LDF Fellowship Program by the American Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), motivated by his desire to Contribute to building the future of his country, Syria.

The project started with modest possibilities, as it was limited to publishing stories of Syrians who were subjected to enforced disappearance and torture, and later grew into a well-established organization committed to revealing all human rights violations in Syria.

Based on the conviction of Syrians for Truth and Justice that the diversity and diversity that characterized Syria throughout history is a blessing for the country, our team of researchers and volunteers works diligently to uncover human rights violations committed in Syria, regardless of the party responsible for these violations or the category they were subjected to. With the aim of strengthening the principle of inclusiveness, ensuring the organization's representation of all groups of the Syrian people, and ensuring that everyone enjoys their full rights.

