

PATHWAYS TO LETHAL VIOLENCE AGAINST FEMALE TIKTOKERS IN PAKISTAN: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF HONOUR-BASED AND REJECTION-RELATED KILLINGS

Fakhr e Alam Khan¹, Sana Nisar^{*2}

^{1,2}Visiting Lecturer, Department of Criminology, University of Peshawar, Peshawar, Pakistan

¹fakhar.special@gmail.com, ^{*2}sananisarmh@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22805218>

Keywords

female TikTokers, honour killing, rejection-related violence, femicide, technology-facilitated gender-based violence, Pakistan

Article History

Received: 01 June 2026

Accepted: 23 August 2026

Published: 05 September 2026

Copyright @Author

Corresponding Author: *

Sana Nisar

Abstract

The recent killings of female TikTok users in Pakistan reflect the problem in perception and treatment of women online. What is rather interesting is that the degree of visibility of such people in social media is associated with their safety and control over them. This study examines two paths by which the violent actions escalate into fatalities, namely, honour killings involving relatives and violence in connection with rejection from the pursuers who are not related to the victims. Within October 2024-August 2026, a group of scholars examined five cases of deaths of eight women. A qualitative comparison was made with the use of a variety of sources, namely, court papers, police reports from reliable news agencies, records, human rights materials, and relevant academic literature. However, for the inclusion in the study, the sources had to contain substantial evidence of the association between the victim's activity in TikTok and her motive of honour or rejection. At the same time, the researchers purposefully excluded from consideration such incidents as accidents, attempted murders, financial motives, and cases not associated with either of these motives.

It became clear that there are five themes in the analysis, including attempts to conceal or falsify accounts of the killings, escalation after the rejection, male dominance over women's agency, women's visibility online as a form of autonomy, and unequal institutional response. In the honour cases, relatives viewed women's actions as damaging to their family's reputation. Concealing the facts about the death occurred in some of the cases. However, while the pattern in the rejection-related case was different, the aggressor viewed a woman's refusal as an offense. The results of the study refute the idea that women's online visibility and TikTok lead to femicide. Digital visibility may be useful in empowering women, their economic and personal expression.

INTRODUCTION

With the advent of short video platforms for Pakistani women, this newfound freedom of social interaction, self-expression, public presence, and earning money from video sharing is a welcome development. Sadly, lots of women and girls are using social media while grappling with various social and economic inequalities. Their mobility, appearance, communication and sexuality are typically controlled by their male relatives, partners, or possible suitors. Being a member of the social media will not change the gender disparity in the real world. Rather it may bring the unwanted attention and criticism from relatives, resulting in increased harassment and threats of the individuals. The national policy in Pakistan defines digital gender-based violence as a means of gender inequality and identifies the form of DBV practices that includes cyberstalking, impersonation, image abuse, and online intimidation, which can limit women's participation in public activities (Ministry of Human Rights & UNDP Pakistan, 2026).

The string of cases of deaths among TikTok-using women raised the question of safety of these women (AFP, 2025). However, these murders did not have similar causes. In a handful of instances the relatives killed the women they believed had harmed their reputation with videos, clothes, lifestyles or simply because they could not delete a TikTok profile (Dawn, 2024a, 2025a, 2025b, 2026a). In another case, an aggressor murdered an influencer as a reaction to her rejection of his advances and got convicted (Al Jazeera, 2026; Associated Press, 2026). Combining all these cases will cause the loss of nuances relating to platform visibility, motive of the offending party and the relationship between the offender and victim. The presented research clearly distinguishes between murders related to perceptions of the family dishonor and murders in the cases of rejections of sexual harassment.

For a number of reasons this could not have been a more pivotal moment. First of all, the increasing

number of women's visibility in social media should be mentioned. Sure it's good, but it shouldn't be right to overlook the problem of unequal Internet access in Pakistan as highlighted by the Ministry of Human Rights and UNDP Pakistan in 2026. Moreover, the shifting of online communications to violent acts and deaths in some instances. The fact that institutions are treating issues of cyber harassment, honor crimes, stalking, child protection and homicide as distinct issues is very disappointing. The fact is that in one particular incident, multiple features can become interconnected. When studied together, there are commonalities that emerge, with attention to the differences between the perpetrator, the reason(s) for his actions, the strategies he uses, and the results of his actions.

Problem Statement

There are two ways of describing the killing of a TikToker, which can be either in relation to her social media posts or as a stand-alone event. Neither of the approaches gives a complete picture of the problem. The former one can contribute to victim blaming, stating that it was the woman's visibility and the content posted that brought violence upon her (AFP, 2025). The latter does not account for the reoccurring myths about honour, obedience, male entitlement, and women saying "no". There are a lot of studies regarding honour-based violence, and there is much done research in Pakistan on this matter (Bhanbhro et al., 2016; Gill, 2009; Nasrullah et al., 2009). In addition, there has been a lot of research done about the use of technology in relation to abuse (UN Women, 2025; UNFPA, n.d.). However, there is still lack of research about the relationship between online visibility and two main forms of lethal violence – honour-based and rejection-based. Methodologically, there is a risk that the news outlet calls the case the "TikToker murder" without referring it to TikTok in any way. Therefore, there should be a specific framework for selecting the cases to differentiate whether the

victim's involvement in TikTok is somehow connected with her activities online and/or rejection of unwanted attention.

Research Objectives

1. To understand the social, relational and situational factors behind TikTok visibility.
2. To compare the two pathways based on the triggering events, and planning, "often" with others criminal justice response. cultural laws and economic opportunities with women's participation in livelihoods
3. To explore the linkages between women's cultural norms, access and their inclusion in livelihood activities with the assistance of technology.
4. To suggest effective evidence-based prevention and criminal justice strategies to safeguard Woman digital media makers, audience.

Research Questions

1. How is women's TikTok activity interpreted as a threat to family honour or male authority in the selected cases?
2. What factors distinguish honour-based killings from rejection-related killings?
3. What elements are shared by both pathways?
4. What differences does the comparison show between prevention and criminal justice?

Literature Review

Honour Based Violence as Gendered Social Control

Honour-based killing should be considered as part of a range of other issues relating to violence against women. It's so much more than simply a cultural practice! Fundamentally the concept of family honor can be adopted to monitor and discipline women (Gill 2009). If this violence is seen as a cultural matter, it is likely to affect the democracy's response or its justice system. Bhanbhro (2016) postulates that H honour-related violence is not necessarily homicidal in nature. Such as threats, seclusion, coercion, forced

marriage and restrictions on personal freedom. Thus, the most serious consequence of chronic abusing remedial behavior can be homicide.

Research in Pakistan reveals a lack of documentation and understanding of honour-related deaths. Nasrullah et al (2009) found a total of 1957 victims from the data recorded from the Human Rights Commission in Pakistan from 2004 to 2007, but stated that this figure may be even higher. Many of the victims of these incidents are female and are usually a man's wife or other familiar person. As per Patel and Gadit (2008) weak law enforcement, societal acceptance and entrenched patriarchy are sources of the persistent issue of 'karo-kari'. Such a level of inequality is not only applicable to the family alone, rather it is applicable to the society as pointed by recent Pakistani research on violence against women (Ali et al, 2021). The statistics we have should be taken with a pinch of salt since not all honor-related deaths are necessarily being recorded (Nasrullah et al., 2009). When family members control the crime scene, give the initial account, or have an impact on later legal proceedings, it may be more difficult to document and investigate these deaths. In 2016, Pakistan's hon killings law was tightened by introducing amendments to the criminal code. The case stipulation introduced by the Pakistan Commission on the Status of Women (n.d.) made that it would allow an offender to escape from serious punishment if the victim's legal heirs granted forgiveness or consented to a compromise. However, the law can only take effect when investigators identify the genuine reason behind doing things in compliance with the order of the god of honor. But not until the investigators figure out the true motive grounded in honourable things can the law work. If they accept the family's initial claim, or label the killing a "private matter," the case may not fall under the application of the applicable honor-crime laws.

The three elements of womanhood were rights denied to women:

Rejection, Entitlement, Femicide

The harassment, threats, stalking or controlling behaviour could result in death. This is when the offender is unable to comprehend a girl's choice to end a relationship, to leave a relationship or even to set up a personal boundary. Research and documents have shown that women's killings are not well documented and studied in official statistics. This can involve differential gender power and attempts to regulate women (Reis & Meyer, 2024). There could be a personal reason for the rejection, or there could be some broader social expectations that will affect an offender's reaction. Vandello and Cohen (2003) have revealed a man's reputation could well be tied to his fidelity and behavior over women. If such a control is threatened, there is the potential for increased tolerance of aggression. In this context Male entitlement is a right to access, intimacy or friendliness that becomes an expectation. If she doesn't accept, she is construed as having insulted, humiliated or provoked her husband.

Rejection related violence doesn't happen through digital platforms, but can be mediated by the greater availability and monitoring of unwanted content. A follower seeing a creator's posts will have the impression of being nearer than they are. The follower can find out what the creator does, how she relates to people, or can follow her after the rejection. Mobile telephones and web-based platforms can additionally be used to help maintain unwanted contacts, monitor women, make threats towards women, utilize fake identities and disenfranchise and humiliate women openly (UN Women, 2025; UNFPA, n.d.). As a result, technology is a way to contact and remain accessible. If an offender feels he has a "right" to the access, then he may see it as an offence and feel that a woman's rejection of this is an offence deserving of punishment, and increase his risk of perpetrating violence.

Digital Presence, Ethical Surveillance, and Victim Attribution

Existing studies show how exposure to harassment, negative societal effects, reputation damage, and blackmail may be a threats facing Pakistani women within the digital realm. Women accounted for the majority of all requests from the Cyber Harassment Helpline of Digital Rights Foundation, which in turn tended to be accompanied by similar complaints more often. Women requests were more likely to be accompanied by similar complaints and typically made up the majority of all requests for assistance from Digital Rights Foundation's Cyber Harassment Helpline. In its first six years, they made up 59% of the total number of beneficiaries of the helpline (Digital Rights Foundation, 2023). The impact of online abuse is not limited to the online world. For example, a picture can be displayed to the family of the woman or a private conversation can be employed to threaten the family that the picture will be displayed in public. Shame about women exposed in public is another rationale that can be reinforced with negative comments out on the internet.

Although it might appear like a sound idea for women to cease using social media platforms, the digital gender gap suggests otherwise. Inequalities in women's access to devices and to be supervised by family members, and social norms about women using technology have made it more difficult for them to access devices and technology (Digital Rights Foundation, 2023). Meanwhile, there are opportunities of earning and freedom of expression online. After Sana's death, grieving was reported across the country and the comments condemned her for and dehumanized her for being a TikToker (AFP, 2025). This victim-blaming places responsibility on the woman's visibility on the Internet as a victim versus the person that harmed her. It may also connote to other women that they can be questioned on their privilege to be secure when online.

Theoretical Framework

The research focuses at intersection of two fields: feminist criminology and coercive control and technology facilitated violence. Feminist criminology is an analysis of violence in the context of unequal gender relations. Focus is placed on who is in authority, who is believed, who risks most and who is punished in families, in society and in the law in families. From this perspective, there is no proof that TikTok is responsible for the violence. Rather, it is not considered a social activity through which inequalities of gender can be reproduced, challenged or surfaced.

One path by which seemingly autonomous acts may become entangled in a wider system of controlling a woman's autonomy is by coercive control (Stark, 2007). These can include anything from watching her post, to asking her to remove a certain account, to limiting her clothes, her activity, to repeatedly asking her to be their friend, or to try to meet with her. By honour cases, family members have the opportunities to act and claim the power to defend the honour of the family. In rejection related cases the control typically is obtained from a single pursuer. Both offenders put the same demand on the woman: she has to give up her personal authority, submit to the requests of the offender.

Addressing online behaviour can be related to someone's physical harm; this is one of the explanations for technology oriented gender based violence. An online communication can allow an offender to reach a woman, information about her, several opportunities to interact with her and ways of intimidation (UN Women, 2025; UNFPA, n.d.). There can also be increased criticism and moral condemnation of a creator's public account by the family or community of the creator. This approach to lethal violence sees it as a process rather than a single event. Visibilization or refusals of the woman can be an assault on the authority of the person she is with. Technology can then allow for more access or exposure and if

she isn't complying, attempts at control can increase. This process can be prevented by early appropriate actions at institutional level; otherwise, if it goes on without appropriate action/inaction, it can cause major problems in a blended model. Early appropriate action at institutional level can prevent this process; early inappropriate action/inaction may lead to major problems in a blended model.

Methodology

Research Design

In this study a small-N qualitative comparative design was employed to investigate selected incidents found in publicly available secondary sources. It was not intended to provide a "guesstimate" of the possible number of such killings. The study, however, drew focus on patterns and monitored processes in Information-rich Cases (IRC). The incidents were analysed as the primary unit of analysis. If there were several deaths one entry of each woman's death was made for each event. Search period was January 2019 - 31 August 2026. All cases that fulfilled the inclusion criteria, however, were within the period of October, 2024 to August, 2026.

Students learn to develop a search strategy and use various sources to find it.

In the searches women's names were added with the keywords Pakistan, woman, girl, female TikToker, TikTok influencer, killed, murder, honour, family, father, brother, husband, rejection, proposal, friendship, stalker, and refused. Peer-reviewed articles, Government of Pakistan, United Nations agencies and statutory bodies, civil-society reports and court or police developments reported by established news organizations were used. Case facts were given preference from court reports, and reports based on FIRs, or if possible, confirmation from at least two independent reports through a named police official's statement. Later reports were then used to revise the material which was published at the beginning of an investigation. The social media

postings were not considered as evidence, nor were anonymous blogs, unsourced videos and Wikipedia.

Eligibility for the study: Inclusion and exclusion criteria:

This incident was only reported when four criteria were met. The victim was a female or a girl Pakistani. Second, there was evidence of her involvement with TikTok either as a user, content creator, or the event revolved around her TikTok content. Third, that he died by murder. Lastly, the motive was suspected to be an honour-based or rejection-related motive, either from police officers, court documents, or corroborated by well-educative reports. This was added because of police's apprehension that this man's motive was inspired by TikTok posts by women in the family and all four deaths were from a family attack (Dawn 2024a, 2024b). Excluding from case accounts where there was a death by accident, the victim survived, the motive was primarily financial in nature or motive has not been clear, or where the incident was not located in Pakistan, or where there was no substantial linkage between social media users and the motive. However, where such credible evidence did not establish any trigger, such as rejection or honour based killing, then domestic killings were not included.

The data is extracted and analyzed.Extraction and analysis of data.

This data was collected on a matrix that was created to capture the following: date of the information, location, victim profile, relationship with the accused offender, digital connection, caused conflict, interaction of others, method of

killing, possible concealment, evidentiary status and criminal justice response. The following two proposed pathways were initially coded deductively. A second phase involving induction was utilized to examine any commonalities among the cases. The similarities and differences of the two pathways emerged as a result of ongoing comparisons. Each allegation was classified as a charge, conviction, reported confession, police account or charge. This assisted to separate early reports from reports that were backed by a court decision.

Avoid any hint of bias or limitations in the framework of ethical considerations.

Only public information of dead people used in this study. It did not include any human subjects contact or Private Records and interventions. Communal care needed to be taken in an ethical fashion. There was neither sensational detail, nor reproduction of pictures of or hostile comments, nor recognition of uncertainty, nor distinction between allegations and known findings were present in the study. However restrictions must be noted: They involve media selection bias, unequal coverage of the cases being investigated, continuing investigations, conflicting reports in the media about the names and ages of cases, and the fact that only one case of an eligible rejection had been collected. Usually, that's small sample size that doesn't adequately demonstrate that the creation of such content makes any one woman more likely to be killed. Findings results offer analytical understanding of the processes, however, cannot be statistically generalised to all TikTokers who are female in Pakistan.

Case Profile and Evidentiary Status

Table 1 Select incidents to classify and analyze based on the analytical classification.

Incident	Victim(s)	Pathway	Key evidentiary basis	Status at cut-off
Karachi, Oct. 2024	Madiha Farooq; Shamshad Farooq; Ayesha Sameer; Alina Razzaq	Honour-based familial control	Police said suspect linked killings to TikTok videos and alleged 'immodesty'; confession reported	Court proceedings reported; not treated as conviction
Quetta, Jan. 2025	Hira Anwar	Honour-based familial control	Police reported father and uncle confessed to premeditated killing over lifestyle, clothing, and TikTok content	Father and uncle convicted and sentenced to life in 2026
Islamabad, June 2025	Sana Yousaf	Rejection-related retaliation	Police described repeated rejection; later court conviction	Umar Hayat sentenced to death in May 2026
Rawalpindi, July 2025	Mahak	Honour-based familial control	Police investigation rejected suicide account and alleged father killed her after refusal to delete TikTok	Investigation/prosecution reported
Taxila, Aug. 2026	Shamsu Bibi (Ayesha Gilamana)	Honour-based familial conspiracy	Police claimed father, brother, and others confessed; CCTV and technical evidence cited	Ongoing investigation; allegations not adjudicated

Note. Classification reflects the strongest publicly reported motive as of 31 August 2026. Preliminary police allegations are not findings of guilt.

Sources: Dawn (2024a, 2024b, 2025a, 2025b, 2026a); Associated Press (2025, 2026); Arab News (2026); Express Tribune (2025, 2026).

Findings

Pathway One: Honour-Based Family Violence

Some families take it upon themselves that when it comes to honour-based crime, it's not just about having fun on TikTok, it is a serious matter. These videos can cause problems for them because they can ruin the family's reputation. To take the case of tragic Karachi, as an example. The suspects' problem with the TikTok videos created by the victims was reportedly "serious," as he deems them "immodest and shameless" (Dawn, 2024a). The tragedy that four women from the same family

were killed over this, makes the effects of honour based violence on families even more tragic.

If we scratch the surface when we look at Hira Anwar's case, it seems there was a lot more to the story. Not only her style and lifestyle, but the social events she went to, as well as what she did on her computer. There were allegations that her father and maternal uncle had something to do with the shooting. At first, her dad blamed strangers who would attack their farm, but as investigators got more details right, both ended up paying the price of their crimes in life in prison time. It is not

simply a knee-jerk response, it's evidence of an attempt to take control when they sought to avoid responsibility for this terrible act. Interestingly, this was the first time this family had been out of the United States, and the fact that it constitutes a problem of honor proves a point: honor can happen to anyone, and can occur even in a family that seems modern and civilised when living here. In Rawalpindi, the heart-breaking case of Mahak, a 16-year-old girl, has come to the fore. According to authorities, her father told her to remove her account from TikTok. But when she refused he made the unthinkable decision to take her life. The family initially insisted it was a suicide, but the post-mortem released from the coroners and a police investigation led them to lodge a case of murder. The police took it upon themselves to press charges to make sure no one would try to settle the matter or do something to hide the deal. This brings up a number of questions about control and digital presence in Mahak's case, as if the deletion of her account only means "about" social media, it means that her father's wish was ultimately about his power over her free decisions. It is this same denial that has authorities saying it was this that initiated this unfortunate string of events.

By the month of August 2026, it started to look bad for Shamsu Bibi, aka Ayesha Gilamana for online, who was murdered in Taxila. Initially, the police looked into a variety of leads surrounding her death. Unfortunately, the situation changed when they picked up five on the streets - including her father and brother. This implies "other motives—which may include honor-related motives. The police during their inquiry collected CCTV footage, technical data as well a witness statements to collate what occurred. The suspects even tried to build a 'deliberate game of make-believe' around the shooting, they guessed. With the current facts and data that are available in this case, one should use the term "honor" with a grain of salt, as it may still be too early to simply classify this as an honor case with the available facts. This

is a fairly good understatement since the importance cannot be over-emphasised of looking at new evidence and not making decisions based on old reports. JH.A.20.A.4:

Pathway Two: Rejection-Related Retaliation

Sana Yousaf's case of brutal murder is being classified as a case of rejection related violence. Authorities said that the crime was motivated by a man who tried to be Sana's 'friend' on the social media app TikTok, but she had rejected him several times. The obsession grew from Internet chatting to real-life and possibly-fatal activities, court papers show. So, carrying a gun with him, he moved all the way to Islamabad where he asked her to SMS him, or even come and meet him, but she failed and managed to kill her at her house.

This is the disturbing part of this case—from unchecked advances to where he felt he had a right to her attention. They've taken a social media message to a literal invitation for her. Rather than run away from the rejection he felt, didn't run away like a sane man, but rather did what a sane man wouldn't, namely responded to rejection with violence.

It does not only interest for the fact that the offender was not a member of a family who says he is performing, in honour of that family, but also because he was a radical Islamist who is trying to justify his actions by using the Arabs of Sousouma. Interests the story because the family member is a radical Islamist who seeks to legitimise his crimes on the grounds of the Arabs of Sousouma. Rather, he was pushed into an anger at the individual level, rejection. But there is a sinister parallel in his need for control: If the woman he was seeing him pulled back it was an insult to his control; she wouldn't have wanted to be his girlfriend. It's not just the violence being referred to, it's also legal responsibility for the violence – that's what's noteworthy here, more so than with many of the initial reports discussing honour-related violence.

Cross-Pathway Themes

Digital Visibility as a contested autonomy

For the first time in tiktoks history women could be who they are, share their thoughts and feelings, and interact with others. In the chosen cases, however, some considered these forms of self-expression as a degree of independence that they could not tolerate. When the cases concerned honor, the family members asserted that the web presence of the women affected the family's honor. Then there's the ones of rejection – this one involved a stalker following the creator's profile on the platform, trying to contact the creator, yet without any success. It's not that TikTok was to blame for the violence that broke out, but it certainly brought these ladies on to the spotlight which meant unwanted interference from controlling family members and unwanted attention by pursuers.

Entitled to Control depicts how men dominate women's decisions in relation to their body's affairs.

In each of the cases examined it is clear that males were trying to make decisions in the interests of females. For example, honour related incidents. For family members, it was whether they could post videos and what they could wear, what they could do and could not do, who they could hang out with, and whether they could even have TikToks. Then there's Sana Yousaf who after finding out that she cannot accept the termination decision of her contacts has been entangled with a pedophile boyfriend. There's Sana Yousaf, who felt that she had made a decision to not contact the person anymore and had had a pedophile boyfriend. Though the needs were distinctly diverse, all of them had to address one fundamental principle: Women's independence was still contingent upon men's permission.

When, after a refusal or resistance, there has been escalation.

In several cases the attempts at enforcement of compliance failed and violence broke out. She

reportedly did not delete her TikTok account, though, when she was asked to remove the videos, such as the one featuring the girl, by Mahak. Hira was constantly having conflicts with her family about the outfit she wore, the way she dresses, and, naturally, the TikToks. Alas, the murder was judged to be a premeditated one by the police. Then there's Sana Yousaf, who continually turned down the offender's attempts to get in touch with her. What was remarkable about these situations was that what felt like a war sometimes ensued as people usually experienced pressure and demands that they were not able to keep up with when the family wasn't getting what they wanted. This isn't about the women being at fault for not taking a backdown, it's about the entitled person who has to go into a fight against a woman who is not going to take a backdown or is showing some resistance. The concealment and the attempts to change the account. Covering up and the change in account.

In some honour killings there have been disturbing attempts to blame somebody else or to “recant” or alter the original reports on the killings. The family of Hira Anwar said that someone from the group was responsible for the killing of her family; the family of Mahak has told police that the killing of her family was done by a suicide. The people of Taxila had another scam-type incident, this time involving falsehoods being created by its police, police said. That's why it's important for investigators never to assume the first word of any relative. One thing which is usually revealed in the post mortem evidence, in the eyes of the camera (cctv), and also in Digital evidence and other tech evidence is a different story altogether. For Mahak, the complainant was the police, who would assist in compromising some of his issues when the case comes up later. That's why it is important to have an independent investigation, and make sure the evidence is preserved carefully, particularly if there's a family member with an agenda on how things go.

Unequal Institutional Attention

Selected cases were given differing amounts of public and institutional visibility. For instance, the deaths of Sana Yousaf was reported by the national media, while she was convicted within a year (Al Jazeera, 2026; Associated Press, 2026). Many other cases were continuing and being investigated or prosecuted at the time of this study and these were mainly through local media and preliminary police reports. It should be noted, however, that media attention for cases does not necessarily result in speedy resolution likely to be the reason for Sana's case being resolved quickly. It should, however, be emphasised that this poses a question: What public interest does entice institutional action? The best rule is no prevention and investigation by popularity or the case going "viral."

Discussion

On closer examination of these cases, we realised that there are two lines of violence; both have a gendered element of control. According to the cases analyzed, in honour-oriented societies, violence generally manifested as violence in the family committed by a family member's concern with the family's honour. Often multiple members of a family were involved in these acts. But when it comes to rejection cases, that's another story – normally one man taking it out on one woman who decided to end any connection with him due to his rejection. In both situations, the aggressor(s) made use of the choices of the women as if they had been a command.

One way to see this trend is from the feminist criminology perspective, focusing on the power of men and women, rather than on the culpability of the digital platforms themselves, like TikTok. While TikTok played a role in the ways women were dressed and interacted with them, it is not somehow a direct thing that had sparked the violence. Generally, the killings were ultimately the retraction of actions that occurred at the hands of those who desire to dominate and discipline women to make choices for themselves.

For honour cases, it must be remembered it is not always possible to assume that there is an honour motive simply because the offender might state this in public. They should have noticed earlier indicators like: wanting to deactivate social media profiles, dress or act strangely, threaten family's reputation, family involvement with planning, death being hidden. To ensure the legal reform implemented in Pakistan in 2016 is effective, the police and prosecutors need to acknowledge and provide tangible proof of any honour motivations (Punjab Commission on the Status of Women, n.d.). There is a genuine danger that key issues on honour will be overlooked if the murder is dismissed as simply a private family matter and/or the initial family explanation is taken on board without challenge.

In the pathway that leads to rejection, we need to re-evaluate our take on early warning signs. Pay attention to things such as personal e-mails or messages that are repeated or attempts to book meetings that you don't want. These more sinister actions can't be ignored either, like someone appearing at the place where the woman is, threatening after being refused, claiming to be someone else, checking where she is, etc., or even being able to get hold of weapons. These are all very important ingredients of effective risk assessment. These behaviours are grouped together due to the fact that they could form a spiraling pattern, not just be individual behaviours. Pakistan's strategy on gender-based violence through technologically enabled means will offer a chance to toughen the linkage between cyber complaints with offline protective measures (Ministry of Human Rights & UNDP Pakistan, 2026). The remedy of removing harmful content or even to just make a complaint might be insufficient when a pursuer is physically able to find the woman.

Findings also reveal the reasons why women should never be held responsible for violence perpetrated against them. Encouraging women to desist from posting, hide their identity or off

social-media platforms shifts the burden of prevention onto the women and not on the perpetrator. It too perpetuates the same level of control in relation to women's visibility found in the selected cases. Sometimes temporary changes to privacy may be helpful as part of an individual safety plan. However, the central question should not be: 'which women are getting off digital platforms'. Women can be online, they can work, they can speak and they CAN NOT be harassed. Therefore, prevention needs to be focused on behaviours by which offenders control, and other vulnerabilities of institutional responses, rather than on victim digital footprint.

Only four honour-based incidents and one rejection-based incident were in the sample. But this variation shouldn't be interpreted as a rise in honour killings, said one. It was a result of the strict rules we then had set that we ended up choosing so small a value for the cut-off date for the advancing public record, and how much evidence there was in the public domain before this date. The case of rejection has been added because of the comparative analytical purposes rather than the numbers. Further studies need to be conducted with the intention of creating a nationwide database of femicide, such as a FIR on every death, court rulings, digital information on the relationship between a woman and the offender and the history of the relationship between a victim and offender. This type of data would allow for more precise estimation of what the frequencies of which cell pathway were.

Policy and Practice Recommendations

A joint threats assessment. A joint threats assessment. Police and cybercrime staff must work off the same processes in conducting risk analysis. Repeated unwanted contact, threats, display or posting of person or location information or use to call persons to unwarranted meeting, demand to desist from account from family, report of weapons readily available. The assessment of sign

of warnings (online and offline) should not be done individually, it should be done together.

Specific procedures on potential honour killings.

If the first death report is from the family, such cases of suicide, accident or murder by an unknown party should be taken very seriously. The scene of the crime and digital evidence should not be contaminated and there should be an independent postmortem and research into restrictions/threats made prior to the death. Minimisation of opportunity for future familial settlements could be when the complainant is, as appropriate by the legal system, the police or the state.

Content creators' safety precautions.

We urge social media companies to establish an effective mechanism (such as rapid response systems) through which, when a specific report documents a threat to its lives, to preserve relevant digital evidence and to promptly take any necessary measures to counter credible threats of death, attempts to evade account blocks, exposure of personal information or attempted exposure of personal addresses, via impersonation or other means. They should have clearly stated terms of safety and terms to let users know where they can report such concerns in Urdu (and other regional languages).

Children's Protection. Where children are involved, there needs to be coordination between the law enforcement, child protection agencies, education providers and responsible adults. Parental claim and enforcement of discipline and family honour cannot take priority over a child's right to live, freedom of expression, privacy and protection.

Safeguarding against unjustified harassment or chasing. The Legislature should be more proactive and commence or strengthen lawful measures to deal with the ongoing non-justified harassment

and following. Emergency protection orders, risk criteria applied to bail decisions, access to weapons and quick notification of victims when suspects are released or on bail are some of the ways to be considered by justice institutions.

Directions to avoid being victimized. People who need to be informed, such as police, public prosecutors and journalists, and university employees, should be aware that they should never reveal the “likability” of the female case, the material she read, how she was dressed or how she refused a touch as a justification for violence. Media or official statements should be paying attention to the offender's conduct rather than perhaps just the allegations, without being mixed up with conclusions.

The National Observatory on Femicide: In Pakistan a standard database record should be kept that captures the relationship between the victim and the offender, possible indicators of honour-based abuse, online abuse of the victim, previous complaints, case progress and final legal decision. There should be sufficient privacy measures in place. Summary data that is accessible to the public could aid in prevention and assess how well the 2016 honor-crime reform is being implemented.

Awareness of the community and university. Digital safety programs should include education on: Respecting boundaries, safe bystander intervention, preserving digital evidence, and proper reporting procedures. They should also emphasize that social media is not an invitation to contact or meet a woman, or to share her personal life, even more so when it comes to engaging in intimate contact.

Conclusion

Guided by the selected cases, it is concluded that two clear paths have been taken in relation to lethal violence of female Tiktokers in Pakistan. In

honour cases, family members argued that they can control their female family members' use of the internet because of concerns they have for the reputation of the family. In some cases, there was cross-sector planning and a cover-up of liability as well. In a rejection-related case, an individual disregarded a woman's personal boundaries. Yet both routes involved the notion that boys/men should be in charge of girls/women's choices and punish them if they appear, come back down, wear out that skirt they chose to wear.

While the app TikTok does not have to take blame for these murders, it's simply not being ignored. This not only raises awareness and unwanted access, but it also can provide opportunities for the public to express and communicate. To address situations where online and family harassment, control, stalking and threats impact one another, institutions must recognize potential links among these behaviors. While the importance of early intervention with respect to preventing killings is paramount, there must be some form of punishment in civil law when a person has been killed. Any complaint should lead to a thorough risk assessment, preservation of digital evidence and actions that safeguards victims.

Declarations

Ethics approval: Not relevant. This study did not involve the use of direct interaction, human subjects or private records, but rather public domain secondary sources.

Ethical approval: Not applicable.

Funding: For this study, the authors did not receive any outside funding.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Data Accessibility: All sources used in analysis are cited and accessible in public.

REFERENCES

AFP. (2025, June 16). Teenage TikToker Sana's murder exposes society's misogyny. Dawn. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1917419>

- Al Jazeera. (2026, May 19). Pakistan sentences man to death for killing TikTok star Sana Yousaf.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/5/19/death-sentence-handed-to-man-for-killing-tiktok-star-sana-yousaf>
- Ali, T. S., Karmaliani, R., Khuwaja, H. M. A., Shah, N. Z., Wadani, Z. H., Aijaz, S., & Kulane, A. (2021). Intimate partner violence against women: A comprehensive depiction of Pakistani literature. *Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal*, 27(2), 183–194.
<https://doi.org/10.26719/emhj.20.107>
- Arab News. (2026, August 23). Pakistan police arrest father, other relatives over murder of TikTok star.
<https://www.arabnews.pk/node/2655580/pakistan>
- Associated Press. (2025, January 30). Pakistani man accused of killing U.S.-born daughter over TikTok videos appears in court.
<https://apnews.com/article/ed7cc124e52d328624979c4a42d21523>
- Associated Press. (2026, May 19). Pakistani court sentences man to death in teenage TikTok influencer's killing.
<https://apnews.com/article/e38db431aa4a3d780974481053bd1a93>
- Bhanbhro, S., Chavez, A. C., & Lusambili, A. (2016). Honour based violence as a global public health problem: A critical review of literature. *International Journal of Human Rights in Healthcare*, 9(3), 198–215.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/IJHRH-10-2015-0032>
- Dawn. (2024a, October 20). Karachi man held for murdering four female family members.
<https://www.dawn.com/news/1866339>
- Dawn. (2024b, November 1). Prime suspect records statement in Karachi quadruple murder case.
<https://www.dawn.com/news/1868969>
- Dawn. (2025a, January 30). Father kills girl over TikTok videos.
<https://www.dawn.com/news/1888565>
- Dawn. (2025b, July 9). Rawalpindi police arrest man for allegedly killing daughter over 'honour' after she refused to delete TikTok.
<https://www.dawn.com/news/1923052>
- Dawn. (2026a, August 23). Family members among five held in TikToker's murder case in Taxila.
<https://www.dawn.com/news/2024611>
- Digital Rights Foundation. (2023). Cyber Harassment Helpline annual report 2022.
<https://digitalrightsfoundation.pk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Cyber-Harassment-Helpline-Annual-Report-2022-1.pdf>
- Express Tribune. (2025, July 9). Man kills teen daughter over TikTok dispute.
<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2555003/man-kills-teen-daughter-over-tiktok-dispute>
- Express Tribune. (2026, June 21). Father, uncle get life sentences for honour killing.
<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2614315/father-uncle-get-life-sentences-for-honour-killing>
- Gill, A. K. (2009). 'Honour' killings and the quest for justice in black and minority ethnic communities in the United Kingdom. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 20(4), 475–494.
- Ministry of Human Rights, Government of Pakistan, & United Nations Development Programme Pakistan. (2026). National strategy on technology-facilitated gender-based violence 2025–2030.
https://pid.gov.pk/site/press_detail/32116
- Nasrullah, M., Haqqi, S., & Cummings, K. J. (2009). The epidemiological patterns of honour killing of women in Pakistan. *European Journal of Public Health*, 19(2), 193–197.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckp021>

Patel, S., & Gadit, A. M. (2008). Karo-kari: A form of honour killing in Pakistan. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 45(4), 683–694. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461508100790>

Punjab Commission on the Status of Women. (n.d.). Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offences in the Name or on the Pretext of Honour) Act, 2016. https://pcsw.punjab.gov.pk/criminal_law_honour_crimes

Reis, C., & Meyer, S. R. (2024). Understudied and underaddressed: Femicide, an extreme form of violence against women and girls. *PLoS Medicine*, 21(1), e1004336. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1004336>

Stark, E. (2007). *Coercive control: How men entrap women in personal life*. Oxford University Press.

UN Women. (2025, November 13). FAQs: Digital abuse, trolling, stalking, and other forms of technology-facilitated violence against women. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/faqs/digital-abuse-trolling-stalking-and-other-forms-of-technology-facilitated-violence-against-women>

United Nations Population Fund. (n.d.). Technology-facilitated gender-based violence. <https://www.unfpa.org/TFGBV>

Vandello, J. A., & Cohen, D. (2003). Male honor and female fidelity: Implicit cultural scripts that perpetuate domestic violence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(5), 997–1010. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.5.997>

