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4.11.4. Women perceived to have violated family honour

Following the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, this document has been reviewed and updated. Please consult 'Interim Country Guidance: Syria (2025)'

COMMON ANALYSIS
Last update: February 2023

COI summary

In Syria's patriarchal culture, the honour of a family is closely connected to the honour of women and girls in the family. This concept of honour is based on notions of female virginity before marriage and sexual fidelity while in wedlock. Rape and/or other forms of sexual abuse targeting women and girls is seen as bringing shame to the family and to the wider community. Therefore, survivors of sexual violence may face repercussions as described under 4.11.2. Violence against women and girls: overview. In addition, girls may be forced to marry the perpetrator or another man in an arrangement to cover up the 'dishonour' (see 4.11.3. Forced and child marriage). [Situation of women, 1.1.4, pp. 26-27, 1.2.2, pp. 31-32]

There is also a widespread assumption that women detainees have experienced sexual violence, which can be perceived by the family and the community as a stain on the victim's dignity and honour. This stigma can reportedly lead to social isolation, rejection from employment, divorce, disownment by the family and even 'honour' killing. [Situation of women, 1.2.10, p. 41]

Generally speaking, most cases of 'honour' killings are connected to sexual violence (but not necessarily rape) and are committed by family members of the victim. 'Honour' killings can be a reaction to street harassment or assault, to assumed sexual violence during abduction and even to an autonomous decision made by a girl concerning whom and when to marry. So-called 'honour' killings are also shared through social media to demonstrate the cleansing of the family's 'shame' [Situation of women, 1.1.3, pp. 23-24]. According to sources, there were indications that 'honour' killings increased after the outbreak of the crisis in 2011. However, the actual extent is not known, as there are no official statistics on 'honour' being used as a justification in cases of murder and assault. Furthermore, the investigation of 'honour' killings is often not a priority as it is considered a family matter and is reportedly rarely prosecuted. In May 2022, a source stated that 'honour' killings occur mainly in areas where tribes play an important role, such as in Sweida or north-eastern Syria, but are not limited to a specific ethnic group [Targeting 2022, 13.2.2, p. 111].

In March 2020, Legislative Decree No. 2 was issued, repealing Article 548 of the Penal Code, which was known as the 'mitigating circumstances'. Article 548 had treated honour killings as provoked offences or non-premeditated murder and therefore resulted in lower sentences in murder cases. However, it is reported that in many regions practice has not yet adapted to the change in law. In addition, other articles of the Penal Code allow judges to reduce the sentence if there are mitigating circumstances, such as the events that can

lead to an honour killing. [Targeting 2022, 13.2.2, p. 111]

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

‘Honour’ killings amount to persecution. When the repercussions of a perceived violation of family honour would normally not reach the level of persecution in themselves, such as rejection from employment, divorce, and disownment by the family, the individual assessment of whether they could amount to persecution should take into account the severity and/or repetitiveness of the acts or whether they occur as an accumulation of various measures.

What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: age, personal status, area of origin and residence, perception of traditional gender roles in the family or community, situation of the family, lack of documentation, etc.

Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile may be for reasons of membership of a particular social group. For example, women who have previously been subjected to sexual violence may be at risk of ‘honour’ crimes for reasons of membership in a particular social group, based on their common background which cannot be changed and their distinct identity, because they are perceived as being different by the surrounding society, due to the stigmatisation related to being a survivor of sexual violence.

See other topics concerning women and girls:

- 4.11.1. The situation of women in the Syrian society

- 4.11.2. Violence against women and girls: overview
- 4.11.3. Forced and child marriage
- *4.11.4. Women perceived to have violated family honour*
- 4.11.5. Single women and female-headed households

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