

What is honour?

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Honour is important for each individual regardless of cultural background or time, yet depending on culture and background it can carry different means of expressing itself. Inner qualities like, reputation, self-image and moral identity are usually correlated with honour (Salmenkangas 2006). However, the prerequisites to attain honour are different in various cultures.

It seems that dignity is the cultural ideal in western societies. An individual is seen as equal to every other person and possesses intrinsic human worth, which cannot be added or deducted by other individuals. This sense of dignity is what guides the person to make decisions based on the internal standards, regardless of the surroundings. (Ijzerman and Cohen 2011: 458). Therefore, honour consists of inherent traits and not of what other people say or do.

However, in patriarchal cultures honour refers to how an individual sees his or her self-worth, but also how the surrounding society sees it. The individual must earn self-worth through correct behaviour, which is outlined by the societal norms. (Ijzerman and Cohen 2011: 458). Honour is intrinsically connected to the norms of behaviour for both, men and women. Honour is also based on the understanding of ownership and control of women's bodies. Even more than laws, social norms significantly regulate women's lives. (Sen in Welchman and Hossain (eds) 2005: 48). Female chastity, loyalty to family, high social esteem and defence of reputation are imperative in honour cultures. An honourable man is expected to defend his and his family's reputation, even if violence is needed and an honourable woman obeys the appropriate behaviour expected of her. (Ijzerman and Cohen 2011:458).

Below is a schema of how honour is gained, lost and recovered (Sen in Welchman and Hossain (eds) 2005: 47).

Taulukko 1. Schema of honour and dishonour dynamics

<p>Honour Vested in person (including conjugal honour) family, tribe, clan, community, collective.</p>
<p>Actions that can bring dishonour</p>

Associating with male friends, having a boyfriend, attending college or going to work without permission, violating dress codes, choosing one's own marriage partner, and so on.

Actions that reclaim honour

Honour can be restituted through either the modification of the transgressor's behaviour (eg a forced marriage) or erasure of the carrier of the dishonour (killing).

Women's behaviour that upholds honour

Modest sexual behaviour, fidelity in marriage, no pre- or extramarital relationships with men, no unchaperoned rendezvous with men outside the family, meeting motherly obligations to children, meeting wifely obligations to her husband, meeting daughter's obligations to parents, meeting daughter-in-law obligations to parents-in-law, and so on.

In order to approach conflicts and violent behaviour holistically, it is crucial to understand what is honour and how does it guide people. When doing conflict resolution and preventive work, understanding this also helps to include not only the young person in a difficult situation, which is usually the case, but also the family and possibly the community.

References

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