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When Dishonor becomes Lethal: Comparing Traditional, Digital and Non-Sexual Trigger Pathways in Honor Killing

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ABSTRAK

Honor killing has often been explained through allegations of disgrace, although a reported grievance and the account supplied after a killing are not equivalent forms of evidence. This critical integrative review examined marriage-related disputes, digitally mediated disclosure and grievances without an explicit sexual component. Published perpetrator interviews, media-based studies and documentary accounts enabled qualitative comparison, but differed in whether a pre-death event, reputational attribution and subsequent threat could be traced. Records concerning Banaz Mahmod established warnings before a completed homicide. Reporting on a TikTok-related killing in Pakistan illustrated weaker attribution based on police statements after death. The disputed death of Seeta Kaur exposed the risk of treating an alleged non-sexual honor killing as confirmed. The comparison identified distinct documentary configurations rather than three exclusive causal pathways. Neither digital exposure nor a non-sexual grievance could be assigned an independent effect on lethality. Separating events, attributions and retrospective justifications provided a more defensible basis for comparative homicide research.

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PENDAHULUAN

In honor killing research, the event said to have provoked a killing is often known through the account of the person accused of committing it. A suspected relationship may appear in a police statement as both a prior occurrence and an explanation for murder. Those statements carry different evidential weight. Independent material can establish that a disagreement occurred without proving that the accused regarded it as a reputational offence. A confession, in turn, may describe dishonor without confirming the alleged conduct. The perpetrator interviews examined by Doğan make motives and social relations accessible, yet they also illustrate why a narrated motive should not be mistaken for an independently observed sequence. Comparative studies have seldom kept these levels of evidence apart consistently (Doğan, 2014a; Doğan, 2014b; Doğan, 2016; Doğan, 2019; Ne'eman-Haviv, 2021).

Sexual regulation occupies a prominent place in the literature. Accounts of suspected infidelity and marital choice recur in research from South Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean. D'Lima and colleagues examined 200 cases reported by English-language media in India and Pakistan. Their case definition included an intention to kill even when a victim survived, so the material cannot be presented as 200 completed homicides. It documents allegations reported in the press rather than the population frequency of particular fatal triggers. The recurring emphasis on sexual conduct warrants scrutiny, especially where an account provides no independent basis for distinguishing an accusation from the conduct attributed to the victim (AlQahtani et al., 2023; D'Lima et al., 2020; Kulczycki & Windle, 2011; Patel & Gadit, 2008). Media visibility and case inclusion affect the categories that emerge.

Digital visibility has complicated the circulation of such allegations. Qandeel Baloch's murder in Pakistan attracted scholarship on her public presence, agency and the gendered judgement attached to

social media. Shroff and Alam offer different readings of that visibility, but neither study isolates a causal effect of platform use on the probability of murder. Material shared online may reach relatives who would otherwise remain unaware of it. Sometimes a device becomes part of surveillance, while public discussion develops only after the killing. Scholarship on digital abuse helps identify those distinctions, although its findings on nonfatal harm cannot establish a lethal sequence (Alam, 2020; McGlynn et al., 2021; Rackley et al., 2021; Shroff, 2021). What matters for the homicide question is an evidenced link between the online episode and conduct undertaken before the victim was killed.

The label honor killing is itself contested. A study of Canadian news coverage by Shier and Shor found differences between reporting on cases called honor killings and cases described as family murders. Other scholarship questions the tendency to locate family violence within supposedly fixed cultural traditions. The criticism does not make reputation irrelevant. It means the label requires evidence about what actors believed and did before death, rather than relying on an ethnicity, a media description or a statement after arrest. Interpretive caution is particularly warranted when sources omit the broader history of violence within a household (Abu-Lughod, 2011; Akpınar, 2003; Gill & Brah, 2014; Shier & Shor, 2016).

Reputation operates through social relationships rather than through a self-executing rule. Aksoy and Szekely's model links honor enforcement to incentives faced by families and to the conditions under which communal expectations matter. Social psychology relates honor to standing, while a comparison of siri' highlights local variation in collective dignity (Kadir, 2026h). Retaliation studies likewise connect affronts to status. None of these studies implies that a relative's private embarrassment will necessarily culminate in collective punishment. The empirical question is whether a reputational claim was communicated, whether another actor endorsed it and whether any sanction was demanded before the homicide (Aksoy & Szekely, 2025; Benard & Doan, 2020; Cross et al., 2014; Thrasher & Handfield, 2018; Uskul & Cross, 2019).

Agency studies in England and Wales complicate the familiar image of one male relative punishing a young woman. Bates identified different perpetrator configurations in a large set of recorded honor-based abuse cases. Research on female participation and male victims adds further variation, although it mainly concerns abuse rather than completed homicide. The distinction matters. Patterns observed in safeguarding files may offer plausible contexts for lethal events, but they cannot establish the frequency of those contexts among murders. A comparison of homicide pathways must give greater weight to studies that actually document deaths and the circumstances preceding them (Aplin, 2017; Bafouni et al., 2025; Bates, 2018; Bates, 2021; Idriss, 2022; Ridley et al., 2023; Ritchie et al., 2026; Roper et al., 2026).

Attitudes towards honor violence are better documented than immediate homicide triggers. Eisner and Ghuneim investigated approval of honor killing among adolescents in Amman, while other studies relate honor values to social expectations, identity and violence-related judgements. Work using demographic data from Pakistan addresses a different level of explanation again. These findings help establish why certain beliefs may be socially available. They do not tell us which incident activated a particular offender, what the offender knew or whether the killing was planned. Treating background attitudes as triggering events would move across levels of analysis without evidence (Beller et al., 2021; Brown et al., 2018; Campbell et al., 2025; Eisner & Ghuneim, 2013; Travaglino et al., 2024).

The literature remains uneven in distinguishing what occurred before death from the risk conditions surrounding a family and the explanations offered after the offence. Sexual regulation, digital disclosure and grievances unrelated to sexuality also operate at different analytical levels. The first concerns a regulated form of conduct, the second a channel of information and the third the content of a different dispute. Their overlap is consequently part of the inquiry rather than a problem to be concealed by exclusive classification. What triggering events are documented in honor killing cases, and how reliably can they be distinguished from broader risk factors and post-homicide justifications? How do traditional, digitally mediated and non-sexual triggers differ in their reputational attribution and escalation mechanisms? An adequate answer requires attention to both documented contrasts and the limits of the surviving records (Aksoy & Szekely, 2025; D'Lima et al., 2020; Khan & Morris, 2026; Ne'eman-Haviv, 2021).

RESEARCH METHODS

A critical integrative literature review was used for a qualitative comparison of documented grievances and reputational processes. Integrative reviews permit conceptual synthesis across studies whose designs and units of analysis differ, provided those differences are retained in interpretation (Snyder, 2019; Torraco, 2016; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). Studies of completed homicide were the primary source for claims about events preceding death. Research on nonfatal honor-based abuse, normative attitudes and digital coercion supplied contextual insight, not additional homicide cases. Selected official records and reputable contemporaneous reporting were considered where they could clarify an illustrative chronology or expose a contested classification. The review is purposive rather than systematic. It does not represent an exhaustive evidence corpus, an incident-level sample or a basis for estimates of incidence or causal effects.

The literature was located through targeted scholarly queries, journal and publisher pages, bibliographic records, and the reference lists of relevant studies. Search combinations included honor or honor killing, homicide, triggering event, reputation, accusation, social media, family dispute and escalation. Publications from 2000 through November 2026 were prioritised, alongside earlier conceptual works with direct relevance. Preference was given to sources identifying an event, a reputational interpretation, or conduct preceding a death. Sources whose principal outcome was nonfatal abuse remained eligible only for conceptual comparison. The selected publications were assessed for direct relevance and the provenance of particular assertions. No exhaustive screening counts, population denominator or inter-reviewer agreement estimates were available, and none are asserted here (D'Lima et al., 2020; Gale et al., 2013; Ne'eman-Haviv, 2021; Snyder, 2019; Torraco, 2016; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005).

Claims were distinguished according to when and by whom they were made. A documented antecedent required evidence that an event or allegation was described as occurring before death. An offender's claim that the victim had violated a rule did not establish that the alleged conduct occurred. Longer-standing coercion and normative attitudes were regarded as contextual conditions unless a dated incident could be identified. Explanations first recorded after death were classified as retrospective accounts. Media reports, offender interviews, judicial findings and institutional documents retained their different evidentiary status. Conflicting versions were not combined into a single chronology merely because they referred to one victim (Doğan, 2016; D'Lima et al., 2020; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Shier & Shor, 2016).

A structured thematic comparison considered the reported dispute, its timing, the person attributing dishonor, the channel of disclosure and any documented threats or mobilisation. The source type and unresolved claims were noted for the illustrative records discussed below. These dimensions draw on familiar qualitative framework analysis, rather than a new analytical method (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gale et al., 2013; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Relational disputes, explicitly non-sexual grievances and digital involvement were not coded as mutually exclusive categories. The available literature did not permit a reproducible census of unique homicide cases, so case counts and inferential comparisons were not attempted. Table 2 compares selected records to clarify what each supports and what it leaves unresolved.

Evidence was assessed against the claim it was used to support. A contemporaneous warning can establish knowledge of a threat before death, but cannot by itself establish the offender's motive. Retrospective police statements may identify a suspected grievance without proving the underlying incident. When an alleged death was not officially confirmed as homicide, it served as a classification boundary rather than an observation of a completed killing. The comparison accordingly concerns reported sequences and their documentation. It does not estimate which pathway carries greater lethal risk. Uneven national coverage, multiple publications derived from one statement and missing pre-death records remain material limitations (D'Lima et al., 2020; Gill & Brah, 2014; Shier & Shor, 2016; Snyder, 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Events, Allegations and the Problem of Evidentiary Confidence

Doğan's interviews with imprisoned perpetrators in Turkey offer unusually detailed accounts of remembered conflicts, family relations and justifications. Their value is interpretative. The stories are necessarily retrospective and may be shaped by self-presentation. D'Lima and colleagues use a different

evidentiary base, assembling 200 media-reported cases in India and Pakistan that included attempted killings where the victim survived. Their material illustrates how disputes over marriage and alleged misconduct are publicly described, but not how often those events occur among all completed homicides. Neither study independently verifies every accusation or reconstructs an identical sequence for every incident (Doğan, 2014a; Doğan, 2014b; Doğan, 2016; D'Lima et al., 2020). The two sources cannot therefore be pooled as a homicide case series.

The word motive can conceal more than it explains. A man may report longstanding family dishonor after a killing without identifying a recent event that changed his conduct. A newspaper may identify adultery as the cause while providing no evidence that the alleged relationship occurred. Both texts record a claim. Only a documented sequence can connect that claim to an incident before death. No appeal to honor should remove the ordinary need for temporal evidence (Doğan, 2014b; Doğan, 2016; Shier & Shor, 2016). Judicial narratives can compress years of disagreement into one apparently decisive provocation, leaving its connection to lethal action unresolved (Kadir, 2026d). Recording that gap is more defensible than choosing an incident for explanatory effect.

Disputes over marriage are described repeatedly, yet their classification is less simple than it first appears. Refusing a proposed marriage is an observable decision if adequately documented. A family's judgement that the refusal disgraced them is a separate claim, and the presence of threats still requires its own evidence. Studies of forced marriage and migration show how regulation of intimate choice can intersect with coercion. They do not make every refusal an independent non-sexual trigger. Marriage regulation commonly carries assumptions about sexual autonomy, so coding should preserve the expressed accusation alongside the researcher's description of its content (Baxi et al., 2006; Chaudhuri et al., 2014; Idriss, 2022).

Accusations demand care because their circulation may matter more to an alleged enforcer than their factual accuracy. A claim of infidelity may be fabricated, mistaken or used to maintain control, as documentary accounts of honor violence also make clear (Singh & Bhandari, 2021). If a source records that an allegation reached a relative before the death, the supported fact is its reported transmission, not the victim's conduct. Doğan's interviews can reveal how participants gave meaning to an allegation, while media accounts may preserve only a later police description (Doğan, 2014b; Doğan, 2016; D'Lima et al., 2020). Treating both as equivalent proof of dishonor would reproduce the offender's judgement. The credibility of the allegation, the existence of its communication and its causal significance must be assessed separately (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; McGlynn et al., 2021).

A case may contain several moments that look like the trigger. The first challenge to family authority may precede death by months, whereas a later dispute over living arrangements may coincide with a new threat. D'Lima and colleagues note that killings in their media material sometimes occurred long after the reported triggering event. A short interval between two events consequently cannot be assumed, nor can the last reported disagreement automatically be treated as the decisive cause. What the record permits is a chronology with uncertain causal links (D'Lima et al., 2020; Ne'eman-Haviv, 2021; Patel & Gadit, 2008).

Research on honor-based abuse broadens the range of demands that may lead to punitive control. These demands need not take the form of an explicit accusation of sexual misconduct. Most of the relevant studies, however, examine nonfatal abuse, forced marriage or safeguarding rather than completed homicide. Their findings justify looking for a wider set of grievances without establishing how frequently such grievances preceded a death (Bafouni et al., 2025; Bates, 2018; Bates, 2021; Idriss, 2022; Ridley et al., 2023). Van Baak and colleagues offer a homicide-specific account of variation among victims in the United States, but variation in victim profiles does not itself identify a trigger or demonstrate a distinct escalation process (van Baak et al., 2024).

The timing of a justification provides a useful evidentiary check. Honor invoked after arrest may describe an earlier belief, yet scholarship on cultural defence cautions against allowing a legal explanation to substitute for evidence of a preceding event (Kadir, 2026f). Press accounts create a further complication when they apply a familiar label to conduct that the accused described differently. An independent complaint or threat recorded before death would strengthen the temporal connection. Without such material, the explanation remains a reported claim rather than a demonstrated motive (Abu-Lughod, 2011; Gill & Brah, 2014; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Shier & Shor, 2016).

Table 1 Reported antecedents, documentary anchors and evidentiary limits

Reported antecedent	Illustrative evidence	Evidentiary constraint
Marriage or relationship dispute	Perpetrator interviews (Doğan, 2016) and pre-death warnings in the Banaz Mahmod case (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2015)	A reported grievance does not prove wider family endorsement
Sexual-misconduct allegation	Perpetrator and press-based accounts (Doğan, 2014b; Doğan, 2016; D'Lima et al., 2020)	Transmission of an allegation does not verify the conduct
Digitally mediated dispute	Qandeel Baloch scholarship (Shroff, 2021) and police-reported Quetta case (Reuters, 2025)	Platform visibility does not establish pre-death knowledge or causal effect
Allegedly non-sexual grievance	Seeta Kaur child-custody dispute discussed in an official report (Monckton-Smith et al., 2022)	Her death was not officially confirmed as murder (UK Parliament, 2017)
Threat or coercive control	Banaz Mahmod warnings before death (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2015) and nonfatal abuse studies (Bates, 2021; Ridley et al., 2023)	Ongoing risk may not identify the decisive triggering event
Honor justification after death	Retrospective offender accounts (Doğan, 2016) and police-reported suspect explanation (Reuters, 2025)	A later motive statement cannot independently verify a pre-death event

Normative Attribution and the Social Reach of a Grievance

The reputation of a family member may become consequential when another person treats an act as a collective affront. Aksoy and Szekely explain the circumstances in which relatives may anticipate social costs, but the model does not justify inferring community pressure from cultural affiliation alone (Aksoy & Szekely, 2025). The murder of Banaz Mahmod provides a more concrete distinction. Before her death in London in 2006, she had repeatedly reported threats to police. An official inspection subsequently documented these contacts and failures in the response (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2015). Those records establish that danger was communicated before the homicide. They do not demonstrate that all neighbours or relatives endorsed the killing, nor should an offender's later account substitute for that missing evidence.

An accusation does not need a large audience to acquire force. Within a household, its disclosure may change expectations about what others must do. Psychological scholarship and a conceptual account of Bugis-Makassar siri' both describe standing as shared, though the local terms of that sharing differ (Mappaselleng & Kadir, 2025). Yet a narrator's claim that the neighbourhood was watching does not prove that neighbours intervened. The names, messages and demands in a case record matter more than a broad cultural description (Cross et al., 2014; Doğan, 2019; Khatib et al., 2019; Travaglino et al., 2024; Uskul & Cross, 2019). Evidence of a conversation is sufficient to establish a channel, but not to prove that the rumour circulated outside it.

Research on status and blood feuds offers a comparison while cautioning against treating collective violence as a single mechanism (Kadir, 2026b). Such work describes how an affront may create expectations of response when a person's standing is at stake. Honor killing differs because the alleged wrongdoer may be a relative whose choices are controlled by other family members. The reputational cost is therefore often attributed to people who did not undertake the disputed action. How that transfer of responsibility occurred should be established rather than assumed (Benard & Doan, 2020; Brown et al., 2018; Thrasher & Handfield, 2018). Its explanatory value is strongest when the affected family relationships are described rather than inferred from the killing alone.

A perpetrator may describe strong community expectations where the documentary record instead reveals a prolonged private struggle over control. Both explanations could be relevant, but they are not interchangeable. Coercive behaviour within a relationship can develop without public discussion, while concern about public judgement may be invoked to legitimate the violence afterward. The category of reputational enforcement is strongest when independent sources describe who communicated demands before death and how the offender responded (Aksoy & Szekely, 2025; Doğan, 2019; Gill & Brah, 2014). One family member may later speak in the name of relatives who were absent from the dispute. That account cannot establish their consent. If an earlier warning names only the accused, the narrower observation should prevail, however plausible the wider account seems from the family's social setting.

Banaz Mahmod's contacts with police illustrate why institutional records belong within a chronology of escalation. The warnings were made before the murder and were examined in a later official inspection (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2015). They can therefore corroborate an earlier threat without relying entirely on the killers' explanations. A recorded failure to protect a victim is analytically different from proof that the last police encounter precipitated the homicide. Research on reporting and institutional responses to honor-based abuse confirms the importance of taking threats seriously, but cannot identify a universal causal sequence (Akpınar, 2003; Alizadeh et al., 2011; Carbin, 2014; Mulvihill et al., 2019). The relationship between a grievance, a threatened sanction and the eventual offence must remain case-specific.

No single model of family participation survives every case. Bates describes partner-led, family-led and mixed configurations among reported abuse cases, while Aplin and other researchers examine women's varied participation in enforcing control. In homicide, the person making an allegation may differ from the killer. A role-based legal analysis likewise separates instigation from execution without presuming culpability from family membership (Kadir, 2026g). This is a substantive question for documentation, not a detail that can be settled through a generic statement about patriarchy (Aplin, 2017; Aplin, 2022; Bates, 2018; Bates, 2021). Even where several people were involved, the level of agreement among them should remain a question, not an assumption.

Digital Mediation without Digital Determinism

Digital involvement is meaningful only when its place in the chronology can be identified. Shroff's study of Qandeel Baloch examines public visibility and gendered moral judgement before her murder, but it cannot isolate the causal contribution of a platform (Shroff, 2021). A more recent example comes from Quetta in January 2025. Police reported that a father suspected of killing his daughter objected to her TikTok activity and later admitted responsibility after initially blaming an unidentified attacker (Reuters, 2025). The reporting connects a digital dispute to the police account of the offence. It does not supply independently dated evidence of the father's discovery, the family deliberations or a complete escalation sequence. A police allegation remains a police allegation.

Digital material can persist where a spoken accusation would fade. Images may be forwarded, stored and repeatedly shown to different people. Work on image-based sexual abuse documents the harms associated with the circulation of intimate material. Those mechanisms can inform questions asked of homicide accounts, though the populations and outcomes are different. The relevant proposition is modest. Digital media may alter the speed and durability of an accusation, while the move from alleged disgrace to lethal violence still requires separate explanation (McGlynn et al., 2021; Rackley et al., 2021). Persistence is an affordance of the medium, whereas its reputational importance depends on how the material was used.

A threatening message may itself alter the development of a conflict. In cases of blackmail, a threatened release of material can produce coercion even if the material is never distributed. The relevant event may therefore be the threat, rather than an alleged sexual act depicted in an image. Monitoring, contact with relatives and subsequent threats require separate documentary support. Online-abuse studies establish the relevance of these practices to coercion but cannot resolve their role in completed honor killings (McGlynn et al., 2021; Rackley et al., 2021; Shroff, 2021). Where no evidence links the threat to an actor involved in the killing, digital mediation remains a possible explanation rather than an established pathway.

Authenticity presents a different problem. A cropped screenshot can circulate as evidence of conduct without proving the accusation. Recipients may still treat it as genuine. Accepting that interpretation as fact would reproduce the alleged enforcer's judgement. Three distinctions matter here.

The digital item may exist, its provenance may or may not be established, and the meaning attributed to it may have little relation to its authenticity. Where the original file or communication history is unavailable, a false allegation and the event it purportedly depicts must remain analytically separate (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; McGlynn et al., 2021).

A distinction between pre-death exposure and later publicity is indispensable. Qandeel Baloch's online presence preceded her murder, making mediated visibility part of the historical setting described by Shroff (Shroff, 2021). The intensity of the attention following her death, by contrast, cannot be projected backwards as proof of what the killer saw or feared. The Quetta report is closer to a stated conflict about digital activity, yet the available account of motive principally comes from police after the event (Reuters, 2025). Both examples point to reputational disputes involving technology, although neither permits estimation of a digital effect on lethality. Timing and source independence remain decisive.

Digital scrutiny is also gendered in ways that do not necessarily involve a homicide. Research on online abuse makes clear that women can be exposed to unwanted attention and reputational attacks. The leap from that broader finding to an honor killing mechanism remains untested in most sources. Treating every online controversy as a precursor to murder would make the category too broad. Only records linking an identifiable digital episode to subsequent threats or punishment should inform a homicide-specific pathway (McGlynn et al., 2021; Rackley et al., 2021). The relevant studies identify exposure to harm rather than a homicide rate attributable to those forms of online attention.

One homicide can be both a conventional sexual-norm conflict and digitally mediated. A family might interpret a relationship as misconduct only after seeing an online photograph. Calling the case digital does not remove the sexual allegation, and calling it traditional does not erase the means of discovery. The difference lies in the process by which a claim came to be known. Research that forces the case into one exclusive group could mistake an administrative classification for a genuine difference in mechanisms (D'Lima et al., 2020; Gale et al., 2013; Shroff, 2021).

Non-Sexual Grievances and Difficult Boundaries

Non-sexual grievances require affirmative evidence rather than an absence of sexual language in a report, a difficulty already noted in reviews of honor-based violence (Mayeda & Vijaykumar, 2016). Seeta Kaur's death in India in 2015 illustrates why the threshold matters. A Home Office-commissioned study discusses her alleged refusal to relinquish a son to a childless brother-in-law as a grievance linked to honor (Monckton-Smith et al., 2022). Her family also described the death as suspicious. The UK government's published answer stated that Indian police had not been able to confirm murder because of insufficient evidence (UK Parliament, 2017). This is evidence that a non-sexual grievance has been advanced in an alleged honor-related death, not a verified instance of non-sexual honor killing. A confirmed fatal outcome and a demonstrated honor motive cannot be inferred from the allegation.

The reported Kaur dispute concerned family authority and child custody rather than an explicit sexual allegation. Its description makes the conceptual boundary visible, but the official uncertainty over the death prevents it from establishing a homicide pathway (Monckton-Smith et al., 2022; UK Parliament, 2017). Studies of male victims and atypical honor-based abuse similarly show that a narrow focus on women's sexual behaviour may exclude other forms of coercion (Idriss, 2022; Ritchie et al., 2026; Roper et al., 2026). They do not remedy the missing evidence about Kaur's cause of death or the prevalence of non-sexual triggers in completed killings. The category is therefore necessary for careful comparison and remains empirically underdetermined.

The boundary with intimate partner homicide is especially difficult. A partner may use the language of respect to justify punishment after a breakup, even where the record points mainly to jealousy or possessive control. Judicial classification work distinguishes honor killing from intimate partner femicide without relying on labels alone (Kadir, 2026i). Cases involving wider family approval require evidence of that approval, and cases without it should not be forced into a collective-enforcement model. The source of a reputational interpretation needs to be traceable (Abu-Lughod, 2011; Gill & Brah, 2014; Shier & Shor, 2016). A clear expression of jealousy alone cannot establish a socially shared sanction for a supposed breach of honor.

Property and custody disputes can threaten family authority without becoming honor killing. The question is whether the dispute was connected to a reputational sanction before the death and whether homicide was independently established. Kaur's reported refusal to transfer care of her son illustrates

an asserted link to family honor, but the death remains contested (Monckton-Smith et al., 2022; UK Parliament, 2017). Economic motives can also coexist with sexual or marital allegations. Comparative work on dowry killing cautions against merging material demands and honor-based rationales simply because both occur within families (Kadir, 2026e). Identifying a grievance is a beginning, not a substitute for classification.

The position of women as participants rather than victims also complicates simple categories. Aplin's work and studies of family involvement show that enforcement roles may arise from coercion, affiliation or active collaboration. An account of a woman's involvement does not automatically establish her decision-making power. More importantly, it cannot identify the trigger without information about the dispute that preceded violence. Gender and role belong to the social organisation of an incident, while the trigger remains a separate evidentiary question (Aplin, 2017; Aplin, 2022; Bates, 2018). The social position of a participant also changes over time. Someone who initially mediated a dispute could later communicate a threat, and the available record may not identify whether the change was voluntary. Treating involvement as a fixed personality trait would obscure what the source actually describes about the sequence.

Jurisdictions differ in what becomes visible to researchers. Some cases reach courts or public media under a specific offence label, while others are described as family murder. Shier and Shor's Canadian media comparison shows why those labels deserve independent scrutiny. Cross-national evidence may therefore contain different types of records even before real differences in conduct are considered. Apparent scarcity of non-sexual triggers could reflect classification and reporting, although that explanation cannot be confirmed without stronger data (Abuarrah, 2025; Campbell et al., 2025; Shier & Shor, 2016). Comparative interpretation must therefore separate differences in recording practices from differences in the events experienced by victims.

What Varies Across Pathways

The clearest documentary contrast is between a recorded pre-death warning and a retrospective explanation. Banaz Mahmod's complaints demonstrate that threats could be identified before her killing (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2015). The Quetta case supplies a police-reported objection to digital activity, but an independently corroborated sequence of discovery and escalation is not available from the cited report (Reuters, 2025). Kaur's reported dispute concerns a non-sexual family demand, while the status of her death as homicide remains unconfirmed (Monckton-Smith et al., 2022; UK Parliament, 2017). These accounts therefore differ both in the substance and transmission of the alleged grievance and in the quality of the evidence. Table 2 compares what is established, alleged or unresolved. It does not treat the cases as representative samples of three exclusive homicide types.

Table 2 Source-anchored comparison across intersecting grievance dimensions

Dimension	Conventional marital conflict	Digital mediation	Allegedly non-sexual demand
Illustrative record	Banaz Mahmod, London (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2015)	Qandeel Baloch (Shroff, 2021) and Quetta killing (Reuters, 2025)	Seeta Kaur, India (Monckton-Smith et al., 2022; UK Parliament, 2017)
Documented status	Completed murder with earlier police warnings	Baloch murder interpreted in scholarship. Quetta police reported a suspected TikTok grievance	Death and child-custody dispute reported. Murder not confirmed
Timing of evidence	Threat reports predated the murder	Online visibility predated Baloch murder. Quetta attribution reported after death	Grievance described retrospectively by family and in reports

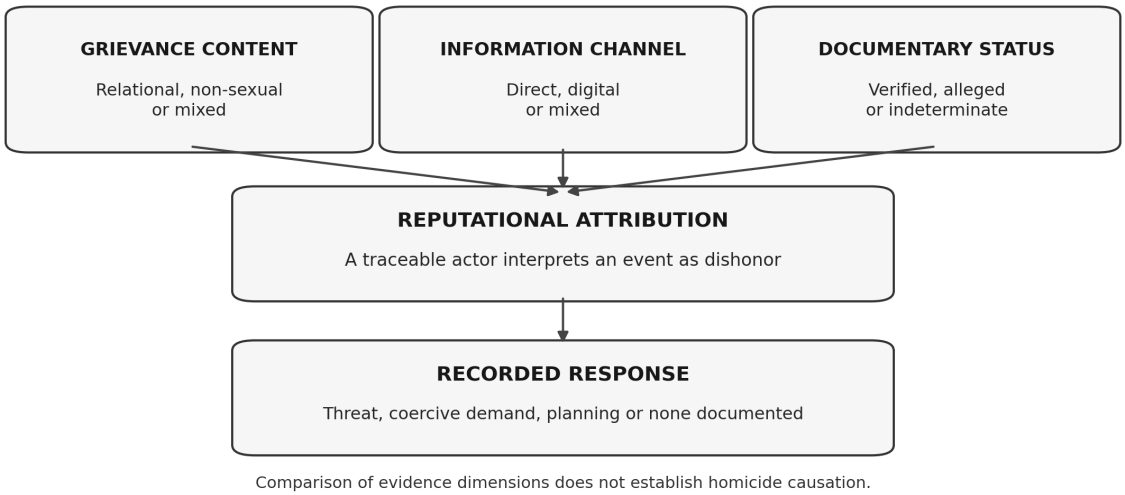
Dimension	Conventional marital conflict	Digital mediation	Allegedly non-sexual demand
Attribution and response	Victim reported threats from family	Gendered public judgement in Baloch case. Suspect objection alleged in Quetta	Family honor invoked in explanations of the custody conflict
Permitted inference	Pre-death threats are independently documented	Digital content can enter a reported grievance. No independent lethal effect established	A non-sexual allegation merits inquiry, not classification as confirmed homicide
Main evidentiary limit	Wider audience involvement requires case-specific proof	Platform access and intermediate escalation are not fully reconstructed	Fatal classification and motive remain unresolved

Reputational attribution is most observable where someone makes a dated demand or threat. The warnings preceding Banaz Mahmod's murder provide stronger temporal evidence of escalating danger than general claims that the family was ashamed (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2015). In the Quetta reporting, objections to social media were attributed to the suspect by police after the killing (Reuters, 2025). No equivalent record of pre-death communications was available in the reviewed account. The difference concerns what can be established, not proof that one form of conflict necessarily escalates faster than another. Digital visibility can expand an audience, but the number of viewers is not itself evidence of an honor sanction (Aksoy & Szekely, 2025; Shroff, 2021; Uskul & Cross, 2019).

The comparison also exposes a shared feature of accounts that otherwise appear different. Family control may precede both a relational dispute and a disagreement about obedience, while the information prompting that control may travel online or through direct conversation. Studies of nonfatal honor-based abuse document threats and restrictions, and Khan and Morris offer a model of perpetration organised around control, punishment and protection (Bates, 2021; Khan & Morris, 2026; Ridley et al., 2023). Neither provides a common homicide timeline for the three categories. Kaur's disputed death particularly resists inclusion in such a timeline (Monckton-Smith et al., 2022; UK Parliament, 2017). A plausible mechanism should be treated as a hypothesis when its final lethal outcome or intermediate actions cannot be independently substantiated.

Temporal proximity is a poor substitute for evidence of escalation. The presence of digital content before death establishes an opportunity for discovery, not necessarily that an accused person accessed it. A documented warning may be more informative than an apparently dramatic final dispute. Banaz Mahmod's earlier complaints make such threats traceable (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2015). Reports about Qandeel Baloch and the Quetta killing instead foreground visibility and an asserted objection, with uneven access to contemporaneous family communications (Reuters, 2025; Shroff, 2021). These differences do not support a ranking of risk. They show why a comparison of reputational processes must remain sensitive to documentary timing and the source of every allegation.

An evidentiary distinction also separates observed audience participation from an imagined audience. A documented demand by relatives gives stronger grounds for discussing social enforcement than an offender's statement that everyone would mock the family. Research on honor norms makes both possibilities theoretically plausible, but their status in a case differs. A doctrinal comparison with religious vigilantism also identifies the danger of treating alleged communal approval as evidence of actual mobilisation (Kadir, 2026a). Without that separation, a strategic justification may be mistaken for community pressure (Aksoy & Szekely, 2025; Benard & Doan, 2020; Doğan, 2019).



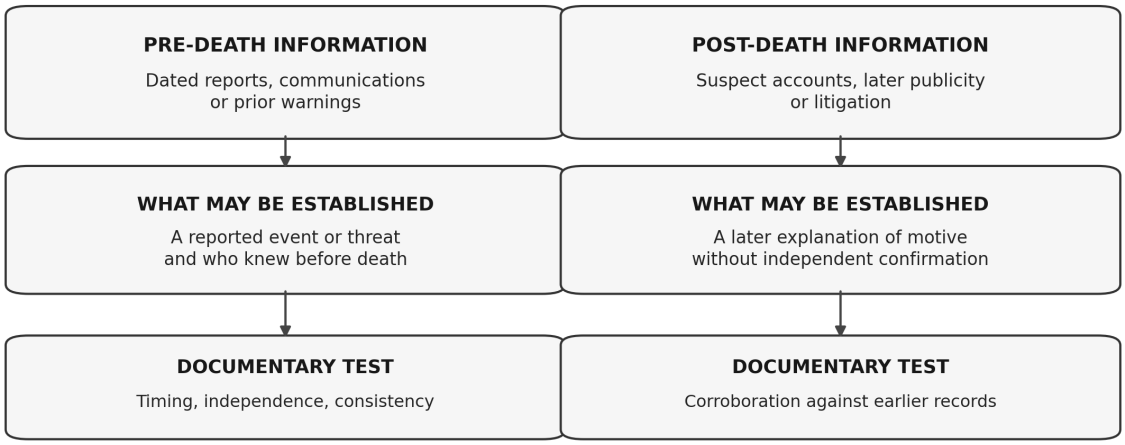
Picture 1 Dimensions of grievance, transmission and reputational attribution

A claim about digital discovery requires more than proof that an online post existed. The record must identify who knew of the material before death and whether that knowledge elicited any action. The Quetta account attributes an objection to the suspect, but the cited reporting does not reproduce an independent pre-death communication (Reuters, 2025). Equally, an allegation linked to a death that has not been confirmed as homicide cannot establish an escalation pathway, as the Kaur case makes plain (UK Parliament, 2017). Picture 1 distinguishes the dimensions of the dispute. Picture 2 sets out the separate evidentiary status of information recorded before and after death.

Limits of the Evidence and Implications for Homicide Research

The principal limitation of available evidence is not the number of possible motives but the incomplete link between accounts and deaths. Doğan's interviews preserve offenders' recollections, D'Lima and colleagues provide a press-based collection including attempts, and public documents illuminate selected incidents (Doğan, 2016; D'Lima et al., 2020; Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2015; Monckton-Smith et al., 2022; Reuters, 2025; UK Parliament, 2017). Their units of observation differ substantially. Combining them into a numerical case series would create false precision. It remains possible to compare how accusations are attributed and what the documents omit, provided the comparison does not become an estimate of prevalence or a test of causal differences.

Two independent claims must be distinguished. An event may be documented before death without evidence that the offender interpreted it as dishonoring. A dishonor justification may also be recorded without proof that the alleged event occurred. Scholarship on judicial reason-giving cautions against treating a stated motive as corroboration (Kadir, 2026c). The evidentiary distinction depends on when information was recorded and whether independent sources support it (Picture 2). Neither chronology nor corroboration, taken alone, is a validated predictor of lethal violence (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Ne'eman-Haviv, 2021; Shier & Shor, 2016).



Picture 2 Evidence concerning events before and after homicide

A quantitative comparison of lethality would require a defined population of incidents and comparable observations of each relevant antecedent. The reviewed literature does not provide that denominator. Media coverage varies across countries, and several articles can repeat one original statement. Aksoy and Szekely contribute a sophisticated account of normative enforcement, including homicide data, but their design does not provide matched observations for the three overlapping dimensions used here (Aksoy & Szekely, 2025). The evidence therefore supports source-sensitive interpretations of information transmission and possible sanctioning, rather than estimates of the impact of digital exposure or non-sexual conflict (Campbell et al., 2025; D'Lima et al., 2020; Shier & Shor, 2016).

Evidence of variation is strongest at the level of documented grievances and information channels. A recorded threat in a completed homicide, a post-offence police account of a digital objection and a disputed death linked to a child-custody demand cannot bear equal explanatory weight (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2015; Monckton-Smith et al., 2022; Reuters, 2025; UK Parliament, 2017). They should not be forced into three measured causal types. The heterogeneity proposition survives in a narrower form. Events described as dishonor differ in content and documentary trajectory, whereas evidence for distinct lethal escalation mechanisms remains uneven. That distinction makes the conclusion more limited but also more defensible (Aksoy & Szekely, 2025; Khan & Morris, 2026; Ne'eman-Haviv, 2021; Shroff, 2021).

Risk recognition follows the conduct that can be observed rather than the label attached to it. Threats recorded before Banaz Mahmod's death were actionable information regardless of how the grievance was later classified (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2015). In a suspected digital dispute, the relevant questions concern identifiable threats, access to the material and changes in conduct rather than platform use alone. Nonfatal abuse and professional recognition studies help establish the relevance of coercive control, though they do not demonstrate the effectiveness of a specific homicide-prevention measure (Gregory et al., 2020; Khan & Morris, 2026; Mulvihill et al., 2019; Ridley et al., 2023). Better incident records would make both theoretical comparison and safeguarding decisions more evidence-sensitive.

CONCLUSION

Reported antecedents of honor killing vary, but their evidentiary support is not equivalent, as earlier work on honor rationales also cautioned. Disputes over relationships and allegations of sexual misconduct are well represented in perpetrator interviews and media-based studies. Those sources do not always verify the event attributed to the victim, and the latter may include attempted rather than completed killings. The first research question is therefore answered at two levels. Published accounts document several forms of reported grievance, while reliable separation of a triggering incident from background coercion and post-homicide justification requires independent chronology. The existence of a dated threat is stronger evidence of pre-death danger than a motive first declared after arrest.

The second research question yields a qualified rather than categorical comparison. Conventional marital disputes concern a regulated relationship, digital mediation concerns the way information

becomes known and non-sexual grievances concern a different substantive demand. The dimensions can overlap. Banaz Mahmod's earlier warnings provide a clearer record of escalation than the post-death police account of a TikTok-related dispute in Quetta. Seeta Kaur's alleged non-sexual grievance cannot be counted as a confirmed homicide trigger because her cause of death was not established as murder. Published evidence thus supports differences in reported attribution and documentation, but not three proven mechanisms or comparative effects on lethality.

Trigger–pathway heterogeneity remains useful when treated as a testable proposition rather than a settled taxonomy. Information channels may affect who learns of an allegation, while threats and family decisions determine whether a reputational claim develops into observable coercion. The reviewed sources cannot establish how often those transitions culminate in homicide. Further inquiry would need linked judicial findings and contemporaneous communications for confirmed cases, together with explicit treatment of rival explanations. Separating what is documented from what is merely asserted keeps claims about lethal escalation proportionate to the evidence.

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