

Honor-Based Confinement: Honor Practices Toward Women in Israel, as Violation of their Right for Dignity and Respect

Ilana Kwartin - Ph.D. Candidate at Gender Studies Department of the Bar Ilan University, Israel; Lecturer, Sapir Academic College Law School, Israel

Modern Israeli society, a mix of traditional cultural customs and modernity, has allowed the growth of a practice I label Honor-Based Confinement. This phenomenon, at the heart of my doctoral research, constitutes the invisible, mark-less, emotional confinement of wives by their husbands. Honor-Based Confinement results in the prolonged erosion of a women's self-esteem through humiliation, contempt, belittling, degradation and verbal abuse. While Israel addresses physical violence and confinement through tort and penal law, the legally unaddressed, less-documented, invisible, emotional confinement is just as oppressing as it destroys a woman's very essence of humanness and sense of dignity. This phenomenon presents an extraordinary opportunity to develop a legal intervention to disrupt and prevent an existing customary behavior.

In qualitative research conducted over the past three years, I've interviewed 20 Jewish Israeli women whose sense of human dignity as wives, mothers and women was compromised through Honor-Based Confinement. Surprisingly, these women differ in background and cultural tradition, representing a wide swath of Israeli society: young and old, with and without children, ethnic background, Orthodox and secular, urban and rural and others. Typical behaviors identified in my research include stalking; limiting access to financial resources and knowledge; confinement to traditional gender roles and spaces; usurpation of dreams and desires of self-fulfillment; and domination of personal and family decision-making.

The concept of Honor-Based Confinement is partially represented in existing socio-clinical discourse as emotional and verbal abuse, with typical solutions ranging from

couples therapy to divorce, but the very nature of the problem often precludes these solutions. The legal discourse has yet to name this phenomenon, partially due to the non-specific and on-going, low-intensity nature of emotional confinement, and partially to its occurrence in the private sphere. My research is innovative and groundbreaking by aspiring to define this phenomenon within the legal discourse and legislate a solution.