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IRAN: Iranians asking whether to abolish or continue headscarf requirement

[Middle East Monitor](https://bit.ly/3GuI5NU) (18.11.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3GuI5NU> - Following the death in police custody of [Mahsa Amini](#) this September, the controversy over Iran's headscarf requirement resurfaced, with some prominent figures in the country openly criticising the rules, *Anadolu News Agency* reports.

Iran has been [gripped by mass unrest](#) since mid-September over the death of Amini, a 22-year-old woman who died in custody after being arrested by the country's morality police.

At least 342 people, including 43 children and 26 women, have been killed by security forces during ongoing nationwide protests in Iran, according to a human rights group.

First, on 25 September, the Union of Islamic Iran People Party asked that the government take the necessary legal steps to abolish the mandatory headscarf legislation.

President Ebrahim Raisi, when asked about the practices of the morality police in a 28 September state TV interview, said: "If it is thought that the method of implementation is incorrect and that new ideas exist, these new ideas can be discussed and implemented."

"Values cannot be modified, but the manner in which the law is applied can be debated," he said.

On the question of whether patrols should be reconsidered, Raisi said that the best practices should be considered in enforcing the law and that they must provide a platform for dissenting views.

He also implied, however, that they have no plans to overturn the headscarf law.

During this time, some of Iran's most prominent figures spoke out against the mandatory headscarf requirement. Former Parliament Speaker, Ali Larijani, is among them. In an 11

October newspaper interview, Larijani emphasised that the protests have deep political roots and urged a modification of the mandatory headscarf law.

On 17 September, retired Brig. Gen. Hossein Alaei, the former Navy Commander of the Revolutionary Guards Army, similarly questioned the patrols of the morality police.

He said it should be asked if the required headscarf practice has a place in religion, suggesting that it might make more sense to deploy patrols against thieves who steal women's phones and handbags.

Some religious figures, while in limited numbers, challenged the compulsory headscarf application, which has been enforced since Iran's revolution in 1979.

Following the revolution, prominent religious figures such as Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti and Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani are among the few clergy who reject the mandatory headscarf.

There are now relatively few clerics in Iran who openly condemn the headscarf requirement.

Further reading

[US wants to oust Iran from UN women's body](#)

IRAN: The fight against the veil, a symbol of patriarchal norms

The veil in Iran has been an enduring symbol of patriarchal norms – but its use has changed depending on who is in power

By Amy Motlagh

[The Conversation](#) (14.11.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3hQ21QV> - In images of the uprising that followed the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini on Sept. 16, 2022, perhaps the most iconic ones, aside from that of Amini herself, are those of unveiled Iranian women photographed from behind, facing police barricades or raising a fist at the scene of mass protests.

The [wide use of images of Iranian female protesters](#), without the headscarf, in the Western media highlights how the veil can often be seen as the single most important measure of women's rights and well-being.

Indeed, oftentimes outside of Iran, wearing a veil is seen as oppression – and its removal as emancipation and freedom. This understanding, however, fails to take into account the veil's broader symbolism and ignores the complex history of mandatory veiling and unveiling in Iran in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Islamic Republic and the veil

During the 1979 revolution, veiling became a symbol of resistance to the Pahlavi monarchy that ruled from 1925 to 1979. For many during the revolution, the [veil was a symbol of authentic national identity](#). It was used to push back against the Westernization and erosion of Iranian values that ignited the revolution.

After the Islamic Republic, led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, came to power, the veil became compulsory. Since then, certain forms of veiling – such as donning the chador, a cloaklike garment that covers the entire body and is required of women visiting a mosque in Iran – have come to be seen as [signaling affiliation with](#) or support for the Islamic Republic.

Less comprehensive forms of veiling, such as a rusari, or head scarf, and the knee-length tunic or coat known as a rupush, are understood as signs of minimum cooperation and potentially a rejection of the norms of the Islamic Republic. These types of veiling allow the wearer to adjust the amount of hair shown and the fit and the length of the tunic. Women accused of “bad hijab,” as Amini was, are [typically those adopting this form of veiling](#).

However, in pre-1979 Iran, wearing the veil did not necessarily mean that a woman was straightforwardly “religious.” Instead, it could [signal a variety of other social meanings](#), such as being conservative, upholding traditional values or an indication of personal modesty, among others.

Pahlavis and the era of modernization

Indeed, four decades before the Islamic Republic was established, the Shah of Iran, Reza Pahlavi, had forced women to remove their veils through the Mandatory Unveiling Act of 1936.

Pahlavi, who installed himself as king in 1925 after overthrowing the Qajar monarchy, viewed the entry of unveiled women into public spaces as an essential component of modernity, modeled on Western norms.

As a consequence of the 1936 act, women were prohibited from veiling in public. Refusal to comply was met with [sometimes violent enforcement](#) and removal of the offending garment. While men too were instructed to wear European-style trousers, suits and hats, it was women’s bodies that were at the nexus of these reforms.

Pahlavi’s complex project of modernization included reforms to law and education, and the end of gender segregation of many public spaces. The reforms offered women greater rights and protections should their husbands choose to divorce them, and opened up new educational opportunities. But Pahlavi viewed the presence of unveiled women in public space as essential to signaling these changes.

My book “[Burying the Beloved](#)” examines how ideas about women’s personhood and rights were explored during this period by novelists in Iran, particularly through stories about marriage. This era saw the publication both of the first novel by a woman and the first female protagonist in Persian fiction. Novels of this period [revealed social anxieties around the legal reforms](#) that gave women larger roles in society and more rights in marriage.

Pahlavi abdicated in 1941, during World War II, and his son Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who ascended the throne, adopted a more lenient attitude toward this law. He did not rescind it, but neither did he violently enforce it. At the same time, the modernity his regime promoted was signaled by a cosmopolitan secularism – [no veiled woman](#) could hope to advance in the diverse areas of society, politics and economy patronized and controlled by the monarchy during his rule, which lasted until 1979.

Social and familial pressures [reigned over women’s veiling](#), accompanied by changing cultural mores facilitated by virtually wholesale adoption of Western sartorial styles, cinema and other media.

Dying to show their hair?

Over the past few weeks, I have repeatedly seen comments on news articles that insist, "Women in Iran are literally dying to show their hair!" But a rejection of the head scarf in the context of these protests is not a simple demand for one personal freedom.

Instead, it should be understood as a rejection of many things. Protesters in Iran are pushing back against an oppressive regime that has refused to brook any dissent and has destroyed voices for reform through imprisonment, exile or death. They are also pushing back against a long history of laws, beginning before the 1979 Revolution, that have used women's bodies as symbols of political ideology.

The veil that is being removed is therefore not an insistence only on the right to personal freedom and expression – though it may be that for some who are removing it – but also a rejection of patriarchal norms that have animated both the pre-revolutionary regime and the Islamic Republic.

Further reading

[Images of veiled Muslim women are used to justify the war](#)

[Unrest across Iran continues under state's extreme gender apartheid](#)

[Head-covers have always been political in Iran](#)

[Women have been rebelling against restrictions since the Islamic revolution in 1979](#)

IRAN: Police fire on Mahsa Amini mourners

Iranian police are reported to have fired on protesters in Saqqez, home city of Mahsa Amini who died in custody after being arrested for allegedly wearing her hijab "improperly"

By David Gritten

BBC (27.10.2022) - <https://bbc.in/3fe5nfR> - Thousands gathered near the grave of the Kurdish woman and clashed with security, 40 days since her death.

A rights group and witnesses said officers fired live rounds and tear gas at the crowds in the city.

Protests swept across Iran after Ms Amini, 22, died on 16 September.

She had been detained three days earlier by the morality police in the capital, Tehran, and fell into a coma after collapsing at a detention centre.

There were reports that officers beat her with a baton and banged her head against a vehicle, but police denied that she was mistreated and said she suffered a heart attack.

On Wednesday, security forces were deployed in Saqqez and other parts of Kurdistan province, in anticipation of fresh demonstrations on the 40th day of mourning for Ms Amini - a culturally significant occasion for Iranians.

[Videos showed thousands of mourners walking along a road, through a field](#) and across a river to bypass roadblocks and reach the graveyard where Ms Amini is buried.

The crowds were heard shouting "Woman, life, freedom" and "Death to the dictator" - two of the signature chants of the protest movement - as well as ["Down with traitors"](#) and ["Kurdistan will be the graveyard of fascists"](#).

It was not clear whether members of Ms Amini's family were present.

A source close to the family told the BBC's Jiyar Gol that intelligence agents put pressure on her father to say that they were not holding a ceremony.

Kurdish human rights group Hengaw, which is based in Norway, later tweeted that mourners had marched towards the provincial government's office in Saqqez and that security forces had [opened fire on people in Zindan square.](#)

Reuters news agency quoted an unnamed eyewitness as saying: "The riot police shot mourners who gathered at the cemetery... Dozens have been arrested."

The semi-official Isna news agency reported that "a limited number of those present at Mahsa Amini's memorial clashed with police forces on the outskirts of Saqqez and were dispersed".

Hengaw also reported demonstrations in several cities in Kurdistan. It said police had used live fire in several places, [including in Marivan.](#)

The first protests took place after Ms Amini's funeral in Saqqez, with women ripping off their headscarves in solidarity.

The protests evolved into one of the most serious challenges to the Islamic Republic since the 1979 Iranian revolution.

Women have been at the forefront, waving their headscarves in the air, setting them on fire and even cutting their hair in public.

Another Norway-based organisation, Iran Human Rights, says at least 234 protesters, including 29 children, have been killed by security forces in a crackdown on what Iran's leaders have portrayed as "riots" fomented by foreigners.

Opposition activists said protests marking the 40th day of mourning for Ms Amini were also held in other parts of the country, including Tehran.

Video appeared to show that [security forces fired tear gas inside a girls' school in the capital](#) in response to a protest by students.

One young female protester inside Iran told BBC World News: "You cannot imagine how tough it is to go to streets knowing that they are ready to shoot. But we are not afraid.

"It's not about me. It's about the next generation. We want to have a normal life."

She added: "I don't know when our protests will come to an end, but today Iranian society is more awake than ever and we are ready for big changes."

IRAN: Iranian authorities plan to use facial recognition to enforce new hijab law

Government says it will use technology on public transport in crackdown on women's dress

By [Weronika Strzyżyńska](#)

The Guardian (05.09.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3L0ceF2> - Iranian government is planning to use facial recognition technology on public transport to identify women who are not complying with a strict new law on wearing the hijab, as the regime continues its increasingly punitive crackdown on women's dress.

The secretary of Iran's Headquarters for Promoting Virtue and Preventing Vice, Mohammad Saleh Hashemi Golpayegani, announced in a recent interview that the government was planning to use surveillance technology against women in public places following a [new decree signed by the country's hardline president, Ebrahim Raisi](#), on restricting women's clothing.

The decree was signed on 15 August, a month after the 12 July national "Hijab and Chastity Day", which sparked countrywide protests by women who posted videos of themselves on social media with their heads uncovered on streets and on buses and trains. In recent weeks, the Iranian authorities have responded with a spate of arrests, detentions and forced confessions on television.

"The Iranian government has long played with the idea of using facial recognition to identify people who violate the law," said Azadeh Akbari, a researcher at the University of Twente, in the Netherlands. "The regime combines violent 'old-fashioned' forms of totalitarian control dressed up in new technologies."

The hijab, a head-covering worn by Muslim women, became mandatory after Iran's revolution in 1979. Yet, over the decades since, women have pushed the limits of the stipulated dress code.

Some of the women arrested for defying the new decree were identified after videos were posted online of them being harassed on public transport for not wearing the hijab properly. One, 28-year-old [Sepideh Rashno](#), was arrested after a video circulated on social media of her being berated for "improper dress" by a fellow passenger, who was then forced off the vehicle by bystanders intervening on Rashno's behalf. According to the human rights group Hrana, Rashno was beaten after her arrest and subsequently forced to apologise on television to the passenger who harassed her.

Rashno is not the first person to suffer violent repression as a result of going viral on the internet. In 2014, six Iranians – three men and three women – [were sentenced to one year in prison and 91 lashes](#) after a video of them dancing in Tehran to Pharrell Williams's song Happy had more than 150,000 views.

Since 2015, the Iranian government has been phasing in biometric identity cards, which include a chip that stores data such as iris scans, fingerprints and facial images. Researchers worry that this information will now be used with facial recognition technology to identify people who violate the mandated dress code, both in the streets and cyberspace.

"A large chunk of the Iranian population is now in this national biometric data bank, as many public services are becoming dependent on biometric IDs," said Akbari. "So the

government has access to all the faces; they know where people come from and they can easily find them. A person in a viral video can be identified in seconds.”

She added: “By doing that, the government proves a point: ‘Don’t think that a small thing happening on a bus somewhere is going to be forgotten. We know who you are and we will find you and then you will have to suffer the consequences.’”

“Ebrahim Raisi is a real ideologue,” said Annabelle Sreberny, professor emeritus at the Centre for Iranian Studies at Soas University of London. “There are terrible economic and environmental problems facing Iran. The inflation rate may now be reaching 50%, but the government is choosing to focus on women’s rights.”

Sreberny added: “I think it is part and parcel of a failing government that is simply not dealing with these massive infrastructural, economic and environmental issues. And women are seen to be a soft target.”

IRAN bans women from stadiums, again

Women were not allowed to attend the last World Cup qualifying match played yesterday in Mashhad. Out of 12,500 tickets sold online, at least 2,000 were reserved for women. Women stage a protest outside the stadium for a right won after a long struggle. For a local Islamic leader, women’s presence is a form of “vulgarity”.

Asia News (30.03.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3DqOI07> - Iranian authorities have again banned women from entering stadiums to watch football matches, overturning [a long battle](#) that saw a [young woman](#) set herself on fire in protest and die.

Since the Iranian revolution of 1979, women have been excluded from all sporting events and venues where men compete in teams or individually.

According to reports from the semi-official *ISNA* news agency, women were banned from attending the last qualifying match for the Qatar 2022 World Cup, set for the end of the year.

Iran has already qualified for the competition, the first country in Asia to do so. However, FIFA, the world football governing body, had ordered Iran to allow women access to stadiums as a prerequisite for admitting its team’s participation in the competition.

Local sources say that out of 12,500 tickets sold online, at least 2,000 were reserved for women for a game played with Lebanon in the north-eastern city of Mashhad, which ended with two nil score in favour of the home team.

A video circulating on social media shows hundreds of female soccer fans chanting “we object” in response to the decision to ban them from attending the match.

So far no one has taken responsibility for the ban. *Khabaronline*, an Iranian news website, said that “despite tickets being sold, women are still not allowed to attend [matches at] the stadium.”

Ahmad Alamolhoda, Friday prayer leader in Mashhad, who was appointed by the country’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said he was always against women’s presence as spectators in men’s sports competitions. In his view their attendance is a form of “vulgarity.”

In a post-match interview, team captain Alireza Jahanbakhsh said it would be great to see women in stadiums in the future because they too enjoy seeing the country's team.

For the first time in decades, hundreds of Iranian women were allowed to attend the Asian Champions League final match in 2019 between Persepolis and the Japanese Kashima Antlers in Tehran.

Last January, more than 2,000 women went to Azadi stadium to watch the match in which Iran defeated Iraq and clinched a spot at the World Cup.

IRAN: Honor killings will continue as long as Iran's laws protects killers

Widespread practice of child marriage means more young girls will be murdered

Center for Human Rights in Iran

Center For Human Rights in Iran (10.02.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3BdK8B8> - Mona "Ghazal" Heydari was 17 years old when her husband, Sajjad Heydari, decapitated her and paraded her head on a street in the Iranian city of Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province—at times smiling at a camera.

"Now do you have anything more to say?" he said while carrying the girl's severed head in his hand by her hair in a video clip that was aired by the state-owned Rokna News Agency before the government banned it from republication.

Sajjad Heydari was arrested, but so far no charges have been announced against him for killing his [child bride](#), and if they are, Iranian law would still work in his favor, allowing him to go unpunished, or at worst serve a mere 10 years in prison.

At the core of this crime are two unaddressed issues in Iran—the [lack of protections](#) for violence against [women in Iran](#), and the widespread practice of [child marriage](#). As such, these individual acts of murder are closely tied to government policies.

Iran's laws offer girls and women little protection from widespread domestic violence

Iranian laws allow men to carry out various forms of violence against women with little if any consequence. For example, Article 302 of Iran's [Islamic Penal Code](#) states that a man can legally kill a person for committing a crime that is punishable by death under Sharia (Islamic) law, such as adultery. A woman in Iran, however, could never walk free after killing her adulterous husband and could actually be executed.

Indeed, there's no guarantee that Sajjad Heydari will be charged, and Iranian media reports are indicating that Mona Heydari's father may never seek justice for his daughter. Meager attempts to provide stronger legal protections to girls and women have long remained [blocked from becoming law](#) by Parliament.

In addition to lenient punishments for fathers and husbands for violence against girls and women, other aspects of Iranian law compound the problem. For example, a woman can't leave the marital home without proof that she's endangered, and if a woman does flee, she forfeits financial maintenance. Orders of protection do not exist, and shelters for

abused women are woefully absent in much of country. In general, the police consider violence by family members to be a “family matter.”

Widespread child marriage leaves many girls desperate to flee, vulnerable to honor killings

Meanwhile, the legal marriage age for girls in Iran is 13. Younger girls can be married off if their father or male guardian receives a judge’s approval. Mona’s father [confirmed](#) that court-approval was granted to allow her to get married at age 12.

The latest figures from the Statistical Center of Iran shows that 9,753 girls between the ages of 10 and 14 were married in the spring of 2021, a 32 percent increase compared to the previous spring. The increase has been fueled by low-cost state [marriage loans](#) that parents have increasingly sought to benefit from by marrying off their young daughters.

Meanwhile, the U.N. has reported that at least [17 percent](#) of Iranian girls under the age of 18 are married off by their families each year. A common theme in honor killings in Iran has been the victim’s—who are often child brides that have been forced to marry—desperation to flee abusive marriages.

Mona heydari: from battered child bride to murdered wife

Mona Heydari was married off at the age of 12 and became a mother at 14 after having a child by Sajjad Heydari. A source close to her family told the London-based [IranWire](#) Persian news site that she had tried to escape him by fleeing to Turkey because she was “suffering from domestic violence.”

“Every time she talked about divorce or complained about her husband’s assaults, they convinced her to continue her marriage for the sake of her child but eventually she dropped everything and ran away,” added the source.

Mona Heydari had returned to Iran with “assurances that she would not be in any danger if she came back,” the source told IranWire. “But a few days after she returned home, Sajjad and his brother tied her hands and feet and cut her head off. Sajjad’s brother rolled her decapitated body in a blanket and threw it away in another neighborhood while Sajjad walked around in the street holding her head in his hand.”

After she was murdered, Sajjad Heydari’s mother [told](#) the state-owned Fars News Agency that Sajjad Heydari was “provoked” because his reputation had been damaged by rumors that his wife had committed adultery.

Society decries violence and child marriages to no avail

Her killing has renewed debates among Iranians about the Iranian government’s [refusal](#) to pass laws that could have better protected Mona Heydari and girls and women like her, as well as the inhumane practice of [child marriage](#) in Iran. These issues have long prompted societal outcry, and have once again become loudly debated on social media by Iranians following news of Mona Heydari’s murder, which was first reported on February 5, 2022.

Despite broad societal condemnation of the practice, clerics, conservative lawmakers and other state officials continue to block attempts to raise the minimum marriageable age in Iran, and each year tens of thousands of girls under the age of 15 are married off by their families each year in Iran, according to state statistics. In reality, the numbers are likely much higher as many families in Iran do not register underage marriages.

Meanwhile so-called "honor killings" continue to occur in Iran with at least seven children and women known to be murdered in this manner this year in Iran. They include: [Romina Ashrafi](#) (13), [Shakiba Bakhtiar](#) (16), [Mobina Souri](#) (16), [Faezeh Maleki](#) (21), [Reyhaneh Ameri](#) (22), and [Fatemeh Farhi](#) (19).

IRAN: Beheading of 17-year-old shocks Iran, renews debate about violence against women

By [Golnaz Esfandiari](#)

Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty (08.02.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3BcFjIs> - After Sajjad Heydari beheaded his 17-year-old wife, Mona Heydari, he paraded her severed head in the streets of the southwestern Iranian city of Ahvaz in an attempt to prove that he's an honorable man. Footage of the macabre scene was posted online showing him smiling.

Mona Heydari's killing, which was reported on February 5, is the latest publicized case of an "honor killing" in which mostly women are killed by their male relatives on the grounds they dishonored their family for any number of alleged moral failings -- including eloping, committing adultery, requesting a divorce, or even unfounded accusations of tainting the family's reputation.

The gruesome killing in the capital of Khuzestan Province has shocked the nation and renewed a debate about widespread violence against women and the lack of legal protections.

Mona Heydari had reportedly fled to Turkey months before her slaying to live with a Syrian man she had met online. The young wife and mother of a 3-year-old son was killed a few days after she returned to Iran after reportedly receiving assurances from her family that she would be safe.

Her husband and his brother, who reportedly helped carry out the crime, are in custody. Reports say Mona Heydari had been forced into marrying her cousin and that she had given birth to her son when she was only 14. According to Iranian media reports, she is said to have been subjected to violence by her husband, who had refused to divorce her.

Many in Iran have blamed the Islamic legal system as well as the country's patriarchal culture and traditions for fostering an environment that allows for such a killing, which comes less than two years after 14-year-old Romina Ashrafi was beheaded by her father in northern Iran. Ashrafi's father, who before killing her had consulted a lawyer to find out what punishment he could face for the crime, was later sentenced to eight years in prison. U.S.-based sociologist Hossein Ghazian told RFE/RL's Radio Farda that many men believe the women in their families are their property.

"Men own the mind and bodies of women. They draw a line and consider it a societal duty to protect their honor," Ghazian said. "If they fail, they believe they have to prove their honor, and [often] do so by killing the women whose bodies have been violated."

'There Is No Law'

Female lawmaker Elham Azad said "there is no law with an executive guarantee" to protect women from violence in Iran.

She expressed hope that pending legislation on the Protection, Dignity And Security Of Women Against Violence would prevent such horrific crimes in the future.

The bill, passed by the government of then-President Hassan Rohani in January 2021 but waiting to be passed into law by parliament, criminalizes violence against women, including action or behavior that causes "physical or mental harm" to women.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has said that, despite having "a number of positive provisions," the proposed legislation [falls short of international standards](#).

Iran's vice president for women's and family affairs, Aniseh Khazali, [wrote on Twitter](#) in the wake of Mona Heydari's killing that parliament placed an urgent review of the bill on its agenda after fixing "shortcomings."

Khazali also said that the judiciary is determined to impose the most severe punishment against Sajjad Heydari and his accomplice. She did not provide further details.

'We Did Not Get Any Results'

Lawyer Ebrahim Nikdel Ghadam, who represented Ashrafi's high-profile case, argued in court at that time that Iranian law did not create a deterrent against such killings.

He said Ashrafi's father did not receive the highest sentence he could receive for murdering a child, which is punishable by three to 10 years. He was exempt from the "retribution" law -- meaning the death penalty -- since according to the Islamic Penal Code he was the girl's guardian.

"The beheaded child bride might be alive today if Iran's government had enacted laws against the cruel practice of child marriage and protections against domestic violence." -- Hadi Ghaemi, Center for Human Rights in Iran

However, Nikdel Ghadam said the court didn't accept an additional punishment of internal exile, which is allowed under Iranian law.

"Although Romina's mother was terribly afraid for herself...and this concern was raised many times in court, we did not get any results. Why? Because there are problems in this field when it comes to the law," he said.

He also suggested that light sentences for those who kill their female relatives pave the way for more such killings.

"We see that they did not deal with the case and a brutal murder properly to set [an example], and the result was that less than two years later we are witnessing another tragic event, another life lost," he said.

Hadi Ghaemi, the executive director of the New York-based Center for Human Rights in Iran, said Iranian authorities are "as responsible for Heydari's death as her murderers."

"The beheaded child bride might be alive today if Iran's government had enacted laws against the cruel practice of child marriage and protections against domestic violence," Ghaemi said on Twitter.

IRAQ: 20-year-old girl who converted to Christianity murdered after Tik Tok Video

Christian News (10.03.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3t2IRdR> - A 20-year-old girl- who converted to Christianity has been murdered after releasing a TikTok video.

Iman Sami was killed on 7th March in Northern Iraq, after a suspected retaliation with her family following a TikTok video she posted where she was singing Christian spiritual songs.

Iman was a daughter of a Muslim cleric.

International Christian Concern (ICC)'s President Jeff King shared his concern, he said: "For someone born as a Muslim to be open about exploring Christianity is a tremendous act of bravery, as most Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) in the region face intense pressure from both their families and communities.

"Maria's TikTok post should not have ended with her death.

"Iraq is just emerging from a very difficult time when Christians experienced a horrific genocide.

"It is an important step toward healing for Iraq to pursue an investigation of due process into issues related to freedom of speech and religion."

The Christian community in Iraq continues to suffer severe consequences of the ISIS genocide, and Muslim Background Believers are specifically at a high risk of targeted violence because of their conversion to Christianity.

The persecution faced by Iraq's Christian community has forced most to flee the country.

Christian news site Ankawa Today published on Facebook: "Iman Sami, known as Maria, was found by the police last night.

"She suffered in her life because of her early marriage, where she drowned in marriage at the age of only 12 years.

"After separation from her husband, she lived alone.

"She was an activist in the field of women's rights and a brave woman.

"She has videos on the TikTok app that reached hundreds of thousands of views. Her brother and uncle killed her yesterday!"

JORDAN: Custody laws maintain a sexist status quo

Despite important strides made by social movements advocating for women's rights and led by Arab women in the region, there is still a long way to go to combat gender discrimination.

By [Lara Bellone d'Altavilla](#)

Open Global Rights (29.09.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3NTfio1> - It **is no secret** that national penal codes throughout Southwest Asian and North African (SWANA) countries include discriminatory laws against women in the areas of marriage, divorce, and child custody.

Sharia law is used to justify these familial laws throughout the SWANA region, but modern interpretations of Sharia differ from what is actually written in the Quran.

Perhaps one of the most damaging aspects of familial law for women relates to child custody, where mothers find themselves at the mercy of fathers and all-male courts. Although social movements advocating for women's rights and led by Arab women in the region have been essential, [with important strides made throughout the years](#), more significant legal amendments must be made to personal status laws to address ongoing problems.

Jordan is a prime example. There, familial laws have been a detriment to mothers seeking custody of their children. Under the [Personal Status Law](#), fathers are given wilaya, which refers to legal authority over the child, while mothers are given hadhana, which refers to physical care of the child. However, hadhana can be taken from a mother if she is found to be 'unfit' or remarries. [Article 223](#) of the Personal Status Law gives the wilaya to the child's father. The automatic grant of the wilaya to the child's father does not change, even if the father acts in violation of the child's best interests.

Under this law, Jordanian (and [foreign](#)) mothers are [granted custody of their children until the age of 15](#), but fathers possess the right to determine their children's education, country of residence, medical treatment, and religious upbringing. The father is also responsible for [obtaining passports and permitting international travel](#), unless the mother secures the court's approval to do so in a very long and tedious process.

Farah Shahin (pseudonym), a women's rights activist and single mother, has lived through this experience. She has been fighting for legal custody of her child for the last three years after divorcing her ex-husband. I was able to connect with Farah through social media after following her activism work, which is particularly crucial given there are few Jordanian women publicly advocating for amendments to the country's custody laws. Before her marriage, Farah and her supportive family were not aware of the disproportionate effect that custody laws had on women.

It wasn't until she filed for divorce that she learned of the ways the law works against her, including that it doesn't permit her to apply for her daughter's legal registration documents or make any life decisions for her. Since then, Farah has become an activist, speaking out for women's rights and against discriminatory custody laws. She has, however, faced heavy backlash and criticism from local communities, including from Jordanian women.

Farah further explains that even after being granted a divorce, mothers can still lose custody of their children if the father decides to exaggerate claims of their alleged 'misconduct' under interpreted Islamic pretexts, including allegations about friendships with men, immodest dress, or inappropriate upbringing of their child. When women do not comply with the father's requests or attend meeting times for specific reasons, they could face jail time under the current law.

Given such harassment, divorce and custody battles have discouraged women from seeking divorce out of fear of losing access to their children. This is particularly harmful for women suffering from domestic violence and abuse by their husbands, thereby demonstrating how divorce and custody laws are another example of discriminatory treatment against women.

Further, according to Farah, when a mother loses custody of her child, many times the child will face abuse upon returning to the father or his family. Farah shares, "the familial laws are not only detrimental towards women but also for their children who are subjected to domestic abuse. It only shows that the courts don't actually care about children, but rather care about keeping the status quo for men."

Farah stresses the importance of women's financial independence, needed to battle for child custody in courts and provide a good life for their children. However, this is extremely difficult since only [15 percent of Jordanian women are in the workforce](#).

And after getting divorced, women are not allowed to remarry for risk of losing custody of the child under [Article 171/B](#). Yet, Jordanian law, along with that of other countries in the region, does not impose the same restrictions on men. This makes dating for divorced mothers extremely challenging, since most women do not want to remarry for fear of losing their child. Courts "prohibit us from having a sexual life because we will be seen as 'unfit' mothers, but at the same time they prohibit us from remarrying," Farah states.

All of this takes a psychological toll on mothers, which can be used against them. Dismally, Farah notes that, "custody battles and divorce ruin the mentalities of women here. When you get divorced, the men make women's lives miserable, but I still blame the law because it encourages men to do this. What people don't realize is that laws have direct consequences on society. Therefore, when sexist laws exist in a country, sexism will be prevalent within that society."

Familial laws have disproportionate negative impacts on women in SWANA countries but also negatively impact women in other parts of the world. Arab women are demanding more from their governments and working hard to raise awareness in their communities, but legal amendments in familial law are needed to change societal norms and the mindsets of future generations, especially in regards to women's rights and liberties.
