

# Murder and Motivation: A Qualitative Study

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**Background:** Murder is considered as the worst crime in all societies. It might be accomplished suddenly based on previous resolution, effect of stimuli, or due to a mental condition.

**Objectives:** The present study aimed to determine the reasons and motivations to commit a murder from murderers' point of view.

**Patients and Methods:** It is a qualitative research making use of content analysis, conducting on 17 male imprisoned murderers. Participants were selected through goal based sampling to gain data saturation among prisoners in central prison of Kermanshah. Deep individual and semi-structured interviews were conducted using general questions designed as interview guide. In the meantime, personal satisfaction, information privacy, liberty to leave the study, and moral commitment of the interviews were observed.

**Results:** In the end, five main contents were found: collective quarrel, honor killing, emotional dissatisfaction, lack of control on anger, and burglary.

**Conclusions:** It seems that prevention of collective quarrel and control on anger could be helpful to decrease the murder rate in society.

**Keywords:** Crime; Homicide; Qualitative Research

## 1. Background

Murder is considered as the most serious crime in human society and Islamic punishment law has divided it into three major types: intentional, quasi-intentional, and once the error, where the intentional murder is considered as a major crime having the most severe punishment. Committing a murder could be accomplished in a moment based on previous intention or under the effect of some stimuli or mental conditions. Murder intention could be different due to economical, social, moral, cultural, religious, and political condition of various societies (1). Reasons to commit a murder have been categorized differently by experts. One system has divided the reasons into three categories: biogenic (body), psychogenic (mind), and sociogenic (social environment) (1-3).

Lee et al. reported immigration to be the main reason to commit murder in the US (4). In countries such as Finland where crime rate is significantly low, Eronen introduced psychological disorders, such as schizophrenia and antisocial personality disorders, to have major role in committing crimes (5). Furthermore, Rogd, Hougen, and Poulsen studied murders committed in Denmark during ten years and reported that the main reasons to commit the crime included quarrel, family conflict, financial problems, relationships, honor killing, and envy

(6). Murder consequences and expenses would be harmful not only for victims and their families but also for the whole society where the murder took place (7). In the event of murder, community mental health is in jeopardy and social discipline may be disrupted (8).

## 2. Objectives

Recognizing factors and motives to commit murder could be helpful to introduce practical solutions to predict and prevent a murder and eventually improve social security and community mental health. Considering the importance of the issue, the present study used qualitative research method to investigate the motivations to commit murder among male prisoners in Kermanshah.

## 3. Patients and Methods

It is a qualitative research based on contractive content analysis conducting on 17 male prisoners, all committed murders. Based on persuasive sampling to gain data saturation, participants were selected from central prison of Kermanshah, Iran. All prisoners reported their consent to participate in the study. Deep individual and semi-structured interviews were conducted and general open ques-

tions were used as guide to the interview, which resulted in explanatory open responses. All the conversations were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Personal satisfaction, information privacy, liberty to leave the study, and moral commitment of the interviews were observed.

Demographic information such as age, education, occupation before being imprisoned, and marital status, were asked as well as questions on the reasons to commit murder. Individual interviews ranged from 20 to 30 minutes and continued till information saturation. Imprisoned male murderers were considered as inclusion criteria. The questions which used in interview were open. However, the following questions were used as guide to interview:

1. When did the murder happen?
2. What was the motivation to commit the murder?

Deeper and exploratory questions, including “why” and “how” were also asked to figure out the depth of participants’ experiences.

## 4. Results

Five major contents emerged from the interviews. Their codes included collective quarrel, honor killing, emotional dissatisfaction, lack of control on anger, and burglary. In the following sections, some parts of participants’ statements are presented to describe the codes.

### 4.1. Collective Quarrel

Investigating the interviews showed that many of the murders were committed as a result of group and tribal quarrels in Kermanshah province, Iran. In continuation, some parts of interviews are reported.

For instance, a participant, in his mid-forties, married, and educated to elementary school, reported that he committed a murder due to a tribal quarrel on their farmlands.

“I am a farmer and the murder happened about 8 years ago; once there was a fire on the neighboring farm and the neighbor thought that I set the fire. Then, a severe quarrel happened between two families and the victim attacked me holding an axe in his hand. I hit him with a knife while I got hurt too. I spent three months in hospital to recover”.

### 4.2. Honor Killing

As reported by participants, another reason to commit a murder was sexual issues. Some issues such as betray by spouse, having sex with a female family member were reported as major reasons to commit murder. In the following, the murderer’s statements on killing his friend due to having sex with his cousin are presented:

“The victim was my cellmate in prison. After releasing from prison, we expanded our friendship to families. My cousin divorced some years ago and after a while I recognized that my close friend had sexual relationship with

her. I could not stand it and in a quarrel, hit him with a knife and killed him”.

Another participant said that he killed his wife as she betrayed him. He said:

“Men work from morning to late afternoon to make money and provide a good life for their families and all they need is a relaxing, peaceful home though it was never like that in my home. My wife was always late at home, mostly after 10 or 11 pm. She always excused for being late. I warned her several times, but she never noticed. Finally I shot her”.

### 4.3. Emotional Dissatisfaction

Emotional dissatisfaction was also suggested as a reason to commit murder by the participants. A 31-year-old participant with guidance school degree, for instance, said that he killed her beloved girl’s fiance because her family did not accept him to marry the girl.

“It happened 6 years ago and I have been imprisoned since then. I loved my cousin since I was a child and we were friends since then, but her family did not allow us to get married. Then, she married a relative. I talked to him and explained our relationship but he declined, so I killed him.”

Another participant with university degree reported that he loved a girl but their families refused to let them get married. After quarrels between them, he decided to kill the girl and shoot himself to death, though it was not successful.

### 4.4. Lack of Control on Anger

Another reason to commit a murder was reported to be ‘lack of control on wrath and impulsive acting’ even in a very simple event. A 48-year-old married criminal having a child said that:

“Actually, I committed a murder in a very simple event. There was no background or certain reason. I met the victim by chance. I was driving when another car cut my way and honked my horn to notice him. He kept right and I passed him. He chased me and cut my way on a junction, got off his car and insulted me. After an argument, he took a rod out of his car and hit my car and I throw him a knife I had in my car. Unfortunately, it hit his chest and killed him. Everything happened in less than two minutes”.

Sudden burst of anger and inability to control it could be recognized from the statements of another participant who killed his brother-in-law by hitting his head with an iron capsule.

“Well the main reason to the event was my drug abuse. I consumed opium for 14 years. Then, I relinquished using opium. I could not stand it anymore. My brother-in-law was 33 and had three kids. He was an addict too. Once he came over and asked to use drug in my home. I refused and asked him to avoid using that. He was holding a piece of wood in his hands and threatened to hit me. I took up the capsule and hit his head. He died 28 days later”.

#### 4.5. Burglary

Burglary is a very common crime, which threatens social security (9, 10). The present study also reported burglary as a reason to commit murder.

### 5. Discussion

Our results showed that the collective quarrel and violence due to inability to control anger were the major factors to commit a murder among the participants in the study. Quarrel and argument are social misbehaviors, which disturb social relationships and create hatred, rancor, and animosity among people; these in turn could lead to further argument and quarrel and financially and spiritually damage the society.

Collective quarrel is a problem in Iran, which has a tribal context. It is also more evident in some parts of the country that are highly affected by traditional and tribal values and have less devotion to legislations. On the other hand, quarrel and violence is still considered as a measure of power and advocacy of social and cultural traditions and family respect. Unfortunately, it should be mentioned that there was 80% increase in quarrel rate during the last 6 years, which suggests some tension in the society (11). Therefore, it seems necessary to introduce interventions to decrease collective quarrels, and also enhance life skills such as ability to control anger, violence, and aggression. Eftekhari et al. suggested quarrel, burglary, and family conflicts as major reasons of committing murder in Tehran (1). Shah and Gupta, also, reported quarrel and robbery as main factors leading to murder in India (12, 13). Considering these results, social workers could help prevent and decrease quarrel and aggression. On the other hand, improving employment and income play an essential role to prevent social misbehaviors, including committing murder.

Honor killing is a social problem, which has recently attracted experts in social issues. Results from the present study supported that honor killing was a reason to commit murder among criminals. Such murders were committed due to issues such as illicit love affairs, betray by spouse, adultery, losing virginity, and so on, which are considered as unchastity. The United Nations Population Fund reported that over 5000 girls are sentenced to death under the name of honor killing by their family and relatives each year (14). In another study, Aldridge and Brown suggested that skepticism to relationships of partner was considered as the reason to kill spouse (15). In this regard, it is important to educate and acculturate society and families to prevent honor killing.

Another content found in interviews on committing murder was inability to control anger, which led to impulsive and hasty reactions, including murder. It should be noted that impulsive behaviors comprise 3 features of perceptibility, lack of plans, or ideas and error prone (16). From social point of view, impulsiveness is a behavior learned from family and environment where the individ-

ual reacts without considering potential consequences of the behavior in order to gain desired results; it affects others as well as the individual (17-19). Considering the results, it is suggested that life skills and self-control behaviors be improved to control impulsive behaviors.

Marriage is an accepted tradition and an essential need among human beings (20). However, families object their children to marry based on some wrong beliefs, which results in problems and damage to individuals and society. In the present study, a reason to commit murder was that an individual was emotionally hurt and committed murder as revenge. As a result, it seems essential to educate families to help their children make the best decision on their marriage, which improves health and safety of the society.

Overall, the present study found 5 main contents out of the interviews with the participants. The codes included: collective quarrel, honor killing, emotional dissatisfaction, lack of control on anger, and burglary. Therefore, it is essential to consider these factors while designing preventive interventions at social level to improve social security level.

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### Author's Contributions

Farzad Jalilian, Mehdi Mirzaei Alavijeh, and Mohamad Reza Amoei developed the original idea, the protocol, and study design. Mohammad Ahmadpanah and Firoozeh Mostafavi participated in data analyses. Behzad Karami Matin participated in writing manuscript. All authors provided comments, participated in writing manuscript, and approved the final manuscript.

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