

Violence Against the Women of Iran

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“Boys don’t hit girls.” This is a phrase that most Americans have heard by the time they could talk and it is rarely questioned. It reflects the common belief that men should respect and never be violent with women. In Iran, however, men are constantly violent with women. Women are victims of harsh legal punishment, domestic violence, and honor killings and dowry murders. There are several different causes of these problems with violence and some steps that can be taken to end this horrible practice.

Iranian law is very discriminatory towards women. The Iranian constitution says a “woman’s life is valued only half as much as a man’s life” (Official Laws Against Women in Iran, 2005). The government “reserves its cruelest punishments for women” (Iran’s 7th-Century Justice, 2010). While much of the punishment for crimes for men and women are the same, men often can find loopholes in the law. The punishment for both men and women for premarital sex is 100 lashes. When one is guilty of adultery, the convict is subject to being stoned to death. However, in Iran polygamy is allowed so men can oftentimes get around punishments for adultery (Ebadi, 2010). Also, the legal testimony of two women holds the same worth as that of one man, causing men to be able to get around the law with greater ease (*New Yorker*, 2009). Men associated with the Iranian government are guilty of being violent towards women. In Iran there are many feminists trying to obtain equal rights for men and women. Women’s rights demonstrations before the Revolution in 1979 were usually broken up by troops by force. More recently, women have been beaten in the streets by troops during protests. Women in prison are subject to constant, violent rape. Women have also been punished for not dressing properly. They have been required by law to wear a head scarf and at times a hooded coat-they are not supposed to wear tight clothing. Women are also not supposed

to wear makeup except for their husband. Women can be beaten for not dressing the way they are told they should (*New Yorker*, 2009). In Iran's constitution it says "women who appear on the streets and in public without the prescribed Islamic hijab," a traditional religious veil, "will be condemned to 74 strokes of the lash" (Official Laws Against Women in Iran, 2005). The extent of this belief in how women should dress is going so far that Iran is looking to ban the importation of toys such as Barbies. They see Barbie as the epitome of everything that is wrong with western women (Bakewell, 2008). The Iranian government will do anything and everything to keep women under the control of men. They are using law to keep women as lower class citizens. The government, however, has no right to take away the rights of its citizens.

Women are also victims of domestic violence. Iran has the sixth highest percentage of Muslims in the world, with 99% of the population being Muslim (Religion Facts, 2005). While a belief in this religion is that men and women are equal under God, women are still discriminated against. The Qur'an, the Islamic book of scripture, says, from *Islam for the Western Mind*, "God has placed 'much good' in women," but men are placed 'a degree above' women" (Islam for the Western Mind, 2005). The Qur'an also says, as observed by *Islam: Faith and History*, "As for those women whom you fear may step out of line, admonish them, then desert them in the beds, then hit them" (Islam: Faith and History, 2004). Even in the religion of the majority of the Iranians it is acceptable for a husband to abuse his wife under certain circumstances. In Iranian culture the man is the head of the family, there is a patriarchal family structure. Because of this, it is easy for men to be violent with their wives and get away with it, simply

because they run the household. (Bakewell, 2008) Religion is condoning violence, which makes it easy for people to justify violence against women.

Finally, women are the main victims of honor killings and dowry murders.

Dowry murders are when a woman is killed by either her husband or her in-laws because the woman's family cannot pay her dowry, "a payment made to a woman's in-laws upon her engagement or marriage as a gift to her new family" (Facts & Figures on VAW).

Acid attacks are one of the forms of violence from dowry disputes (UN Women).

Another major form of violence inflicted on women is the practice of honor killing. This is when a man kills a woman because she has done something to bring disgrace to her family. (Bacon, 2010) Over the past 20 years there have been more than 4000 women killed from these honor killings (Bakewell, 2008). Iran holds to traditional Islamic views on gender roles. They believe that women need to stay pure and chaste. When a woman does something to become sexually impure it brings dishonor to her family. Iranians believe that it is a large enough wrongdoing for the woman to be killed (Ali, 2003). And making it even worse, many of these honor killings happen after a woman is raped (UN Women). This is an extremely irrational way to handle a problem that was not even the woman's fault. Iran needs to modernize and get rid of these sorts of primitive practices.

There are several reasons that these atrocities are so prevalent in Iranian society. One reason is that Iranian law is highly discriminatory towards men. When there are laws that allow men to abuse women and easily get away with it, and equally laws that condemn women to severe punishment with no possible way of escape, it is easy to see that violence against women will be an undeniable result. Another reason could be some of the teachings in the Qur'an. As previously stated, it says to husbands that when their

wives do something wrong that they have permission to “hit them” (Islam for the Western Mind, 2005). While it teaches of men and women being equal under God, it speaks of women being inferior to men. And while it teaches good morals, it also, in a way, promotes violence against women. As many Iranian men are Islamic, they would read the Qur’an and believe they have the right to harm their wife if they do something they do not like. Another reason for the violence against women in Iran is the patriarchal structure of the Iranian family. The families are male dominated and the woman is supposed to do what her husband wants of her. In *Islam: Faith and History*, it says, “Obedience to the husband...meant above all the total restriction of the wife’s movement outside the home without her husband’s permission. It was institutionalized in the law of seclusion of women, in order to protect the man’s family honor...and give him absolute control over all the women of his household” (Islam: Faith and History, 2003).

Historically men have had power over their wives and this tradition has been carried on to modern times. Because of this it is easy for men to get away with abusing their wives. This same kind of thing has occurred in many countries. In the world men are the ones who become presidents, who are the religious leaders, who have the high paying jobs, and who are the heads of the family. In Iran, however, this idea of male dominance has gone so far that women are being killed because of the disdain men have for women. It is set in their culture and that is a hard thing to change.

There are some ways that this pattern of male violence against women can come to an end. One way would be to set up women’s shelters and organizations for abused women to turn to for help. The only way this problem can possibly be stopped is if someone is willing to come to their aid. Nongovernmental institutions need to be set up

so women have someone to go to who they can trust is not going to beat and kill them (Violence by Intimate Partners, 2010). Organizations like the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, and the National Organization for Women could help these women to obtain the rights that they deserve and that many other women in the world already have. “No woman has to be a victim of physical abuse. Women have to feel like they are not alone” (Salma Hayek). More women will fight for their rights if there are other backing them up. However, before any of this can happen, the laws of Iran need to change (Violence by Intimate Partners, 2010). Women cannot receive rights when the government is doing everything in its power to keep women beneath men. Iran needs to not punish people by beating and stoning them. They need to not let men escape criminal punishment. They need to make illegal any and all abuse towards women. They need to get over their male arrogance and see that women deserve the exact same rights as men do. Other countries must also help women receive their rights. The governments and citizens of all free nations must stand together against the degradation of women and demand equal and humane treatment for the women of Iran.

Some might say that the culture of this country is impossible to change because of the fact that it has been going on for so long. That the laws of Iran cannot be changed. But if this were true, then how did America break away from Great Britain and obtain their rights? Or how did American women receive the same rights as men? How did African Americans get their civil rights recognized? It was because people believed that things could be changed. They believed in their cause enough that they did whatever it took to bring about the change they desired. It was because they fought and did not quit.

There are countless people who believe that the violence against women should be stopped. If these people step up and act on these beliefs then this monstrosity in Iran can and will be stopped. “Violence against women is an appalling human rights violation. But it is not inevitable. We can put a stop to this” (Nicole Kidman).

Women are victims of horrid abuse and murder in Iran, with most of it being justified by law or religion. Men look at women as weak beings who they have the right to manage. But these Iranian women will not stop fighting for their rights. Being abused will not make them believe that they really are lesser people than men. As Martin Luther said, “Nothing good ever comes of violence.” All that is happening because of this violence is that innocent women are being killed and abused by ignorant men. This history of Iranian women being abused needs to come to a close. If women’s rights are diligently and sincerely fought for the lives of these women will become the lives they have the right to have. As quoted by Maria Robinson said, “Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending.”

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# Michele Gray

## Education

Copper Hills High School	2009-Present
▪4.0 GPA	
▪Classes	
AP US History	AP European History
AP US Government	Spanish 1 & 2
Honors English	Pre-Calc
Honors Physics	Honors Chemistry
Navigator Pointe Academy	2007-2009
Sunset Ridge Middle School	2006-2007

## Activities

- Peer Leadership Team
- Acappella choir
- National Honor Society
- Cross Country
- Utah Governor's Youth Council
- Piano

## Service

- Helping at Festival of Trees
- Visiting Rest Home
- Math Tutoring
- Helping with Sub-for-Santa
- Helping with Food Drive

## Leadership

- Church Youth Group President
- Church Youth Group First Counselor
- Church Youth Group Secretary
- Peer Leadership Team

## Awards/

## Achievements

- Honor Roll
- 5 on AP European History Exam