

V

Violence from Women's Kin



Rachel M. James and Todd K. Shackelford
Department of Psychology,
Oakland University,
Rochester, MI, USA

Synonyms

Daughter-guarding; Homicide; Honor killing;
Parent-offspring conflict

Definition

Genetic kin benefit from monitoring and defending female family members. Daughter-guarding and sister-guarding, for example, in the forms of vigilance or violence, function to control a woman's sexual behavior, thereby regulating with whom she reproduces. However, violence from kin members is sometimes directed toward the woman. Sometimes this violence includes "honor killing," in which a woman is killed to restore her family's reputation, typically on suspicion that she has participated in illicit or socially unacceptable sexual behavior.

Introduction

Females are a reproductive commodity. For example, although sons have the ability to produce more offspring than daughters, daughters have more certain opportunity to reproduce than sons. Because women invest more heavily in offspring than men, women are more selective when choosing mates. Men compete with one another to secure sexual access to women. Thus, safeguarding female kin may have been ancestrally adaptive (Perilloux et al. 2008). Genetic kin can be reasonably certain that a female relative will have opportunities to produce offspring whereas a male relative may not. By performing behaviors to control a female relative's sexual behavior and thereby protect their reproductive value, ancestral kin members increased their fitness.

Kin's female-directed guarding behavior sometimes becomes violent, and occasionally homicidal. Homicidal revenge for a kin member's abuse or death has been documented in many cultures (Daly and Wilson 1988). Engaging in violence against those who threaten or injure female kin protects the woman's future reproductive potential. For example, proximity to kin is associated with lower rates of female-directed abuse and homicide (Daly and Wilson 1988). Additionally, Daly and Wilson (1988) report that women are more likely to use violence against

an abusive partner when the woman's genetic kin reside nearby, suggesting that proximity to kin translates into protection for the woman, and may encourage her to engage in violent self-defense. However, sometimes culture and reputation lead kin to kill women, a practice referred to as "honor killing." Honor killings are primarily perpetrated by fathers or brothers against female kin to restore and protect the family's honor (e.g., a man kills his daughter who is suspected of having premarital sex). From an evolutionary perspective, killing an offspring may have been ancestrally adaptive, for example, if the absence of that offspring made available resources that could be invested in offspring with a more promising reproductive future.

Guarding Female Kin

Mate guarding refers to behaviors performed to reduce the risk of an intimate partner being poached, committing infidelity, or abandoning the relationship (Buss 1988). The daughter-guarding hypothesis suggests that humans have evolved psychological adaptations to be especially sensitive to and protective of a female kin member's sexual behavior and reputation (Perilloux et al. 2008). Because female kin more reliably reproduce, kin members attempt to exact more control over a female's mating behaviors than over a male's mating behaviors (Faulkner and Schaller 2007; Perilloux et al. 2008). Controlling a daughter's sexual behavior, for example, may have been ancestrally adaptive for kin because females do not face maternity uncertainty, thus increasing the likelihood that the female kin's offspring will share the genes of her kin. Additionally, because offspring development occurs within women, using violence to protect female kin from an abusive partner may have been selected, given that harm inflicted on a woman might decrease her reproductive success and, consequently, the success of her genetic kin. Women who have proximate kin, or more immediate familial protection, are less likely to be killed or injured by a partner (Daly and Wilson 1988). One study of South Asian women

immigrants reported that loss of social support after migration reduced the likelihood that immigrant women would seek help for partner abuse (Ahmad et al. 2009).

Retaliation and Revenge

In some cultures or religions, kin members (particularly fathers or brothers) kill a daughter or sister to restore "honor" to the family. For example, Chesler (2010) reported that 57% of Muslim honor killings are motivated by perceived sexual impropriety by the victim, such as engaging in an extramarital affair. In the United States, 56% of honor killings are committed by a father for the daughter's perceived misbehavior, such as dating outside the family's culture or religion (Hayes et al. 2016). Although it seems counterintuitive to kill offspring, the restoration of the family's social status may improve the reproductive future of other family members. If a daughter's sexual reputation has been tarnished, she might no longer be a reproductive commodity to her family. Her death might therefore benefit the rest of the family by freeing up resources otherwise consumed by her.

Conclusion

Individuals exercise greater vigilance over close genetic kin than non-related individuals or more distant kin (Faulkner and Schaller 2007). Vigilance and violence by a woman's kin function to control the woman's sexual behavior. To increase the replicative success of shared genes, kin may defend females by inflicting violence against an abusive mate or by monitoring a woman's clothing, for example. Guarding of females by kin is intended to increase the power parents and relatives have in determining with whom the guarded female mates and reproduces (Perilloux et al. 2008). In rare instances, however, kin kill their daughters or sisters to restore social status or "honor" to the family.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Benefits to Kin](#)
- ▶ [Conflict Between Parents and Offspring](#)
- ▶ [Daughter Guarding](#)
- ▶ [Kin Proximity](#)

References

- Ahmad, F., Driver, N., McNally, M. J., & Stewart, D. E. (2009). "Why doesn't she seek help for partner abuse?" An exploratory study with South Asian immigrant women. *Social Science & Medicine*, *69*(4), 613–622.
- Buss, D. M. (1988). From vigilance to violence: Tactics of mate retention in American undergraduates. *Ethology and Sociobiology*, *9*(5), 291–317.
- Chesler, P. (2010). Worldwide trends in honor killings. *Middle East Quarterly*, *17*, 1–10.
- Daly, M., & Wilson, M. (1988). *Homicide*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.
- Faulkner, J., & Schaller, M. (2007). Nepotistic nosiness: Inclusive fitness and vigilance of kin members' romantic relationships. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, *28*(6), 430–438.
- Hayes, B. E., Freilich, J. D., & Chermak, S. M. (2016). An exploratory study of honor crimes in the United States. *Journal of Family Violence*, *31*(3), 303–314.
- Perilloux, C., Fleischman, D. S., & Buss, D. M. (2008). The daughter-guarding hypothesis: Parental influence on, and emotional reactions to, offspring's mating behavior. *Evolutionary Psychology*, *6*(2), 217–233.