




## Men's lived experience of domestic violence (qualitative study)

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### Article Info

#### Article type:

Original Research

#### How to cite this article:

Valian, A., Gholamzadeh Jofreh, M., & Shahbazi, M. (2023). Men's lived experience of domestic violence (qualitative study). *Journal of Assessment and Research in Applied Counseling*, 5(4), 81-88.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.jarac.5.4.10>



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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Violence is an unpleasant and harmful behavior towards individuals, families and communities. Domestic violence of couples, especially women against men, is a newer phenomenon that needs research. Accordingly, the main goal of the present study was to study men's lived experience of domestic violence.

**Materials and Methods:** The present research method was qualitative-phenomenological and practical in terms of purpose. The present research method was qualitative-phenomenological and practical in terms of purpose. The participating community included married people in Ilam province, and the research sample (18 people) was selected by purposive sampling considering some criteria of the researcher. Considering the nature of the research method, the rule of theoretical saturation was used for the sample size. The research tool included semi-structured interviews, which were used for the validity of the tool using the formal method and for reliability, the recoding method between the researcher and another researcher was used, and the agreement coefficient between the coders was 0.81. The coding method was also used to analyze the findings.

**Findings:** The findings showed that 32 sub-themes and 6 main themes including (quantitative challenges of having children, body management challenges, female infertility challenges, economic violence, psychological violence and sexual violence) were identified from men's lived experience of domestic violence.

**Conclusion:** It can be concluded that men also experience various types of violence in their married life, that family planners and counselors should analyze its dimensions more in order to better understand this type of violence.

**Keywords:** Lived experience, domestic violence, men, family

### 1. Introduction

The purpose of establishing a family is to create a peaceful environment conducive to the growth and flourishing of personalities. A family is usually a small unit, consisting of at least two or three members, but is considered

one of the most important social institutions and the primary source of construction and nurturing of generations, the highest source of happiness, and the richest source of affection (Baidoo et al., 2021).

Although a family is a source of tranquility for its members, it can also become a center for aggression.

Domestic violence is a clear violation of human rights, not specific to any society or class, and is a widespread and common issue across many cultures, affecting individuals, families, and societies (Mehdizadegan, Haghshenas, & Atashpour, 2013). Violence has always existed in societies and families, affecting them in various ways, but its form has varied over different periods. Among different types of violence - domestic, social, and state - domestic violence is a serious social harm (Piquero et al., 2021). Family violence refers to aggression in marital relationships, sometimes described as spouse abuse, marital violence, wife abuse, partner abuse, etc. (Banerjee, Ferrara, & Orozco, 2019).

Domestic violence in marital relationships is divided into two types: male against female and female against male, known as mutual marital violence when either spouse may initiate violence (Williams et al., 2011). Marital violence is not only perpetrated by men; women also use violence against men (Anderson, 2017). Researchers reported that men are more likely to use the most dangerous and injurious aggression. Women also suppress their husbands, use knives, and firearms (Thomas et al., 1999).

Recently, some researchers and social issue experts have also focused on another form of domestic violence, namely against men (Wilcox et al., 2021). Every day in the media, we witness behaviors leading even to the murder of the victim. It once seemed that violence was only perpetrated by men, but with increasing awareness and women's rights movements, men have also become victims of violence (Kourti et al., 2021).

Women's violent and abusive behaviors at home can impact men personally, causing physical and psychological harm (even death). Furthermore, such behaviors harm the family institution and society due to interactions among family members and with outsiders, incurring significant societal costs (Slabbert, 2017).

A World Health Organization study on health and domestic violence against women, collecting data from over 24,000 women in 15 regions from 10 countries, showed that the prevalence of physical, sexual, or both types of violence by a sexual partner in their lifetime was between 15 to 71 percent, most commonly between 29 to 62 percent (Telles et al., 2020). Despite the high rate of domestic violence, it is often overlooked compared to more common forms of violence. While violence is defined as any behavior leading to physical and psychological harm, usually only physical violence receives attention from criminologists, legal experts, and lawmakers. Some researchers, observing that physical violence by women against their husbands is not as

prevalent, and without thoroughly examining other forms of violence like verbal, psychological, social, financial, legal, sexual, etc., have downplayed domestic violence against men (Danesh, Mazandarani, & Khosh Sima, 2023); or some have argued that women's violence against men should be seen only as reactive, defensive, or survival violence (Ghazizadeh et al., 2018).

Several studies on domestic violence have been conducted. Hosseini and colleagues (2021) found that domestic violence against men has multiple dysfunctional consequences, affecting individuals, families, and society at large (Hosseini, Majdi, & Khalighi, 2021). Heidari and colleagues (2021) concluded that although the severity of experienced violence is higher among women, especially middle-aged couples compared to younger adults, there is no significant statistical difference between the violence experienced by men and women or different age groups (Heidari, 2022). Ghazizadeh (2018) concluded that the central phenomenon and theme of domestic violence is inappropriate marriage, with individual factors like physiological and biological issues, addiction, personality disorders, and personality traits, and family factors like differentiation, family structure, power structure in the family, and unfavorable family experiences playing a role (Ghazizadeh et al., 2018). Economic, occupational, organizational, social, and cultural factors act as background factors, with irrational thoughts, gender differences, and marital myths as intervening factors. Firouzjaeian and colleagues (2015) found that background variables such as age, spouse's age, duration of marriage, number of children, and number of marriages have a significant relationship with violence against men. The main research variables (lack of consensus, synchrony, fortune, and empathy) also directly affect violence against men (Firouzjaeian & Rezaeicharati, 2015). Lysova et al. (2020) found that among male victims, the most severe forms of violence were physical and sexual (Lysova et al., 2020). Aziz and colleagues (2018) concluded that the causes of domestic abuse against men, types of domestic abuse against men, effects of domestic abuse against men, men's perception of reducing or stopping violence by their spouses, and characteristics of abusive spouses are the main factors of violence against women against men (Aziz et al., 2018).

Regarding the necessity of the current research, it must be said that violence from both sides, i.e., men and women, can cause serious and (Aziz et al., 2018) irreparable damage to the family core. Additionally, it incurs cultural, social, and economic costs to society. Moreover, the consequences of

this type of violence can manifest in children, shaping them into aggressors. Therefore, the necessity of conducting research on domestic violence against men, in addition to filling a research gap, can provide more results for understanding the family and marital issues for planners and consultants. Thus, the primary goal of this research is to explore men's lived experiences of domestic violence.

**2. Methods and Materials**

*2.1. Study Design and Participants*

The method of the current research was qualitative-phenomenological and applied in objective. The participant community consisted of married individuals in the Ilam province. The research sample was selected through purposive sampling, taking into account certain criteria deemed important by the researcher, such as the willingness to participate in the research, a minimum history of one year of married life, and the experience of domestic violence. The sample size was determined based on the principle of theoretical saturation in qualitative research methodology; meaning that the researcher continued conducting interviews until no new concepts were identified. When no further new concepts emerged, the interview process was concluded. Based on this approach, a total of 18 individuals were interviewed.

*2.2. Measures*

*2.2.1. Semi-structured interview*

The research instrument consisted of semi-structured interviews that asked questions about domestic violence, with a focus on violence against men by women. There were no restrictions in asking questions, and the researcher focused on important points raised by the respondents. For the validity of the findings, a formal method was used, and the interviews were reviewed by several experts. For reliability, a re-coding method between the researcher and another researcher was used, resulting in an agreement coefficient of 0.81. A coding method was used for analyzing the findings.

*2.3. Procedures and Data Analysis*

Initially, research participants were selected, and the preliminary text of the questions was sent via email and messaging apps for them to familiarize themselves with the questions and the purpose of the research. Participants were asked to choose a suitable time and place for the interview. The interviews, conducted in a friendly atmosphere, sometimes at home and sometimes in parks, began by introducing the research objectives and asking general and demographic questions of the respondents. The questions ranged from specific to general. Efforts were made to ensure participants felt comfortable and answered the questions honestly. Each interview lasted about 40 minutes, depending on the respondent's ability to respond. After each interview, the text was analyzed, and any ambiguous phrases or words were referred back to the concerned individual for further clarification.

**3. Findings and Results**

In the current research sample, the age of two individuals (11%) was 20-25 years, five individuals (28%) were 26-30 years, six (33%) were 31-35 years, and five (28%) were 36-40 years old. Regarding economic status, 4 individuals (22%) had a good economic status, 8 (45%) had an average status, and 6 (33%) had a poor economic status. Also, in terms of marriage duration, 5 participants (28%) had been married for less than two years, 8 (44%) between two to five years, and 5 (28%) for over five years.

Subsequently, the sub-themes and main themes were revisited, and similar, repetitive themes implying the same meaning and concept were eliminated. Initially, there were 214 open codes, which were reduced to 108 after eliminating repetitive and similar codes and final screening. These open codes were then assigned to sub-themes, reducing to 32 sub-themes. Furthermore, all sub-themes were condensed into main themes, ultimately identifying 6 main themes: (Quantitative Challenges of Childbearing, Body Management Challenges, Women's Infertility Challenges, Economic Violence, Psychological Violence, and Sexual Violence) (Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Secondary and Main Themes of Domestic Violence Against Men*

Main Theme	Secondary Theme
Quantitative Challenges of Childbearing	Number of Children Timing of Childbearing

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	Solo Childbearing
	Contentment with Childbearing Quantity
Body Management Challenges	Limits to Self-Care
	Concerns about Cosmetic Products
	Challenges in Makeup Limits
	Excessive Makeup Demands
Women's Infertility Challenges	Woman's Infertility
	Perception of Women's Infertility
	Longing for Childbearing
	Husband's Infertility
	Desire for Childbearing
	Revenge for Husband's Infertility
	Justifications for Women's Infertility
Economic Violence	Unnecessary Money Requests
	Disrespectful Money Demands
	Compulsion to Unnecessary Spending
	Request for Property Ownership Transfer
	Financial Complaints
	Threats of Spouse's Extravagance
	Desire for Latest Gadgets
Psychological Violence	Threat of Divorce
	Threat to Leave Home
	Boasting of Others
	Mockery and Humiliation of Men
Sexual Violence	Women's Request for Variety in Sexual Relations
	Reduction in Sexual Relations due to Women's Behavior
	Marital Intimacy Frequency
	Sexual Partner Complaints
	Disregard for Marital Norms
	Marital Disturbances

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Results from [Table 1](#) show that 32 sub-themes and 6 main themes, including (Quantitative Challenges of Childbearing, Body Management Challenges, Women's Infertility Challenges, Economic Violence, Psychological Violence, and Sexual Violence), were identified in men's lived experiences of domestic violence. The following provides a description of each main theme.

### 3.1. *Quantitative Challenges of Childbearing*

This theme has four sub-themes: "Number of Children," "Timing of Childbearing," "Solo Childbearing," and "Contentment with Childbearing Quantity." It essentially refers to the various challenges couples face regarding the quality and quantity of childbearing. Participants believed that women's attitudes towards childbearing have changed compared to the past, and fewer women are willing to have many children. They believed that most women prefer to have one child or even a child-free life, leading to violence and conflict against them (men). Direct quotes from participants are presented below.

Participants believed that if a man wanted to have several children, he would face opposition from the woman. For instance, one participant said:

"I told my wife I wanted to have 3 children. She replied, 'What, are we opening a daycare? I'm not going to spend my life just giving birth to kids. I'm a person too and I want to live, not just constantly stress about raising children.' (Participant 10)."

"I wanted us to have a child right at the start of our marriage, but my wife said she wouldn't have more than one because raising children takes energy and nerves, and you can't raise several kids like in the past. I told you before we got married, one child is enough (Participant 6)."

Another participant believed that his wife had said she did not expect to have children in the first few years of marriage. This upset the wife because the man had said they should have a child in the first year of marriage, and the woman was not prepared for this, leading to her intense anger at the man and refusing to comply (Participant 16).

Another participant mentioned that:

"My wife was very upset that she got pregnant and had a child against her will. She always complained for several years that I didn't understand and help with raising the child, which led to disputes between us, even threatening me for compensation. 'You're not like the father of this child, I don't

have anyone to help me, at least take care of the child while I go to the salon until I return.' (Participant 18)."

### 3.2. *Body Management Challenges*

Today, the issue of body management, from makeup to body manipulation and various surgeries, has become a social issue that has caused irreparable damage to some. Body management, in its various forms, is very important for women, and every day we see an increase in people visiting doctors for surgeries and body appearance changes. This theme refers to physical body appearance changes. Some examples are mentioned below.

There are often significant disagreements between men and women about the extent of body management and the use of cosmetics and appearance changes. Some women go to extremes, constantly comparing themselves to others and wanting to change their bodies. In this regard, a participant believed that:

"My wife got upset and started sulking when I told her to stop destroying herself with makeup as it could cause skin problems. She always complained, like, 'Why don't you take me for a nose job like Mr. So-and-So's husband? Shut up...'"

"It's none of your business how I take care of myself. Did you pay for it that you are interfering? I got the money from my mother; it's none of your concern, so don't interfere."

One participant believed that:

"My wife's life became all about makeup and doctor visits, to the point where there was hardly any part of her body she hadn't changed, and I could hardly recognize her. When I said I couldn't afford these expenses anymore, she said it was my duty and what have you done for me? This made her even blame me and shout at me angrily, 'What have you done for me?'"

Another participant shared that his wife was always upset because he did not understand and help with raising the child, leading to disputes between them, and even threatening him for compensation.

"You don't seem like the father of this child, I don't have anyone to help me, at least look after the child while I go to the salon until I return. (Participant 18)."

### 3.3. *Women's Infertility Challenges*

One of the significant issues in childbearing today is the challenge of female infertility. Infertility leads to reduced childbearing and sometimes results in a childless life for couples, which can have various consequences including divorce and the spouse remarrying in hopes of having

children. This issue also has significant psychological impacts on women, with instances of suicide attempts. In essence, infertility is one of the family-related problems at the national level, where the high cost of treatment is another challenge. Sub-themes of this main theme include perception of female infertility, infertility as an excuse, longing for childbearing, and justifications for female infertility. Important cases are described below.

Participants believed that:

"When my wife found out she couldn't get pregnant, it was like her world had ended. When she heard directly from the doctor that she couldn't become a mother due to a specific reason, her whole life changed from that day. I tried to calm her down and console her, but she had changed. Despite all my efforts, because of my love for her, it wasn't very effective. She would say I would soon marry another woman, and no matter how hard I tried to change this perception, it was futile. She became more irritable every day, blamed me, and made life more difficult for me. (Participant 15)"

"My wife, upon realizing her infertility and the ineffectiveness of years of treatment, began making excuses, saying that I (the husband) didn't try hard enough and that I didn't take her abroad for treatment. This was despite the fact that the doctor didn't give her much hope, and I had tried very hard despite the heavy costs of infertility treatment. (Participant 9)"

"I told my wife it's okay if you can't have children; I'll marry someone else. She didn't respond, but it was obvious how she felt. She stopped caring for me like before and didn't even prepare meals on time. Gradually, she became resentful that I hadn't done anything for her. She spoke to me harshly and didn't respect me like before. (Participant 10)"

### 3.4. *Economic Violence*

Economic violence includes three sub-categories: 1) taking money, 2) taking non-monetary assets from the man, and 3) forcing spending against the man's will. This theme refers to behaviors, requests, and actions applied by women on men, causing dissatisfaction and interaction and reaction between couples. Descriptions of this theme are presented below.

A participant stated:

"My wife even checks the cash I have... she takes all my money... she checks my account every day (Participant 1)."

Another participant said, "My wife works... initially, she said your money is yours... she said she had no financial



expectations from me... recently, she says you don't know how to save and that I should deposit all my money into her account."

Another participant mentioned, "The SIM card that receives my card's second password is in her phone."

Another participant expressed, "She has taken all the money I have... (Participant 12)."

Another shared, "We were renting, and when we bought a house, she forced me to register it in her name."

One participant said, "When we bought a car, she asked me to put it in her name."

"My wife doesn't think about saving at all and thinks all our income should be spent... We didn't need a rice cooker, but because her friend's husband bought one for her, she forced me to buy a rice cooker." One participant said, "... she always says buy gold, I tell her I need to think about my pocket, she says... (Participant 7)."

"My wife said, 'Why don't you provide me with everything I want? Look at Mr. Mohammad, Frida's husband... he immediately gets her whatever she wants. From now on, it's your duty to bring me whatever I want, or I will behave differently (Participant 6)."

### 3.5. Psychological Violence

The analysis of qualitative data showed that the main theme of psychological violence includes sub-themes: 1) threat of divorce, 2) threat to leave home, 5) flaunting others, 6) humiliation and taunting.

Participants shared that:

"My life has become hell. She says twenty times a day she will enforce her dowry. What kind of situation is this? How much more do I have to pay? (Participant 15)"

"I have spent more on this lady than her entire dowry just to prevent her from enforcing it! (Participant 9)"

Threat to leave home was also a sub-theme. Participants stated:

"When I told my wife to modestly adjust her dressing while going out, she replied it's none of my business and she looks good. She warned me not to nag or she would leave the house. (Participant 14)"

### 3.6. Sexual Violence

The analysis of qualitative data indicated that the fifth main theme of men's lived experiences of domestic violence is sexual violence, including four sub-categories: 1) imposing unconventional sexual practices, 2) sexual

rejection, 3) indifference to sexual needs, and 4) intentional disruption of sexual satisfaction for the man.

A participant said:

"Our sexual relationship isn't good at all. She asked me to try something she liked, even though I didn't like it... this repeated... she kept wanting something new that I didn't like... our sexual relationship doesn't bring me any pleasure anymore..."

Another participant noted, "When I go to hug her, she pushes me away... she sleeps with her back to me..."

The analysis showed that the third sub-category of the main theme of sexual violence is indifference to sexual needs. Statements from two participants containing the theme of indifference to sexual needs are presented below.

A participant expressed:

"She doesn't care what I want in our sexual relationship... she's never asked what I like..."

Another participant shared: "I always initiate. I wish she would initiate a sexual relationship for once."

Another participant said: "I don't want to always be the initiator... our sexual relationship is always according to her wishes... I've told her a thousand times how I like it, but she hasn't paid any attention..."

## 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The primary objective of the current research was to explore men's lived experiences of domestic violence. Findings revealed that six main themes (including: challenges of childbearing quantity, body management challenges, women's infertility challenges, economic violence, psychological violence, and sexual violence) indicate domestic violence by women against men. These results align with some studies (Danesh, Mazandarani, & Khosh Sima, 2023; Ghazizadeh et al., 2018; Hosseini, Majdi, & Khalighi, 2021; Lysova et al., 2020).

In explaining the findings, it should be mentioned that while the focus is usually on domestic violence against women, men are also subject to violence. As the findings showed, various factors are involved in this issue. One of the conflict points is about the quantity and quality of children. Today, women are less inclined towards childbearing. Women, compared to the past, tend to take more care of themselves and often consider self-care during pregnancy less; thus, men desiring more children might face women's anger and reluctance, leading to challenges between them and a form of violence against men. Another significant factor in violence against men is body management

challenges. In analyzing this issue, it should be mentioned that body management and the ideal perception of the body in society have become a new phenomenon. The notion of a fit and attractive woman is increasing among women (Piquero et al., 2021). Women prefer to pay more attention to their physical appearance than before. This can lead to extremism, causing challenges between couples and violent behavior from one of them. In explaining another main factor identified in this research, i.e., women's infertility, it should be noted that some women cannot bear children due to various reasons. Even if their husband might be willing to continue the relationship with his partner, the woman might perceive her future at risk and think the husband would consider another wife (Rowlands, 2021). This can lead to creating excuses and ill-temper from the woman against the man, causing problems; therefore, it can be concluded that women's infertility can disrupt a stable family system and lead to violence from one of the parties if it persists. In explaining economic violence, it should be said that livelihood and its sustainable provision are primarily the man's responsibilities, but sometimes the woman also creates problems for the man. In other words, women, with unnecessary spending and demanding expenses beyond the man's capacity, weaken and incapacitate the man's income. When the man cannot meet these demands, he faces inappropriate and even violent behavior from the woman; therefore, it can be concluded that financial and economic issues in the family system can lead to violence from one of the parties and have adverse consequences.

## 5. Limitations & Suggestions

One of the limitations of this research was the nature of its methodology. Here, only a qualitative method was used, and due to financial and time constraints, the researcher could not validate the results. Moreover, the results of this

research are derived from a specific region where culture plays a very important role in understanding the meaning of family and marriage. Therefore, caution should be exercised in generalizing the results.

It is recommended that future researchers use a mixed method in their approach and, if possible, select samples from various regions of the country. Family counselors are advised to facilitate access to these centers to help couples understand mutual expectations. Furthermore, family system planners can provide practical counseling before marriage, presenting all the challenges ahead for couples, making them more aware of life challenges, and fostering a culture of seeking counseling.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who cooperated in carrying out this study.

## Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

## Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

## Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

## Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

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