

# A Study of Domestic Violence against Women: A Qualitative Meta-Synthesis

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Domestic violence is the most popular form of violence against women. Phenomenon of In the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women-1993 (DEVAW), was introduced as a barrier for reaching equality, development and peace. The objective of this research was to study individuals' lived experiences, especially the experiences of women exposed to violence in Iran.

**Methods:** This research is a descriptive research which employs a systemic review. The statistical population consists of all the qualitative studies conducted in Iran to consider the physical violence against women. To collect the data, Persian keywords for violence against women, domestic violence, wife abuse, violence against spouse and spouses who were beaten were searched in the Iranian online databases including SID, Irandocs, Iranmedex, Iranpsych, and Magiran. As the result of this search, 27 qualitative studies were selected which were exactly dedicated to the domestic violence from the viewpoints of men, women and experts. Then, the repetitions and the studies which were conducted before 2001 were excluded. After close reading of all the researches 10 of them were eventually selected.

**Results:** The most reported items after studying the individuals' lived experiences of physical violence against women in Iran included patriarchy, drug abuse, inappropriate sociability, lack of men's mental stability, deficiency in communicative skills between the couples and ignorance of each other's mental and sexual needs. The most reported strategies also encompass inactive and inefficient approaches such as keeping quiet but preoccupied with the problem, filing complaints, not being on speaking terms for a long while, revenge and deprivation of intercourse.

**Conclusion:** This social issue should be also studied like all other social issues as a multi-dimensional phenomenon in the social context.

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## 1. Introduction:

Domestic violence is the most universal form of violence against women. In 1993 *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women*, a phenomenon was introduced as an obstacle to the actualization of equality, development, and peace. Its existence in society often conveys but a single message: the growth of violence at all social levels (1).

Contemplation over the phenomenon would reveal latent patterns of sexual relations in society, which encompass our lives and opportunities and it has certain effects on us, as a social reality (2). How is the position and place of women defined in our society? C. Wright Mills responding to the question has remarked that, it is highly important to understand the relationship between personal and public subjects and to obtain a sociological insight, because only through such a view could one perceive how private experiences are rooted in social situations. For instance, a woman who is subject to her husband's physical, emotional or psychological violence is suffering from a deeply personal problem, but when other women of that society are also suffering from the same problem, the issue is raised as a social problem and a public subject. Although it often occurs within the private sphere of a family, it has an impact on all social spheres of the lives of women it threatens the quality of women's lives as well as their children's, their capabilities and independence. Therefore, it should be given attention beyond a personal subject and it entails a more comprehensive survey and enterprise by legislative authorities and social institutions (3).

The phenomenon is not restricted to a certain geographical location or social class and is traceable in almost all social layers. Yet the intensity and extension of violence and sometimes types of abuse is varying in

different societies (4). Numerous studies undertaken in developed and developing countries underscore the high rate of violence against women by their husbands (5-8).

Violence is in fact defined as an intention to hurt and physically damage others and is sometimes extended to involve degrees of social privation (9, 10). As mentioned in the United Nations' definition of Violence, violence against women is one of the most prevalent and systematic cases of violation of human rights in the world which uncomfortably affects women due to their gender. Such a sexual violence against women is a kind of discrimination that is deeply rooted in power imbalance and unequal structural relationships between men and women. Violence against women is a global phenomenon that occurs in every culture, country, and continent. It harms families, impoverishes societies and reinforces other forms of inequality and violence in all communities (11).

Violence against women in different countries is classified differently (3); one of the most comprehensive classifications has been undertaken by the United Nations according to which there are various types of violence: physical, psychological, sexual, traditions and customs exerted against women, sexual impairment of women or female genital mutilation, prenatal sex determination, premature or compulsory marriage, violence regarding dowry provision, crime against women caused by prejudice (murder in the name of honor), matricide, violence at work place and other places, smuggling of women and girls (11).

A survey of the studies undertaken at national and international levels reveals the undeniable extent of this phenomenon in all countries and cultures so much so that according to the available statistics, 34.6% of women in the United States (North America) have experienced domestic violence in their lifetime (7). Based on World Health Organizations' reports, many women in South America (49-61% in Peru, 27-34% in Brazil), Africa (49% in Ethiopia, 31% in Namibia, and 33-47% in Tanzania),

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South and East Asia (40-42% in Bangladesh, 23-34% in Thailand, and 13% in Japan), as well as in Europe (23% in Serbia and Montenegro) have been subject to domestic physical violence in their lifetimes (8). There is no authentic data regarding the number and frequency of violence against women in Iran, but the undertaken researches in this field as well as unofficial reports and the statistics of women's references to medical and legal centers of the country imply the high rate and frequency of this phenomenon in Iran (5,12,14-5).

The most appropriate approach to the study of violence against women as a social problem is to take the phenomenon at the structural level of society. At this level we face power inequality between men and women in society, with men holding powerful positions in society while women often occupy lower social positions; power inequality in society manifests itself in the form of violence. It is important in this approach to pay attention to the social structure and its various institutions, ergo underscore the role of these institutions in exerting violence in society and families, since violence is a means of reflection and retention of men's power over women in society that is visible even in personal relationships (12).

A diversity of individual qualitative and quantitative researches have been conducted in different countries including Iran in order to determine causing or deterring factors in the outbreak of domestic violence against women most of which demonstrate limitations in terms of the number of reports surveyed, design, application, and analysis. Meanwhile nationwide studies have been made in some countries as well as Iran in the past years which tend to survey the rate and frequency of the phenomenon and its causology, covering both the depth and the width of the problem. Yet they have mostly neglected important details like the victims' experience of the phenomenon as well as the agents of violence. Accordingly, the first step towards addressing this social problem and obtaining an appropriate decision in this regard would be systematic collection of

data and undertaken researches in the form of qualitative studies to achieve an in-depth and profound as well as comprehensive result out of the lived experiences of the individuals who are directly affected by it. The present paper attempts to make a qualitative systematic review of the lived experience of individuals, especially women who have been subject to violence, to come up with an appropriate ground for further significant studies in this field.

## 2. Methods:

The present study is of the descriptive type and based on metasynthetic method for an analysis of qualitative studies in the field of domestic physical violence against women.<sup>†</sup>

The study of previous researches is achieved by different methods the best-known of which is metasynthesis; a special way of studying and secondary analysis of previous qualitative studies.

In order to perform a metasynthetic and systematic review of qualitative studies, in the first step the related keywords such as 'violence against women', 'wife abuse', 'domestic violence', 'violence against spouse' and 'battered wives' were searched on 'Scientific Information Database' (SID), 'Iranian Research Institute for Information Science and Technology' (IRANDOC), 'IranMedex', 'IranPsych', and 'MagIran' which resulted in 529 papers. Having surveyed titles and abstracts, 27 articles written in the span of 2001 to 2012 that exactly dealt with the issue of domestic violence in views of men, women and experts with qualitative approach were selected for secondary analysis. In the second step after the scrutiny of full texts of

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<sup>†</sup>A survey of the electronic databases of scientific and research papers cited for the present paper revealed that most researches undertaken in the field of domestic violence against women – in terms of accessibility of reports – dealt with physical violence and other types of violence such as psychological, sexual, etc. which are of considerable significance have been neglected in the aforementioned studies. Accordingly considering limitations of statistical societies the present research is also limited to the studies of physical violence against women.

articles and their critical assessment with regard to factors like definition of research subject, target society, time and place of research, validity of method and techniques of data collection and sample sufficiency in terms of authentic results, data saturation and elimination of repetitive cases, ten papers reached for final examination from a logical and interpretive approach and analogy (Table1).

To better expound the cases mentioned in individual lived experiences of violence against women, Table2 offers taxonomy of the most important causes of violence.

As you can see in the table, the most reported cases by violence-ridden women mentioned in ten papers under survey consist of: dominance of patriarchal patterns in society (12-9, 21), drug and alcohol abuse (15-22), inappropriate socialization (12, 15, 16, 20, 23), mental imbalance in men (15,17,19-21), defective communicative skills between couples (14,16-9), and inattention to each other's emotional and sexual needs (15,17,19, 20). With regard to the fact that dominance of patriarchal patterns in women's lived experiences is mentioned in almost all researches, it seems that a massive sociological level for analysis is a proper choice for expounding the social factor in violence against women. Moreover out of ten qualitative studies under survey, three articles have dealt with women's experience of counteractive strategies when facing domestic violence; some of the most important counteractive strategies reported by women are brought in table 3.

Most of the strategies reported in the papers include passive or unfruitful reactions like silence or moping, legal complaints, long-term tantrums, retaliation, and privation of sexual intercourse (14, 18-9). Women have shown less interest in positive or fruitful strategies such as silence and rational dialogues, seeking aid by the heads of the clan or reference to consultation centers and family therapy services (14).

### **3. Discussion:**

The results of qualitative studies indicate inappropriate marriages and inattention to

the right criteria for a successful marriage in the experiences of domestic violence-ridden women. Issues like lack of proper knowledge of the spouse before marriage as well as defective communicative skills within the matrimony, and absence of necessary pre-marriage education, living skills or effective communication between the spouses techniques are reported in these papers (24-27). In some of the studies under survey there were different or sometimes contradictory findings on the role age plays in such domestic tensions; nevertheless few papers have referred to low marriage age and age difference between the spouses as a risky element in the breakdown of domestic physical violence against women (19, 27).

According to the findings of the metasynthesis, women with higher education are less prone to physical violence compared with women with no academic education. Educated women enjoy more autonomy and necessary skills or resources for determining and terminating violent relationships. Likewise a comparison of role of higher education of men and women in engendering domestic violence against women, based on the present metasynthetic analysis, underscores the more significant and preservative function of women's education in this regard (24, 25).

Studies have revealed that women's lack of autonomy makes them subject to domestic violence (19, 20, 24). According to the present metasynthesis, women in occupations with income gain are more likely kept from domestic violence. We should note that occupations with income gains does not necessary equal economic autonomy and we should also pay attention to other elements such as the kind of occupation, difference of income levels between the spouses, their educational background and social norms before its analysis (27-30).

Drug and alcohol abuse in men is reported to be a dangerous cause of domestic violence against women. The negative effects of alcohol and narcotic drugs on the individual power of perception and judgment along with a series of related social and mental

**Table 1:** Summary of qualitative studies related to violence against women in Iran

1 <sup>st</sup> Author	Research Type	Year	Society	Method (Technique)	Number of Samples	Main Results	
1	Taheri Shahla	Qualitative	2001	Khodabandeh Town, Zanjan Province	Qualitative content analysis and depth interview	105 women referring to legal medical centers of Khodabandeh	The women's posed problems imply low levels of women's education, age difference between husbands and wives, low marriage age, financial inequality and lack of financial independency of women, patriarchal culture in society and interference of acquaintances in their lives.
2	E'zazi Shahla	Qualitative	2001	Urban, Tehran	Depth analysis	53 women referring to Counseling and Prevention centers of State Welfare Organization	Issues brought up by women include: attempts to preserve patriarchal power, patriarchal culture, violence as a problem solution method, a way of terminating domestic conflicts, acceptance of violence as a permissive way of enforcing discipline, and the society of treatment of women in a way to accept and tolerate violence.
3	Saberian Masoumeh	Qualitative	2003	Urban, Semnan	Centered group discussions	120 women referring to Forensic Medicine centers of Semnan City	Women's experiences involve unemployment, addiction, men's pride, pertinacity and self-centeredness, other people's interferences, dominant patriarchal patterns in society, excessive competition, objection and women's refusal to play sexually submissive roles.
4	Panaqi Leili	Qualitative	2006	South and South-east of Tehran	Phenomenological, centered group discussions	10 women victimized by violence via purposive sampling	The research based on women's lived experience resulted in classifying it according to three individual, cultural and social elements: cultural and patriarchal problems in society, the couple's negligence of each other's physical and mental characteristics, lack of pre-matrimonial education, inappropriate marriages, defective skills for effective communication, low self-esteem, lack of defensive power and financial independence of women, fear of divorce, violent patterns of men's behavior, men's unemployment or occupation in hard jobs, and addiction to alcohol and narcotic drugs.
5	Ahmadi Batul	Qualitative	2007	Urban, Tehran	Centered group discussions	50 couples from different districts of the city of Tehran 50 experts from Women's Centers of the legislative, the executive and the judiciary organs	The research based on women's lived experience resulted in classifying it according to two individual and socio-cultural elements: arrogance, avidity, experience of violent behavior in previous families, impressibility from friends, high levels of violence in society, marriage at low ages without mutual understanding, modern/traditional tensions, essential differences between families, dowry, difference between levels of education especially higher education on the part of women, women's independence and decision-making abilities in society, women's declining tolerance and submission to men, widespread addiction and alcoholism, men's misuse of women's emotionality, men's increasing distrust of women, preference of male children, family trainings and reinforcement of patriarchal and violent attitudes in men, men's mere focus on material needs in life.
6	Yazdkhasti Behjat	Qualitative	2008	Urban, Amol	Grounded theory, depth interview	30 women referring to counseling centers of the city of Amol	Men's lived experiences emphasize two groups of individual and sociocultural elements: women's ignorance of their real functions in society, absence of logical thought in families, far-fetched expectations, negligence of each other's needs and demands, lack of mutual respect, excessive competitions, and disregard of religious obligations
7	Fakhari Ali	Qualitative	2009	Urban, Tabriz	Grounded theory, depth interview	26 women referring to legal and medical centers of Tabriz	According to the results, women's challenging of lord-slave relationships in the family, their resistance to objectification of women, objection to their privation of education, modernity, women's increasing knowledge of sexual inequality in families are the main causes of violence.
						According to these women's lived experiences, difference in value systems and the couple's dependency indicators, men's indifference to matrimonial life, men's unfaithfulness, power executions from both sides in family relations, financial problems	

8	SadeghiFasaei Soheila	Qualitative	2010	Urban, Tehran	Phenomenologica, depth interview	50 women subjected to violence	and hardships of everyday life, addiction, men's illness and mental problems, distrust, placement in conflicting situations, and failure to appropriately solve problems in matrimonial life are causes of such violent acts. According to the women's lived experiences, there are two classes of structural and individual elements including: husbands' unemployment, women's employment, financial problems, the couple's unacquaintance with life and communication skills, interference of other family members, dissension over how to raise children, dissatisfaction with matrimonial relation, men's unfaithfulness to matrimonial life, men's addiction and devotion to their friends, great class difference between spouses, improper age differences between spouses, or neural disorder in one of the two.
9	Rahimi Hossein	Qualitative	2011	Provincial, Buyer-Ahmad	Depth interview	23 women referring to police stations of Buyer-Ahmad	As stated by women the causes of violence are: men or women's defective socialization, patriarchal culture, improper or incorrect marriages, the couple's lack of skill in making emotional connections, extra marital relation and remarriages men's will and mental imbalance.
10	Raeisi Somayeh	Qualitative	2012	Provincial, Iranshahr	Grounded theory, depth interview	Baluch women of Iranshahr	Women have pointed to patriarchal culture, incorrect methods of socialization, social pressure on women to tolerate violence, and men's addiction

factors would increase chances of resort to violence (31). Although researches on the geographical areas like African countries, South Asia, Europe and North America have emphasized on the consequences of alcoholism (32-34), we should keep in mind that religious practices and beliefs in Middle Eastern countries like Iran might result in minor reportages of alcohol consumption. On the other hand, the widespread use of narcotic drugs in some Middle East countries including Iran and evidences signifying a strong relationship between drug abuse and domestic violence in countries like the United States (34), which also suffer from high rates of drug abuse, double emphasize the necessity to consider the role of drug abuse in any studies of domestic violence.

The women's perception and definition of violence vary according to the indicators of age, education and social class; however, there is a consensus among many women that violence is a culturally accepted phenomenon by men and also insists that through processes of socialization they have learnt to accept men's domination (13, 15, 16, 20, 21). Violence against women has always been applied as a legitimate means of male dominance, in other words it has functioned as a means of social control that stems straightly from a patriarchal structure (13-16, 19-21).

Also the findings of the present research regarding women's counteractive strategies in case of domestic violence reveal that most often women have limited strategies to respond to violence most of which are passive and unfruitful like sulking, retaliation, silence . . . and would only lead to the resumption of the situation or endurance of violence (14,18-9). For a number of reasons including social norms that do not approve divorce or other reasons like fear of losing children, becoming a social scandal, deprivation of social positions, or lack of economic, social and legal support, most women would rather remain in the destructive violent relationships than take divorce (19). Women scarcely refer to consulting centers due to their unfamiliarity with the benefits of seeking help from specialists and consultants, economical problems, and also because husbands do not accompany them (14). It should be noted that any strategies women take is dependent on various elements such as age, social class, educational level, professional and financial independence, support from family and law, and most importantly the degree and type of violence (19).

#### 4. Conclusion:

This study is important in their right; however, this information will also be used

**Table 2:** A taxonomical summary of women’s lived experience of violence according to Iranian case studies

Inappropriate marriage	Age difference between spouses	Educational difference between spouses	Men’s drug and alcohol abuse	Men’s unemployment	Men’s mental imbalance	Women’s lack of independence	Defective communicative skills between spouses	Inattention to sexual and emotional needs	Other people’s interferences	Dominance of patriarchal patterns in society	Inappropriate socialization
						*			*	*	
Taheri Shahla										*	
E’zazi Shahla										*	*
Saberian Mas				*	*			*		*	
Panaqi Leili						*	*			*	*
Ahmadi Batul					*	*	*	*		*	*
Yazdkhasti Behjat									*	*	
Fakhari Ali				*	*			*		*	
Sadeghi Fasaei				*	*		*	*	*	*	*
Rahimi Hossein				*	*		*			*	*
Raeisi Somayeh			*							*	*

**Table 3:** A classified summary of counteractive strategies when facing violence as reported in Iranian studies of women’s lived experiences

Reference to consultation centers	Divorce	Seeking support of the heads of the clan	Complaint and solicitation for legal support	Privation of sex	Retaliation	Passive reactions like silence or moping	Long-term tantrum	Author
*		*	*	*	*	*	*	Saberian Mas
			*		*	*		Fakhari Ali
	*		*	*	*	*	*	Sadeghi Fasaei

give us a clear indication that the most important causes of violence against women such as dominance of patriarchal pattern in society, drug and alcohol abuse and counteractive strategies when they facing violence. It shows that majority of the women preferred to remain silent despite being victimized. In addition the dominance of patriarchal culture and inappropriate socialization of men are the most important causes of violence. Therefore, it seems necessary to treat this social problem, like other social problems, as a multidimensional issue and beyond the private sphere of families within its social context. It should be also noted, however, that the present research is by far the only research undertaken in this field in terms of design –qualitative systematic review. The little number of related qualitative studies, negligence of other types of violence exerted on women in the available studies, and confinement of the existing studies to

to help inform the interpretation of the quantitative research findings. Present study

the women's reports as victims of violence leading to further negligence of the viewpoints of men and experts on the subject have delimited this research.

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