

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Exploring Psychological and Social Factors Contributing to Family Tensions and Violence Against Married Men by Women: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract: **Background:** Family tensions occur between parents and can be perpetrated by either partner, weakening the family foundation. Domestic violence against men by women is a prevalent yet understudied issue. This qualitative study aimed to explore the psychological and social factors that contribute to domestic violence against men by women. **Methods:** This qualitative study employed thematic analysis to explore the psychological and social factors contributing to family tensions and violence against married men by women in Iran. Married men who filed domestic violence complaints in Ilam, Iran (2023) participated in purposive group interviews. The recruitment process continued until theoretical saturation was reached, meaning no new themes emerged from subsequent interviews. A total of 16 men participated in the study. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions focused on participants' experiences with family tensions and violence. These interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the collected data, with themes and sub-themes identified and analyzed using MAXQDA 2022 software. **Results:** Thematic analysis revealed 112 codes, 30 subthemes, and 6 main themes that emerged as the underlying psychological and social factors contributing to domestic violence against men by women in the Iranian context. These main themes were: low psychological resilience, emotional dissatisfaction of the wife, gender role conflict, female chauvinism, marriage based on materialistic goals, and perceived violations of marital vows. **Conclusion:** Men with low self-esteem and societal pressures on gender roles were more likely to experience domestic violence by their wives. Interestingly, some wives held more power due to their financial or educational status. Materialistic marriages and broken vows further increased the risk of violence. These findings call for a multifaceted approach in Iran, addressing both men's mental health and societal issues, while also creating support systems for male victims.

Keywords: Domestic violence, Psychological, Men, Women, Qualitative research

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1. Introduction

The family, as an enduring social institution, has long served as the cornerstone of societal preservation. Across diverse cultures and throughout history, the family bond has persisted in its myriad forms (1). Within the family, individuals find solace and security, with parental roles playing a pivotal role in fostering a harmonious environment (2). Juxtaposed against the family's inherent nurturing essence lies the de-

structive force of domestic violence. This pervasive global phenomenon affects nearly one-third of women worldwide, who experience physical or sexual violence at the hands of their intimate partners (3).

Domestic violence, often referred to as spousal abuse, wife abuse, battering, or partner abuse, encapsulates a spectrum of aggressive behaviors perpetrated within intimate relationships (4). The family conceptualized as a sacred haven for familial well-being and harmony, stands in stark contrast to the reality of domestic violence. This violence shatters the idyllic image of a peaceful home and the security inherent in kinship. Empirical evidence underscores the pervasive nature of this insidious phenomenon, transcending geographical and

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cultural boundaries (5). Domestic violence, a complex and pervasive social issue, takes a heavy toll on individuals, families, and society at large (6). This form of violence, often shrouded in secrecy and underreported, generates a multitude of social and health problems, yet persists in many cultures as a normalized behavior (7).

Domestic violence has traditionally focused on male perpetrators and female victims. However, growing evidence reveals men can also be victims of intimate partner abuse (8). This complex social issue, with roots in shifting family dynamics (9), is fueled by women's increased social and economic empowerment (11). This empowerment, while positive, can sometimes manifest as counter-violence, where women use aggression to assert authority or express grievances (12). The resulting power shift can leave men feeling insecure and alienated within their own homes, threatened by the loss of their traditional role as head of household (13). While domestic violence against men is a serious concern, it is acknowledged as less prevalent than violence against women. This disparity can lead to societal neglect of male victims, as the focus on female victimization, though crucial, can unintentionally create the perception that men are immune to abuse.

Sexual violence against men, a pervasive yet often overlooked issue, carries significant psychological and physical consequences (14). Despite the severity of this trauma, men are far less likely to report these experiences compared to women. This underreporting stems from a complex interplay of factors, including societal stigma, lack of awareness, and difficulties in legal recourse. Men who experience sexual violence often face immense social stigma, leading to feelings of shame, embarrassment, and isolation (15). This fear of judgment and societal disapproval can deter them from seeking help or reporting the assault. The perception that sexual violence is a predominantly female experience further reinforces the stigma, making it even more challenging for men to come forward with their experiences (16).

Psychological violence, encompassing verbal abuse, humiliation, and emotional manipulation, is the most prevalent form of domestic violence. Some advocates argue that effectively addressing domestic violence requires a gender-neutral approach that acknowledges the diverse experiences of both men and women (17). This approach should focus on dismantling harmful gender stereotypes, promoting open communication, and providing accessible support services for all victims (18). Research suggests that biological factors, such as hormonal imbalances, may contribute to aggression in some women (19). Fluctuations in progesterone and estrogen levels, particularly around menstruation, have been linked to increased irritability and hostility. While these hormonal changes may not fully explain aggressive behavior, they highlight the complex interplay of biolog-

ical and psychosocial factors that influence human behavior (20). One study (21) showed that both marital conflict and lack of intimacy directly and indirectly predict domestic violence through their impact on marital satisfaction. This suggests that addressing underlying marital issues and promoting healthy communication and intimacy can play a role in preventing domestic violence. Domestic violence against men, a pervasive yet often overlooked issue, has gained increasing attention in recent years. Hosseini et al. (22) highlight the wide-ranging impact of domestic violence against men, extending beyond the individual victim and family to affect the broader community. This study underscores the need for comprehensive interventions that address the diverse consequences of this issue. Kazemi Dastjerdehei et al. (23) expand on the risk factors associated with domestic violence, including addiction, mental health disorders, criminal behavior, difficulties forming emotional attachments, risky sexual practices, and disregard for ethical norms. These findings highlight the need for holistic approaches that address the multifaceted causes of violence. Taylor et al. (24) challenge traditional assumptions about male power dynamics, suggesting that men's power can be diminished or even invisible in certain contexts, particularly in intimate relationships with women. This finding highlights the need to move beyond gender stereotypes in understanding domestic violence. Scott-Storey et al. (25) emphasize the public health implications of intimate partner violence, affecting individuals of all genders and social backgrounds. Their research calls for a gender-neutral approach to intervention and prevention strategies.

Despite the relatively high prevalence of domestic violence against men by women and its increasing visibility in society, there has been limited research on the underlying factors contributing to this issue (26). Various studies have identified a range of factors, including individual, interpersonal, and socioeconomic causes. However, psychological and social factors have received less attention from researchers, creating a research gap. This qualitative study aims to explore the psychological and social factors that may contribute to family tensions and violence against married men by women in a modern Iranian society.

2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design specifically utilizing thematic analysis to explore the psychological and social factors contributing to family tensions and violence against married men by women in Iran. Qualitative research allows in-depth exploration of lived experiences and provides a rich understanding of complex social phenomena (27). Married men residing in Ilam province, Iran, who had filed domestic violence complaints in 2023 participated

in the study. A purposive sampling strategy was employed, targeting individuals who met specific criteria: willingness to participate, married for at least one year, and experience with domestic violence. Recruitment continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, meaning no new significant themes emerged from subsequent interviews (28). A total of 16 participants were interviewed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide with open-ended questions focused on participants' experiences with family tensions and violence within their marriages. The interview guide explored topics such as men's experiences with different forms of family tensions (e.g., emotional abuse, financial stress), perceptions of the underlying causes of these tensions, the impact of tensions on marital dynamics and potential triggers for violence, and the interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent from participants and later transcribed verbatim.

2.1. Procedure

Following the acquisition of the necessary ethical approvals (IR.IAU.AHVAZ.REC.1402.005), Ilam counseling centers were contacted. After outlining the study's objectives, researchers sought referrals for individuals experiencing marital conflict. A two-stage recruitment process was employed. First, potential participants were identified through the counseling centers. Subsequently, initial interview questions were disseminated via email and social media messaging platforms to familiarize participants with the research aims and specific questions. Participants were granted autonomy in selecting their preferred interview time and location, fostering a sense of control and potentially increasing participation rates. Interviews were conducted in private settings, either at participants' homes or at counseling centers, to ensure comfort and confidentiality. The interview process commenced with a reiteration of the study's objectives, followed by a series of general questions and the collection of demographic data. A semi-structured approach was employed, transitioning from broad to more focused questions. The interviewer prioritized creating a supportive environment to encourage open and honest responses. Interview durations ranged from approximately 45 to 60 minutes, depending on the participant's level of engagement and the richness of the provided information. Following each interview, transcripts were reviewed for clarity. If any ambiguities or unclear terminology were identified, participants were contacted for clarification to ensure the accuracy of the data.

2.2. Data Analysis

A qualitative thematic analysis was employed to explore the data. This involved a rigorous process of identifying and analyzing recurring themes and sub-themes within the data set. MAXQDA software, version 2022, was used to facilitate the

coding and analysis process.

3. Results

In the 16-person sample of the study, the average age of the participating men was 41.32 ± 6.68 years. In terms of education, 11 participants had a diploma or lower, 2 had an associate's degree, 2 had a bachelor's degree, and 1 had a master's degree. In terms of occupation, 3 participants had government jobs and 13 had private sector jobs.

During the interview analysis process, the primary and secondary themes were thoroughly reviewed. Redundant and repetitive themes that conveyed the same meaning and concept were eliminated. Initially, 119 open codes were identified. After removing repetitive and similar codes and conducting a final screening, the remaining codes were assigned to subthemes, resulting in a total of 30 subthemes. Subsequently, all subthemes were consolidated into primary themes, ultimately identifying six main themes (Table 1).

3.1. Low psychological resilience

The first core theme identified in this study is the psychological resilience deficiencies in women, as repeatedly emphasized by the participating men. These narratives reflect the men's perception of their wives' inability to handle stress, manage emotions, and cope with difficult situations. They suggest that the perceived lack of resilience in women contributed to the men's experiences of domestic violence. This theme highlights the perceived inability of women to cope with life's challenges and adversities. Examples of men's narratives:

"I never saw my wife have any patience in life. She was always sick, tired, and incapable of handling life's affairs (Participant 9, 41 years old)." "She would break down and lose her will to live even at the slightest discomfort (Participant 1, 50 years old)." "My wife showed no tolerance or patience when I faced financial problems and ended up in jail. She damaged my reputation even more than my family and friends (Participant 8, 38 years old)."

3.2. Emotional dissatisfaction of the wife

The second core theme identified in this study is the emotional dissatisfaction of the wife and its detrimental impact on marital dynamics. This theme encompasses five sub-themes: unfulfilled emotional needs of the wife, acceptance of husband's emotional coldness, reprimanding husband's emotional tastes, emotional detachment of the wife, superficial affection. Emotional connection is a cornerstone of a healthy and fulfilling marriage and the absence of emotional intimacy between spouses can lead to a range of negative consequences for both partners and their children. Narratives illustrating emotional dissatisfaction:



"My wife realized that I wasn't interested in her anymore, so she started treating me with indifference. Even during family gatherings with my parents and relatives, she would make sarcastic remarks and belittle me. I warned her not to do this, but she said, 'Do you respect me or love me? I'll behave however I want. You can't do anything about it (Participant 6, 40 years old).'"

3.3. Gender role conflict

Another identified theme was gender role conflict, which itself included five sub-categories: imposing non-consensual sexual activities, sexual rejection, ignoring sexual needs, deliberately disrupting male sexual satisfaction, and role conflict in marriage. Some participants expressed their experiences as follows:

"Our sexual relationship is not interesting at all. He told me he likes something and I agreed to try it even though I didn't like it at all... This was repeated every time... He always wanted something new that I didn't like... Our sexual relationship no longer brings me any pleasure... (Participant 12, 38 years old)." One participant said: "He doesn't care about what I want in our sexual relationship... He has never asked me what I like... (Participant 3, 35 years old)."

3.4. Female chauvinism

The concept of "female chauvinism" refers to a lifestyle adopted by some women who prioritize their own bodies and personal lives. Some participants expressed their experiences as follows:

"Believe me, women today have changed a lot compared to even their own mothers. My mother put everything first for her children and husband, but now my wife prioritizes her own life and herself, and then her family (Participant 10, 41 years old)." "My wife takes care of herself first, and her body and well-being are always important to her. Then she comes to me and our child. Even her own well-being is more important to her than the child's (Participant 15, 36 years old)."

3.5. Marriage based on materialistic goals

Another major theme related to domestic violence against men was "Marriage based on materialistic goals." This referred to marriages in which one partner, especially the woman, allegedly placed demands on the man during the courtship period. In other words, participants in the study described how, when discussing marital problems or arguments, women would often use this as a way to belittle or insult the man, reminding him of the conditions they had set for accepting his marriage proposal. This theme encompassed five subthemes: marriage as a source of identity with the man, delaying the time of engagement, continuous rejection of marriage proposals, marriage-oriented culture, and mocking conditional marriage. Some of the participants'

statements were as follows:

"I went to propose several times and was always rejected. I even took my family to meet her, but it was still the same. I even went to propose with some of my important acquaintances and relatives to get her to agree. She rejected me so many times until she finally said yes (Participant 11, 37 years old)." "I went to propose regularly for several years and she always played coy. They didn't raise any specific objections, but they kept delaying their answer. So, whenever we have a problem, she quickly reminds me, 'Do you remember how you begged me like a dog to say yes? Now you're putting on airs for me?' (Participant 16, 35 years old)." "At that time, the most important thing for me was to get her to say yes. She told me that I should never say no to anything she wanted, and she even made me promise not to ask for too many children, even one child is too much (Participant 4, 39 years old)."

3.6. Perceived violations of marital vows

Another theme related to domestic violence against men in the interview transcripts was "Perceived violations of marital vow." This theme encompassed four subthemes: man's emotional attachment to another person, reaction to extramarital relationship, reaction to extramarital behaviors of men, and marital infidelity of couples. Some examples of these subthemes are as follows:

"I was friends with another woman, and my wife was also with someone else. When I went to confront her and expose her, she also told me the exact details of my affair, and she humiliated me in the neighborhood so that the neighbors understood what was going on (Participant 5, 36 years old)." "My wife found out that I was sometimes having an affair with someone else. She became suspicious of me and was very, very violent. One time, she found clues about my relationship with that woman and was sure, she came at me with a knife and said a lot of insulting things to me (Participant 13)." "I met a woman by chance who was also a distant neighbor, and we sometimes had contact. When my wife found out that I had done such a thing, she had filed for divorce (Participant 7, 40 years old)."

Figure 1 presents the psychological and social causes of domestic violence by women against men.

4. Discussion

Employing a qualitative research approach, we investigated the psychosocial factors associated with female-perpetrated domestic violence against men. Thematic analysis of interview data from the participants identified six core psychosocial factors associated with domestic violence perpetrated by women against men: low psychological resilience, wives' emotional dissatisfaction, gender role conflict, female chau-

vinism, marriages motivated by materialistic goals, and perceived breaches of marital vows. This finding is consistent with the work of Hosseini et al. (22).

Psychological resilience is a dynamic process that enables individuals to adapt to and cope with life's challenges, including adversity, trauma, and stress. It is characterized by a set of personal characteristics and behaviors that allow individuals to bounce back from setbacks and maintain their mental well-being. Gender differences in psychological resilience have been a subject of ongoing research (29, 30). While some studies suggest that women may generally experience higher levels of emotional sensitivity and empathy (31), these qualities should not be interpreted as inherent weaknesses or predictors of lower resilience. Instead, it is crucial to consider the complex interplay of biological, psychological, and social factors that influence an individual's resilience. These factors may include genetic predispositions, early childhood experiences, coping strategies, social support networks, and cultural norms.

In the context of domestic violence, it is important to avoid making generalizations about gender-based differences in resilience or aggression. Family tensions are a complex issue with multifaceted causes, and attributing it solely to gender-based resilience gaps would oversimplify the problem and potentially hinder effective prevention and intervention strategies (5). Furthermore, it is essential to acknowledge the diverse experiences and perspectives of individuals within each gender category. Women, like men, exhibit a wide range of resilience levels and coping mechanisms, and their experiences with domestic violence are influenced by a multitude of factors beyond gender (15). Therefore, when examining the relationship between psychological resilience and domestic violence, it is crucial to adopt a nuanced and intersectional approach that considers the interplay of individual, relational, and societal factors.

One of the core themes identified in this study was 'wives' emotional dissatisfaction' as a contributing factor to domestic violence against men. The role of emotional dissatisfaction in domestic violence is complex and multifaceted. While the study highlights the potential for unmet emotional needs to contribute to male aggression, it is crucial to avoid simplistic or victim-blaming explanations. Emotional dissatisfaction can manifest in various ways, including a lack of emotional intimacy and connection, unresolved conflicts or resentments, and communication difficulties (9). It is important to note that emotional dissatisfaction is not an excuse for violence. Individuals have a responsibility to manage their emotions and seek healthy ways to address their needs.

One core theme identified in the study was "female chauvinism," highlighting the complex interplay between gender roles, societal norms, and individual experiences in shaping patterns of domestic violence against men. Female chauvin-

ism, also known as gynocentrism, refers to an ideology that promotes female superiority. It often manifests as a belief that women are inherently better than men in competence, intelligence, or morality (32). The emergence of female chauvinism as a factor in domestic violence raises critical considerations. Firstly, it reflects a challenge to traditional gender roles. In many societies, men have held dominant positions, while women have been subordinate. However, social and economic changes are forcing a renegotiation of these roles. This renegotiation can have significant psychological implications. Men may feel threatened by a perceived loss of power, while women may experience guilt or anxiety as they take on more assertive roles. Furthermore, women's empowerment movements may be misinterpreted to imply female superiority, leading to resentment and conflict in relationships. Therefore, it is crucial to avoid simplistic explanations and instead consider the broader social and cultural context that shapes and expresses gender ideologies.

In traditional Iranian society, gender roles have been clearly defined, with men primarily responsible for tasks outside the home and women taking on domestic duties. However, as society evolves, the concept of family and its associated roles is undergoing significant transformations (33). Women are increasingly seeking opportunities beyond the confines of the home, challenging the traditional division of labor. This shift in gender roles presents challenges for both men and women. Women may face difficulties in balancing their work and home responsibilities, particularly if they lack adequate support from their partners. Men, on the other hand, may need to adapt to changing expectations and redefine their roles within the household. If men fail to adjust to these changing expectations and resist participating in domestic chores, it can lead to tension and conflict within the relationship. Women may express their dissatisfaction through various means, such as refusing to perform household tasks or withholding emotional intimacy.

Several scholars have argued that marital stability is contingent upon the creation of a mutually tranquil environment for both spouses (34, 35). This perspective suggests a reciprocal exchange of tranquility, fostering a sense of security within the family unit. However, disruptions to this dynamic can threaten marital harmony. Studies have documented instances where women express a sense of forced compliance, entering the marriage not out of genuine affection but rather out of a perceived obligation to preserve the union (36). This perceived superiority, often accompanied by feelings of pity directed towards the male partner, can introduce a power imbalance within the relationship. Such imbalances have been linked to increased conflict, with some research suggesting a heightened risk of female-initiated aggression towards the male partner (37). While this study sheds light on domestic violence against men in Iran, its limitations are important to



acknowledge. The purposive sample, focusing on men who filed complaints, excludes those reluctant to report due to social stigma or fear. Therefore, the sample might not represent the full spectrum of male victims in Iran. Additionally, the research being conducted solely in Ilam limits generalizability, as cultural and social factors influencing domestic violence may differ in other regions or countries. Furthermore, relying solely on male perspectives provides an incomplete picture. Including female partners or mental health professionals could offer a more nuanced understanding of relationship dynamics. The theme of "female chauvinism" also warrants further exploration. Understanding the reasons behind women's violent behavior might require additional research methods beyond the current study. Finally, the social stigma surrounding domestic violence could lead to participants withholding sensitive information, potentially introducing social desirability bias into the responses. These limitations highlight the need for further research that addresses these aspects to gain a more comprehensive understanding of domestic violence against men in Iran.

5. Conclusion

This qualitative study sheds light on the complex interplay of psychological and social factors contributing to domestic violence against men by women in Iran. While low self-esteem in the male victims emerged as a key psychological factor, social factors like marital dissatisfaction and societal pressures around gender roles were also significant contributors. Interestingly, the power dynamic within some marriages appeared to be reversed, with wives holding a dominant position due to financial or educational advantages. Furthermore, marriages based on materialism rather than love and perceived violations of marital vows were seen as additional contributing factors. These findings highlight the need for a multifaceted approach to addressing domestic violence in Iran. This approach should consider interventions that address both psychological vulnerabilities in men and societal factors that perpetuate unhealthy marital dynamics and traditional gender roles. Additionally, support services for male victims need to be developed and promoted to ensure they have safe spaces to seek help. By acknowledging the complexities of domestic violence and addressing the diverse needs of both victims and perpetrators, a more comprehensive approach to preventing and responding to this issue can be established.

5.1. Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the Ethical Committee of Ahvaz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz, Iran (code: IR.IAU.AHVAZ.REC.1402.005).

6. Appendix

6.1. Acknowledgment

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6.2. Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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6.4. Authors contributions

All authors made substantial contributions to the conception, design, data acquisition, analysis, and interpretation of the study. They participated in drafting and critically revising the manuscript and approved the final version for publication.

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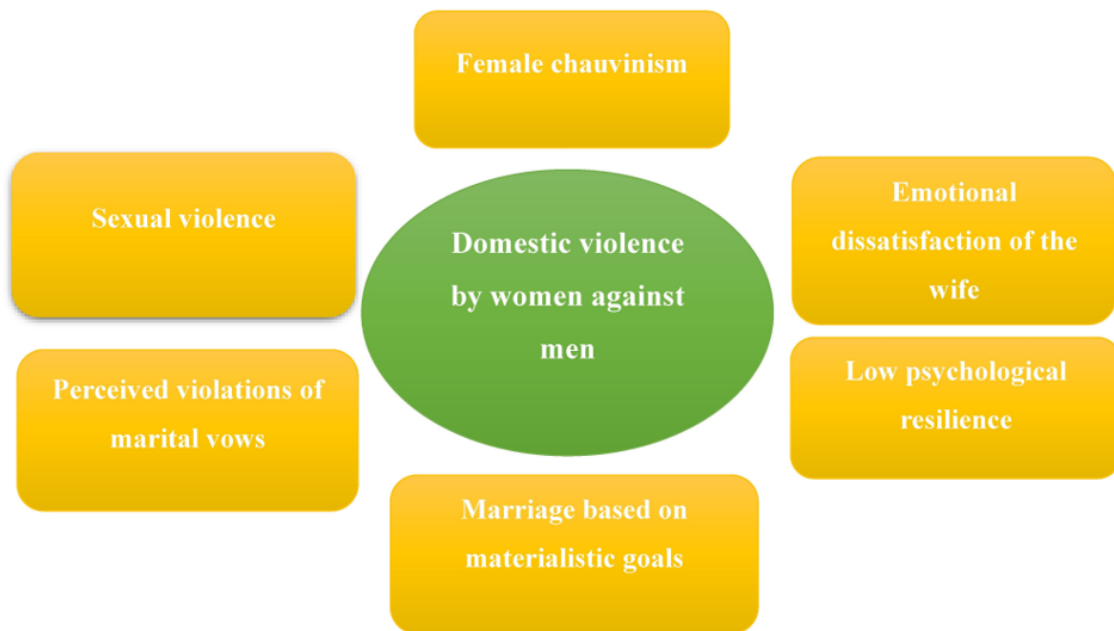


Figure 1: Psychological and social causes of domestic violence by women against men.

Table 1: Main themes and sub themes

Main themes	Subthemes
Low psychological resilience	Wife's impatience Wife's lack of patience in decision-making Wife's quick discouragement with life Lack of selflessness in behaviors Habitual blaming of the other party Restlessness in life
Emotional dissatisfaction of the wife	Emotional dissatisfaction of the wife Acceptance of husband's emotional coldness Reprimanding husband's emotional tastes Emotional detachment of the wife Superficial affection
Sexual violence	Imposing non-consensual sexual activities Sexual rejection, Ignoring sexual needs, Deliberately disrupting male sexual satisfaction Role conflict in marriage
Female chauvinism	Prioritizing personal life for men Women's preference over family Gender norms in life roles Urban and rural life differences Failure to adhere to life norms
Marriage based on materialistic goals	Marriage as a source of identity with the man Delaying the time of engagement Continuous rejection of marriage proposals Marriage-oriented culture Mocking conditional marriage
Perceived violations of marital vows	Man's emotional attachment to another person Reaction to extramarital relationship Reaction to extramarital behaviors of men Marital infidelity of couples