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The men as victims of domestic violence, and the role of demographic variables: A cross-sectional study

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Original Article

Abstract

BACKGROUND: This study aimed to examine the prevalence of spouse abuse against men and the demographic variables affecting it in Savojbolagh County, Iran.

METHODS: This was a cross-sectional study on all married men living in Savojbolagh County. The study population consisted of men employed in rural and urban healthcare centers as well as governmental and private companies in this province; 292 participants completed the demographic form and Man Abuse Questionnaire. This questionnaire assesses the different forms of abuse such as emotional, physical, sexual, neglect, and verbal abuse. The results were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation method in SPSS Software.

RESULTS: The majority of victims had experienced minor abuse (11.6%) including emotional abuse (15.8%), verbal abuse (13.7%), active aggression and sexual abuse (10.3%), and passive aggression and domination (9.2%). Moreover, 6.2% of the participants had experienced medium rate of abuse including passive aggression (8.6%), active aggression and sexual abuse (7.2%), domination (5.5%), verbal abuse (3.8%), and emotional abuse (3.1%). The remaining 1% had experienced severe abuse the most common forms of which were verbal abuse and domination (1.4%) and emotional abuse (1.0%). The highest frequency of spouse abuse occurred in the first 5 years of marriage among laborers. Moreover, there is a reverse relationship between increasing age of men, marriage duration, and education level and man abuse. However, man abuse had a positive relationship with low income.

CONCLUSION: The most prevalent form of violence by women against men in Iran included emotional abuse, verbal abuse, behavioral aggression, and sexual abuse with a severity rate of low to medium. Higher age of men, higher education level, longer marriage duration, sufficient income, and suitable age gap were factors that prevented women's violence against men.

KEYWORDS: Spousal Abuse, Partner Abuse, Wife Abuse, Domestic Violence

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Introduction

Domestic violence as a social health problem is defined as violence of family members against each other.[1] This violence is a combination of verbal, emotional, and aggressive behaviors as well as physical violence[2] including child abuse, elder abuse, and intimate partner violence (IPV).[3] Domestic violence comprises verbal, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse against a spouse. Among these forms of domestic violence, verbal violence is one major method broadly used by women because they can insult their husband, ruining his personality in the presence of their children[4] and imposing their dominance and authority over their husband.[5]

Conducted studies have implied increasing

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domestic violence in different societies.[6] Numerous studies on spouse abuse prevalence have defined it as abuse of women by men. Some studies in the USA showed that 1 in 4 women have experienced physical and sexual abuse by their husband.[7] Moreover, in the UK, 1 in 5 women are victims of domestic violence.[8] In Eastern Asian countries such as India, the rate of domestic violence has been reported as 14.31% and that of mental, physical, and sexual abuse has been reported as 10.8%.[9] In Western Asian countries such as Iran, the rate of domestic violence has been reported between 35 and 85%.[10,11]

Another form of spouse abuse is the abuse of men entailing emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, besides neglect of spouse needs. This form of abuse occurs in almost all societies, is less reported due to shame.[12,13] Therefore, it is hardly possible to present an accurate report in this case. The few studies about women's violence against men indicate an increasing number of men as victims of domestic violence with a change in communities, values, and norms.[14] For examples, about 600.000 men have been victims of violence during 2012 in Britain.[15] Furthermore, a study in Zambia (Demographic and Health Survey, 2013-2014) showed that 9% of women living in this country beat their husbands and 19% of violence occurs when the husband is drunk. In addition, 20% of women use violence as a self-defense strategy against abusive men.[16] Another study conducted in the USA showed that 7.6% of men suffer from domestic violence.[17] According to limited studies in Iran on this subject, only one study found physical violence (26.5%), emotional abuse (59%), sexual abuse (19.1%), and biting (13.5%) among men.[18]

Studies also indicate that various factors such as marital conflicts,[19,20] unmet emotional needs,[21] young age of couples, unemployment, low education level, substance abuse, psychological problems, having a child, and spouse's violence affect the abuse of men.[3,22] Moreover, the abuse of men is more common among the working class with lower economic status.[23] Considering the negative outcomes of domestic violence (violence against men) such as physical harms, psychological problems,[24,25] reduced self-esteem among victims,[26,27] divorce, and offense,[28] and the lack of adequate information on this topic, this study aimed at surveying the abuse of men and the demographic factors affecting it.

Materials and Methods

This was a descriptive and cross-sectional study. The study participants were married men supported by healthcare centers and governmental or private companies in Alborz Province, Iran. The study inclusion criteria consisted of being married, having grade-b literacy, at least 3 years' of marital life, and willingness to participate in the study. The questionnaires were distributed among 400 men; 292 men completed the questionnaires while the rest were incomplete, and thus, excluded. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS software (version 22, IBM Corporation, Armonk, NY, USA).

Two questionnaires were used in this research. The first questionnaire was a demographic questionnaire that measured items such as age, gender, education, occupation, and marital life duration. The second questionnaire used in this study was Ghahari's Man Abuse Questionnaire, which contains 50 questions scored based on a 4-point Likert scale (always: 3; mostly: 2; sometimes: 1: never: 0). The questionnaire assesses 5 dimensions of man abuse including active aggression and sexual abuse, emotional abuse, verbal abuse and neglect, passive aggression, and domination. These 5 factors could explain 67.05% of total variance. The severity of abuse could be assessed by the frequency of abuse in a day. The Cronbach's

alpha of this questionnaire was obtained at 0.98 indicating the high internal consistency of the questions.

Results

The statistical population of the study comprised married men who had referred to rural and urban healthcare centers in addition to employees working in public or private companies in Savojbolagh County, Alborz Province, Iran. Of the 400 study participants, 292 answered the questionnaires completely. The participants were in the age range of 20-59 years with an average age of 35 ± 8.13. Moreover, 24% of respondents had pre-diploma education, 50% had a diploma and associate degree, and 26% had a BSc. In addition, 89% of the participants were living in the city and 11% in villages. In terms of occupational status, 4% were unemployed, 4% retired, 56% laborers, 25% employees, and 10% self-employed. In terms of marital status, 32%, 34%, 16%, 18% of the participants had married 5 years ago, 5-10 years ago, 10-15 years ago, and more than 15 years ago, respectively. Moreover, 91% of them had previously been in a marriage, and 95% had their first marital experience. In addition, 23% had married a relative and half of them had married individuals of a similar culture and ethnicity. In terms of residential status, 47% had a private house, 44% were tenants, and 9% were living in their parents' home. In terms of income, 58%, 37%, and 5%, respectively, had an income of lower than 1 million toman (Iran's currency), 1-2 million toman, and above 2 million toman. Only 5% of the participant had psychiatric problems and less than 3% reported sexual problems. Among the participants, 22% were smokers, 7% consumed alcohol, and 10% were substance abusers. The highest prevalence rates obtained were related to the age group of 30-39 years (48.28%), marital durations of 5-10 years (33.5%), and laborers (60.95%).

As indicated in table 1, all skewness and kurtosis values for spouse abuse and its subscales were obtained between -2 and 2, indicating the normality and symmetric distribution of variables.

Table 2 shows that the majority of victims had experienced minor abuse (11.6%) including emotional abuse (15.8%), verbal abuse (13.7%), active aggression and sexual abuse (10.3%), and passive aggression and domination (9.2%). Moreover, 6.2% of the participants had experienced moderate abuse including passive aggression (8.6%), active aggression and sexual abuse (7.2%), domination (5.5%), verbal abuse (3.8%), and emotional abuse (3.1%). The remaining 1% of the subjects had experienced severe abuse among which the most common abuses included verbal abuse and domination (1.4%) and emotional abuse (1.0%).

Table 1. Descriptive indicators of spouse abuse and its subscales in the subjects

Variable / Indicator	Active aggression and sexual abuse	Emotional and social abuse	Verbal abuse and neglect	Passive aggression	domination	Total percent of spouse abuse
Mean	5.59	6.35	3.42	1.80	1.76	18.94
Standard deviation (SD)	9.05	7.25	5.05	3.09	2.49	25.15
Skewness	1.65	1.21	1.52	1.80	1.52	1.39
Standard error of skewness	0.14	0.14	0.14	0.14	0.14	0.14
Kurtosis	1.63	0.65	1.42	2.67	1.71	0.76
Kurtosis (SD)	0.28	0.28	0.28	0.28	0.28	0.28
Minimum	0	0	0	0	0	0
Maximum	41.00	32.00	24.00	17.00	11.00	119.00

Table 2. Prevalence of spouse abuse and its subscales in the studied subjects

Score	Active aggression and sexual abuse		Emotional and social abuse		Verbal abuse and neglect		Passive aggression		Domination		Total spouse abuse	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Missing	239	81.8	234	80.1	237	81.2	238	81.5	245	83.9	239	81.8
Mild	30	10.3	46	15.8	40	13.7	27	9.2	27	9.2	34	11.6
Average	21	7.2	9	3.1	11	3.8	25	8.6	16	5.5	18	6.2
Severe	2	0.7	3	1.0	4	1.4	2	0.7	4	1.4	1	0.3

To examine the relationship between man abuse and some demographic variables, Pearson and Spearman's correlation coefficients were calculated. The results are reported in table 3.

Based on the relation between age, marriage duration, and spouse abuse, man abuse is reduced with increase in age and marriage years. The highest rate of man abuse with mild intensity was observed in the age group of 20-29 years (72.41%). The most common abuses in the age group of 20-29 years were verbal abuse and neglect (43.63%) as well as active aggression and sexual abuse (37.73%) with mild intensity (Table 4).

According to results presented in table 4, the highest frequency of spouse abuse occurred in the first 5 years of marriage, but the frequency reduced 10 years after marriage. Moreover, results showed that verbal abuse and neglect (36.36%), sexual abuse (33.96%), emotional and social abuse (32.75%), and passive aggression (29.62%) were the most common spouse abuse aspects during the first 5 years of marriage (Table 5).

In case of the relationship between occupation and spousal abuse, emotional abuse was more prevalent in workers (70.68%), neglect and verbal abuse (67.27%), verbal aggression and sexual violence (50.94%), and passive aggression (44.44%), respectively; mild intensity of all types of spouse abuse was also reported (Table 6).

In case of relationship between education and spousal abuse in men,, the results showed that 52.83% men with a diploma were victims of mild degree violence by their wives with most common violence types including emotional abuse (62.06%), verbal abuse and neglect (61.81%), female dominations (55.42%), and active aggression and sexual abuse (41.5%). In other words, there is a reverse relationship between increasing age of men and marriage duration, and man abuse; however, this relationship is positive in the case of income. Although the relationship between age and marriage duration is not strong, it is significant. There was no significant relationship between man abuse and the number of children (Table 7).

Discussion

This study was conducted to examine spousal abuse of men by women and the demographic variables affecting it in Savojbolagh County, Iran. The results obtained indicated that the majority of men were victims of emotional violence by their spouses. The most common types of abuses experienced by men were emotional abuse (15.8%), verbal abuse (13.7%), active aggression and sexual abuse (10.3%), and passive aggression and domination (9.2%).

Table 3. Correlation coefficients between spouse abuse and the studied demographic variables

Spouse abuse	Pearson correlation				Spearman correlation	
	Age	Marriage durations	Age difference between couples	Number of children	Education	Income
	-0.244**	-0.188**	-0.074	-0.091	-0.078	0.132*

* P < 0.05; ** P < 0.01

Table 4. Prevalence of spouse abuse and its subscales based on respondents' age

Scale	Severity	20-29			30-39			40-49			50-59		
		Frequency	Percent in scale with regard to age	Percent in scale regardless of age	Frequency	Percent in scale with regard to age	Percent in scale regardless of age	Frequency	Percent in scale with regard to age	Percent in scale regardless of age	Frequency	Percent in scale with regard to age	Percent in scale regardless of age
Active aggression and sexual abuse	Mild	20	64.51	37.73	7	38.88	13.20	3	75.00	5.66	0	0	0
	Average	11	35.48	20.75	10	55.55	18.86	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Severe	0	0	0	1	5.55	1.88	1	25.00	1.88	0	0	0
Emotional and social abuse	Mild	20	83.33	34.48	21	75.00	36.20	5	83.33	8.62	0	0	0
	Average	4	16.66	6.89	5	17.85	8.62	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Severe	0	0	0	2	7.14	3.44	1	16.66	1.72	0	0	0
Verbal abuse and neglect	Mild	24	88.88	43.63	11	47.82	20.00	5	100.00	9.09	0	0	0
	Average	3	11.11	5.45	8	34.78	14.54	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Severe	0	0	0	4	17.39	7.27	0	0	0	0	0	0
Passive aggression	Mild	16	57.14	29.62	8	38.09	14.81	3	60.00	5.55	0	0	0
	Average	12	42.85	22.22	11	52.38	20.37	2	40.00	3.70	0	0	0
	Severe	0	0	0	2	9.52	3.70	0	0	0	0	0	0
domination	Mild	11	55.00	23.40	12	60.00	25.53	2	40.00	4.25	2	100	4.25
	Average	7	35.00	14.89	7	35.00	14.89	2	40.00	4.25	0	0	0
	Severe	2	10.00	4.25	1	5.00	2.12	1	20.00	2.12	0	0	0
Total spouse abuse	Mild	21	72.41	39.62	10	50.00	18.86	3	75.00	5.66	0	0	0
	average	8	27.58	15.09	9	45.00	16.98	1	25.00	1.88	0	0	0
	severe	0	0	0	1	5.00	1.88	0	0	0	0	0	

Table 5. Prevalence of spouse abuse and its subscales based on marriage duration in the participants

Scale	Severity	< 5			5-10			10-15			> 15		
		Frequency	Percent in scale with regard to marriage duration	Percent in scale regardless of marriage duration	Frequency	Percent in scale with regard to marriage duration	Percent in scale regardless of marriage duration	Frequency	Percent in scale with regard to marriage duration	Percent in scale regardless of marriage duration	Frequency	Percent in scale with regard to marriage duration	Percent in scale regardless of marriage duration
Active aggression and sexual abuse	Mild	18	66.66	33.96	7	36.84	13.20	3	60.0	5.66	2	100.00	3.77
	Average	8	29.62	15.09	12	63.15	22.64	1	20.0	1.88	0	0	0
	Severe	1	3.70	1.88	0	0	0	1	20.0	1.88	0	0	0
Emotional and social abuse	Mild	19	86.36	32.75	18	78.26	31.03	5	62.5	8.62	4	80.00	6.89
	Average	2	9.09	3.44	4	17.39	6.89	2	25.0	3.44	1	20.00	1.72
	Severe	1	4.54	1.72	1	4.34	1.72	1	12.5	1.72	0	0	0
Verbal abuse and neglect	Mild	20	83.33	36.36	14	66.66	25.45	3	50.0	5.45	3	75.00	5.45
	Average	4	16.66	7.27	7	33.33	12.72	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Severe	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	50.0	5.45	1	25.00	1.81
Passive aggression	Mild	16	64.00	29.62	5	26.31	9.25	4	80.0	7.40	2	40.00	3.70
	Average	9	36.00	16.66	14	73.68	25.92	0	0	0	2	40.00	3.70
	Severe	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	20.0	1.85	1	20.00	1.85
Domination	Mild	9	60.00	19.14	11	61.11	23.40	3	37.5	6.38	4	66.66	8.51
	Average	5	33.33	10.63	5	27.77	10.63	4	50.0	8.51	2	33.33	4.25
	Severe	1	6.66	2.12	2	11.11	4.25	1	12.5	2.12	0	0	0
Total spouse abuse	Mild	19	76.00	35.84	11	55.00	20.75	2	40.0	3.77	2	66.66	3.77
	Average	6	24.00	11.32	9	45.00	16.98	2	40.0	3.77	1	33.33	1.88
	Severe	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	20.0	1.88	0	0	0

Table 6. Prevalence of spouse abuse and its subscales based on the job title of the participants

Scale	Severity	Unemployed			Laborer			Employee			Retired			Self-employed		
		Frequency	Percent in scale with regard to the variable	Percent in scale regardless of the variable	Frequency	Percent in scale with regard to the variable	Percent in scale regardless of the variable	Frequency	Percent in scale with regard to the variable	Percent in scale regardless of the variable	Frequency	Percent in scale with regard to the variable	Percent in scale regardless of the variable	Frequency	Percent in scale with regard to the variable	Percent in scale regardless of the variable
Active aggression and sexual abuse	Mild	0	0	0	27	57.44	50.94	1	33.33	1.88	0	0	0	2	66.66	3.77
	Average	0	0	0	19	40.42	35.84	2	66.66	3.77	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Severe	0	0	0	1	2.12	1.88	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	33.33	1.88
Emotional and social abuse	Mild	1	50	1.72	41	85.41	70.68	4	80.00	6.89	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Average	1	50	1.72	5	10.41	8.62	1	20.00	1.72	0	0	0	2	66.66	3.44
	Severe	0	0	0	2	4.16	3.44	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	33.33	1.72
Verbal abuse and neglect	Mild	0	0	0	37	80.43	67.27	1	25.00	1.81	0	0	0	2	5.00	3.63
	Average	0	0	0	8	17.39	14.54	3	75.00	5.45	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Severe	1	100	1.81	1	2.17	1.81	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	50.00	3.63
Passive aggression	Mild	0	0	0	24	50.00	44.44	1	33.33	1.85	0	0	0	2	100.00	3.70
	Average	0	0	0	23	47.91	42.59	2	66.66	3.70	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Severe	1	100	1.85	1	2.08	1.85	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Domination	Mild	0	0	0	21	58.33	44.68	2	100	4.25	1	100	1.12	3	50.00	6.38
	Average	2	100	4.25	12	33.33	25.53	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	33.33	4.25
	Severe	0	0	0	3	8.33	6.38	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	16.66	2.12
Total spouse abuse	Mild	0	0	0	31	68.88	58.49	3	75.00	5.66	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Average	1	100	1.88	13	28.88	24.52	1	25.00	1.88	0	0	0	3	100	5.66
	Severe	0	0	0	1	2.22	1.88	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 7. Prevalence of Spouse abuse and its subscales based on the education of the participants

Scale	Severity	Elementary			Secondary			Diploma and associate degree			Bachelor's degree and higher		
		Frequency	Percent in scale with regard to education	Percent in scale regardless of education	Frequency	Percent in scale with regard to education	Percent in scale regardless of education	Frequency	Percent in scale with regard to education	Percent in scale regardless of education	Frequency	Percent in scale with regard to education	Percent in scale regardless of education
Active aggression and sexual abuse	Mild	2	100	3.77	4	57.14	7.54	22	53.65	41.50	2	66.66	3.77
	Average	0	0	0	2	28.57	3.77	18	43.90	33.96	1	33.33	1.88
	Severe	0	0	0	1	14.28	1.88	1	2.43	1.88	0	0	0
Emotional and social abuse	Mild	4	100	6.89	3	37.50	5.17	36	83.72	62.06	3	100.00	5.17
	Average	0	0	0	4	50.00	6.89	5	11.62	8.62	0	0	0
	Severe	0	0	0	1	12.50	1.72	2	4.65	3.44	0	0	0
Verbal abuse and neglect	Mild	2	100	3.63	3	37.50	5.45	34	79.06	61.81	1	50.00	1.81
	Average	0	0	0	1	12.50	1.81	9	20.93	16.36	1	50.00	1.81
	Severe	0	0	0	4	50.00	7.27	0	0	0	0	0	0
Passive aggression	Mild	1	100	1.85	4	44.44	7.40	21	48.83	38.88	1	100.00	1.85
	Average	0	0	0	3	33.33	5.55	22	51.16	40.74	0	0	0
	Severe	0	0	0	2	22.22	3.70	0	0	0	0	0	0
Domination	Mild	1	50	2.12	4	44.44	8.51	20	62.5	55.42	2	50.00	4.25
	Average	1	50	2.12	3	33.33	6.38	11	34.37	23.40	1	25.00	2.12
	Severe	0	0	0	2	22.22	4.25	1	3.12	2.12	1	25.00	2.12
Total spouse abuse	Mild	1	100	1.88	2	28.57	3.77	28	66.66	52.83	3	100.00	5.66
	Average	0	0	0	4	57.14	7.54	14	33.33	26.41	0	0	0
	Severe	0	0	0	1	14.28	1.88	0	.	0	0	0	0

The results of this study were in line with the results of a study on men as victims of violence conducted by Abbaszadeh et al.[29] In this research, emotional, physical, sexual, and financial spouse abuse were the most prevalent forms of spouse abuse in couples.[29] Furthermore, these results were in agreement with findings obtained by Atef Vahid et al.[22] and Mohamadkhani et al.[18] They showed that the most prevalent forms of domestic violence are emotional abuse, neglect, verbal aggression, and sexual abuse.

Other findings of this research indicated that 6.2% of men had experienced sever abuse and the most common abuses included passive aggression (8.6%), active aggression and sexual abuse (7.2%), domination (5.5%), verbal abuse (3.8%), and emotional abuse (3.1%). This finding was in agreement with the results of studies by Jungnitz et al.[30] and Sarkar et al.[13]

Jungnitz et al. conducted a study in Germany to examine spouse abuse among men. They reported behaviors such as pushing (18%), slapping (9%), hitting or scratching (7%), kicking painfully, Pushing, or grabbing (5%), throwing objects (5%), and injuries caused by abuse (5%) women's violence against men.[30] In addition, Dobash and Sobash examined women's violence against their husbands and concluded that damage to property (4.2%), threat of knocking (5.3%), throwing objects (26.3%), pushing (10.5%), slapping (20.0%), scratching (16.8%), punching (31.6%), kicking (17.9%), using objects as weapons (16.8%), and choking (1.1%) were the most prevalent forms of man abuse among women.[31] Sarkar et al. conducted a study on 1650 men of 15-49 years of age in several countries and found economic violence (32.8%) as the most common spous abuse followed by emotional violence (22.2%), physical violence (25.2%), and sexual violence (17.7%).[13]

Other findings of this study showed that male laborers who had a diploma, and marriage duration of less than 5 years, had experienced several marriages or forced marriage, had 7 children or more, and lived with their parents were more exposed to domestic violence, in particular, emotional violence. In contrast, men who were employees, had low education level, more than 15 years of married life, owned a house, and had an age gap of less than 11 years with their wife were less exposed to spouse violence.

These findings were in line with the findings of Fogarty et al.,[32] Iliyasu et al.,[33] and Kheirkhahzadeh.[34]

Moreover, Namadi[17] conducted a study on 120 men who were victims of domestic violence; 33%, 31.7%, and 9.2% of them were 35-44, 25-34, and 45-54 years old, respectively. About 32%, 38%, and 19.2% of victims had elementary, high school, and university degrees, respectively; moreover, 10.8% were illiterate. In terms of occupational status, 65% were employed and 5.8% were unemployed. In addition, about 43% and 39% of the participants had low and average social and economic situations, respectively. Only a minority of subjects (18.3%) had a high social status. About 95.8%, 40.8%, 80.8%, and 11.7% experienced verbal abuse, various physical abuses (burning with oil and hot water, throwing objects, etc.), emotional abuse, and economic violence, respectively. Men who are victims of violence do not tend to disclose this violence or receive help; they deny women's violence because of their pride. They think that they will be called weak men if they reveal this secret; hence, they do not pursue their rights; so that we do not have any accurate report about men as victims of spousal abuse.

A limitation of this study was the lack of cooperation of some of the men in completing the questionnaires. In addition, this study was only performed on men, and thus, we have no data on the role of men in spousal abuse. Future studies should determine whether the wives of these men are also victims of violence.

Conclusion

The most common forms of domestic violence committed by women against men in Iran included emotional abuse, verbal abuse, behavioral aggression, and sexual abuse with severity rate of low to medium. Higher age of men, higher education level, longer marriage duration, sufficient income, and suitable age gap were factors that prevented women's violence against men.

Conflict of Interests

Authors have no conflict of interests.

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