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Gender-based Violence and Psychological Abuse: Exploring the risk factors with survivors of domestic violence in Albania

Sunika Joshi

European Master in the Psychology of Global Mobility, Inclusion and Diversity in Society

Supervisor:

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Mehmet Eskin, Professor

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Abstract

Gender-based violence is a global phenomenon, and this study explored the lived experiences of women in physically abusive relationships and the risk factors associated with gender-based violence. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 participants in Albania. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data and six themes were generated, namely Experience of violence, Impact of Violence, Individual factors contributing to violence, Role of children in violence, Role of the institution in violence and Social and cultural factors contributing to violence. The results showed that psychological abuse was more common and frequent than physical abuse, and there were various risk factors associated with violence such as alcohol abuse, social norms, traditional gender roles and patriarchy. It was also found that there was a generational difference in social norms of violence against women. Some beliefs differed in younger and older participants where older women were more inclined to justify violence by men. The findings also highlighted most women lived in fear and had a feeling of helplessness while they were experiencing abuse; however, with the support and assistance from organisations, they found their voice and a sense of empowerment. Furthermore, children played an important role while experiencing violence. The findings highlighted the need for intervention in the societal level to change attitudes towards gender-based violence and the need for more organisations with trained professionals to work and support abused women to come out of the abusive relationship.

Keywords: Gender Roles, Psychological Abuse, Shame and Honour, Patriarchy

Resumo

A violência de gênero é um fenômeno global, e este estudo explorou as experiências vividas pelas mulheres em relacionamentos fisicamente abusivos e os fatores de risco associados à violência de gênero. Entrevistas semiestruturadas foram realizadas com 24 participantes da Albânia. Utilizou-se análise temática para analisar as transcrições e surgiram seis temas: a experiência da violência, o impacto da violência, fatores individuais que contribuem para a violência, o papel das crianças na violência, o papel das instituições na violência, e os fatores sociais e culturais que contribuem para a violência. Os resultados mostraram que o abuso psicológico foi o mais comum e mais frequente que o abuso físico. Vários fatores de risco foram associados à violência, como o abuso de álcool, as normas sociais, os papéis tradicionais de gênero e o patriarcado. Também foi verificada uma diferença geracional nas normas sociais de violência contra as mulheres. Algumas crenças diferiram entre as participantes mais jovens e mais velhas, com as mulheres mais velhas a apresentar mais justificativas para a violência dos homens. Os resultados também destacaram que a maioria das mulheres vivia com medo e tinha um sentimento de desamparo durante as experiências de violência; no entanto, com o apoio e assistência das organizações, reportaram encontrar a sua voz e um sentido de empoderamento. Além disso, as crianças tiveram um papel importante. Destacaram-se, assim, a necessidade de intervenção no nível social para mudar atitudes em relação à violência baseada no gênero e a necessidade de mais organizações com profissionais treinados/as para trabalhar e apoiar mulheres vítimas de abuso para apoiar na saída desse relacionamento abusivo.

Palavras-chave: papéis de gênero, abuso psicológico, vergonha e honra, patriarcado

Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis was written by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

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Introduction

“There are wounds that never show on the body that are deeper and more hurtful than anything that bleeds.” Hamilton, *Mistral's Kiss*

As the quote implies, there are such types of abuse and violence that are not easily recognizable and of which the effects are more devastating. The effects of psychological violence are exactly this: not easily recognized, because many consequences remain subtle and less visible (sometimes even completely invisible) as compared to the effects of physical abuse (Ramiro et al., 2004). The behaviour and actions of psychological abuse targets emotional and psychological wellbeing, affecting an individual's perceptions, thoughts, feelings, or behaviours, diminishing the sense of self in all aspects of life as well as mental and physical health in the longer term (Karakurt & Silver, 2013; Marshall 1994, 1996). Previous research has consistently shown that psychological abuse occurs more frequently than physical and sexual abuse and has a stronger impact than other forms of violence (Bonomi et al., 2006; Follingstad et al., 1990; Marshall 1994). Most importantly, psychological abuse predicts, precedes, and co-exists with other forms of abuse (Marshall, 1996; Straka & Montminy, 2008). Therefore, an independent study on psychological violence is necessary to understand its impact and risk factors and how it further exacerbates the violence in ways that are typically invisible.

In the growing body of literature, physical violence has been the primary focus in studies of intimate partner violence, and less attention and fewer studies have approached different kinds of violence (Crowell & Burgess, 1996; Krug et al., 2002). A vast number of studies limited their assessments of experiences to physical and sexual violence and have not focused on psychological violence (Wenzel et al., 2006; Follingstad et al., 1990; Maiuro, 2001). Although there is a dearth of research on psychological violence, the field of study has received increasing attention to psychological violence in the recent years with a realization that psychological abuse may be as damaging or more damaging than physical abuse (Sackett & Saunder, 1999). However, much needs to be done, specifically in establishing a cross-cultural consensus on a standardized definition and measure of psychological abuse (Heise et al., 2019). The available research has stated the difficulty of quantifying emotional abuse in a consistent manner across cultures (Moreno et al., 2005), mainly because of the wide variety of actions and behaviours that could be considered as psychological violence (Jordan, Campbell, & Follingstad, 2010) as well as the cultural differences (Follingstad, Coyne, & Gambone, 2005) that in part influence the act and

understanding of, and sometimes perpetuate psychological violence.

Previous research has conceptualized psychological abuse with different actions or techniques used by abusers. For instance, Maiuro (2001) summarized four primary dimensions of psychological abuse: “Denigrating damage to partner’s self-image or esteem”; “Passive-aggressive withholding of emotional support and nurturance”; “Threatening behaviour, explicit and implicit”; and “Restricting personal territory and freedom. (p. xi)” Similarly, Follingstad et al., (1990) listed six actions, such as the threat of abuse, ridicule, jealousy, threats to change marriage, restrictions, and damage to property. Moreover, Montminy (2005) suggested that psychological violence can be active as well as passive. The findings of Montminy (2005) revealed that violence was not limited to what the victims’ partners say and do, but also what they do not say or do.

Research has shown psychological abuse affects mental and emotional wellbeing, and women who experience psychological abuse live in fear, self-doubt in their feelings and thoughts, have lower self-esteem and are at higher risk of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety and depression (Follingstad, 2009; Sacket & Saunders, 1999). In Marshall’s (1999) investigation of overt (dominating acts, indifference, monitoring, discrediting) and subtle forms (undermining, discounting, isolating) of psychological abuse, it was revealed that subtle forms of psychological abuse were practiced more often and had a cumulative, detrimental impact on battered women’s self-esteem, the meaningfulness of relationship, and quality of life. Therefore, the present research will explore how the experience of violence affects self-perception in the survivors.

Psychological abuse acts as an instrument for men to gain power and control over their female partners (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Johnson, 1995; Straka & Montminy, 2008) and Johnson (1995) suggested that abusers may not even use physical abuse if they gain power and control through psychological abuse. The central idea of feminist theory is power and control stemming in a patriarchal society as a leading cause of violence against women (Dobash & Dobash 1979; Yllö, 1993). The theory further explains that in the context of patriarchal societies, power and control of women by men is normalized to maintain the status quo of dominance (Bell & Naugle, 2008). Abusers use different methods to maintain power and control dynamics with the goal of establishing overall dominance over women and their families (Bell & Naugle, 2008). Moreover, violence stems from gender inequality, and some authors defend that societies with more traditional patriarchal practices and stereotypes of gender roles are more likely to have higher rates of violence (Haarr, 2019). Therefore, the present research will explore whether or not survivors of Intimate Partner

Violence (IPV) or Domestic Violence (DV) understand the presence of psychological violence and analyse if factors such as society, culture and gender also influence the understanding.

While the feminist model (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Schechter, 1982; Yllö, 1993) presents violence as a problem in societal level and asks for structural change to reduce violence, the ecological model (Heise 1998, 2011) asserts that violence is a result of interaction between multiple factors at different levels, such as individual, family or relationship, community and culture and beliefs at large. Thus, this research will present violence against women in the feminist perspective of traditional gender roles, power and control, as well as the interaction of different layers or factors of the ecological model.

While age has been associated with a greater risk of violence when women are married young, and younger women tend to experience more violence than older women (Kishor & Johnson 2004; Moreno et al., 2005), the other side of studying violence in older women would show their stronger adherence to social norms and traditional gender roles (Straka & Montimony, 2008) that risk the continuation of violence since the beginning of marriage and maintaining secrecy about violence throughout marriage (Seff et al., 2008). Therefore, this research will also explore the experiences of older women on their perspective on psychological violence, the differences from the present generation to the past.

Gender-based violence is widespread, however, the WHO multi-country study in 10 countries showed that certain risk factors are common such as age and level of education (Moreno et al., 2005). However, culture and social norms place more considerable influence in the prevalence of violence and differ from one culture to another - from traditional roles to attitude towards violence (Moreno et al., 2005). Therefore, this study will focus on Albania, a country which has undergone drastic political and social changes - from women's emancipation during the communist era to a significant transition to democracy (Burazeri et al., 2010; Haarr, 2019; Oxfam GB, 2000). Violence against women in Albania is pervasive, influenced by patriarchal traditions, rigid gender identities and roles, male dominance, imposed honour and shame on women (Amnesty International, 2006), hierarchy in the family, and intergenerational family control (Haarr, 2019). Notably, as many as 75.4% of women believe that violence against women is a significant problem in Albania (Haarr, 2019), and that psychological violence is the most common form of IPV (OSCE, 2019).

Given the history, the social and cultural settings of Albania, and the prevalence of psychological violence, this study will explore the experiences of Albanian women who

were in a physically abusive relationship from the individual and cultural lens.

The present dissertation is, thus, organized in the following sections. After the Introduction, in the present chapter, an overall literature review on intimate partner violence and specifically, psychological violence, is presented in Chapter 1. Issues of culture, gender and age as key factors in understanding, preventing and intervening in intimate partner violence will be addressed. In this chapter, the context of the study will also be approached, namely, Albanian women after socialism and the existing social norms. The chapter ends with a description of the research questions and study goals. Chapter 2 & 3 follows with the methodology, including sample, instrument and procedures. Results and main findings are presented in chapter 4, with their discussion and implications explored in a final chapter.

Chapter I. Literature Review

The literature review will elaborate on psychological violence as a form of gender-based violence in Albania and determine risk factors of violence using feminist theory (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Schechter, 1982; Yllö, 1993) and ecological theory (Heise 1998, 2011). The study will begin with a brief description of different types of violence, their characteristics, the impact of psychological abuse followed by the description of the risk factors of violence, and shared cultural factors and how this influences violence against women in Albania.

1.1 Violence Against Women

Violence is defined as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person or against a group or community, that either result in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation” (WHO, 2002, p. 4). This definition reflects that violence is intentional, directed towards a person or a group and that the consequences are not limited to physical health issues but also psychological harm.

Relating this definition, violence against women (VAW) is considered as such due to its intentionality and the harm it causes to the victim, women. Considered a violation of human rights, VAW is also multifaceted and prevalent globally and has severe impacts on the physical and psychological health of victims (WHO, 2002). VAW has received attention over the past few years as data from WHO shows its global spread and impact. WHO (2013) indicated that globally, 35% of women have experienced one or more types of violence such as physical and sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), Domestic Violence (DV), and Gender-based Violence (GBV) are often discussed as different types of violence against women. WHO (2010) defined IPV as ‘behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours’ (p. 11) and includes physical, sexual and psychological abuse (Roberto et al., 2014). Domestic violence is used interchangeably with IPV. However, it also is known as violence occurring within a family such as abuse of children or siblings and includes other types of abuse such as physical and verbal abuse, economic abuse and social abuse (Hegarty et al., 2000). Gender-based violence, though a form of violence, focuses on violence shaped by gender roles and status in society, therefore termed ‘gender-

based' (Russo & Pirlott, 2006).

It is evident from the definitions of different forms of violence that psychological harm or abuse is intertwined with all kinds of violence along with physical abuse. However, much of the research emphasizes physical abuse or violence (Follingstad et al., 1990; Maiuro, 2001; Wenzel et al., 2006). The invisibility of psychological harm is a concern as the effects of psychological abuse are more harmful when exposed for a more extended time (Aguilar & Nightingale 1994).

This research will focus on psychological violence in gender-based violence, and factors such as social and gender norms influencing such violence. While gender-based violence comprises the behaviour and actions of an intimate partner such as physical, sexual, and psychological abuse as well as controlling behaviours to restrict freedom of movement (Russo & Pirlott, 2006), this research will emphasize on the underlying effects of psychological violence and the factors contributing to understanding the presence of psychological violence.

1.2 Previous studies on psychological violence

While studies on the definition, nature, and behaviours that constitute psychological violence have not come to an agreement (Maiuro, 2001), different terms which are non-physical are used along with psychological violence. Psychological abuse, psychological maltreatment, verbal abuse, mental abuse, emotional abuse or maltreatment are some such terms commonly used interchangeably, all referring to non-physical forms of abuse (Burman et al., 1992; Maiuro, 2001; Tomison & Tucci, 1997). This is due to there being a wide variety of actions or behaviours that can be considered as psychological abuse, hence causing it to be one of the reasons for an inability to have a standard definition (Jordan, Campbell, & Follingstad, 2010).

Montminy (2005) identified fourteen types of psychologically violent behaviours that became apparent from older women's experiences: 'control, denigration, deprivation, intimidation, threats, an abdication of responsibility, manipulation, blame, harassment, the negation of reality, indifference, making the wife/partner feel guilty, sulking and infantilization' (p 11). Additionally, Ramiro et al. (2004) categorized severe psychological violence into three domains: 'verbal abuse (insulting, belittling, demeaning), fear (threatening the victim or someone close to victim) and separation (leaving the woman at least six months without financial support and being unfaithful)' (p 132). Culture and generation also influence the broad actions and behaviours to be labelled as psychological abuse in cases where men's position and power define relationship boundaries (Follingstad,

Coyne, & Gambone, 2005).

“Psychological abuse is closely connected to all other kinds of abuse. Most experts agree that it precedes, predicts, and coexists with physical abuse and virtually all other forms of abuse” (Straka & Montminy, 2008, p. 262). Frequent experience of psychological violence early on in relationships are identified as predictors of physical violence in early marriage (Murphy & O’Leary, 1989), and above all psychological violence occur in combination with other forms of abuse such as domestic violence (Follingstad et al., 1990).

Follingstad et al., (1990) assessed the relationship of emotional abuse to physical abuse with women who had a history of physical abuse. Six types of emotional abuse were assessed based on frequency and impact: threats of harm, ridicule, jealousy, threats to change marriage status, restriction, and damage to property, in which ridicule had the highest negative impact, as well as being one of the three most frequent types of abuse along with threat and jealousy (Follingstad et al., 1990). Ridicule was rated as the worst type of abuse by 46% of respondents (Follingstad et al., 1990).

Physically abused women reported psychological abuse to have a more detrimental impact than the physical abuse, Follingstad et al. (1990) found, with 71% of women reported emotional abuse as having more adverse impact than physical violence. Similarly, a study on sexually and emotionally abused women found that the participants reported emotional abuse as the most damaging, specifically describing that while wounds might be cured, the pain of fear and humiliation will remain forever (Briggs & Hawkins, 1996; Loring, 1994). A study conducted by Lischick (1999) reported that women who experienced psychological violence without the presence of physical violence had similar emotional experiences as those who had experienced physical violence. Emotional and mental consequences of non-physical abuse are similar to physical violence with coercive control such as extreme fear, anxiety, guilt, low self-esteem, and depression (Crossman et al., 2015).

1.3 Risk factors of violence against women

Gender is a socially constructed system where societal values and expectations create ideologies about masculinity and femininity (Butler, 1990; Pleck et al., 1993b; Tolman & Porche, 2000). Conservative gender stereotypes in culture expect males to be masculine, with features such as being assertive, powerful, and protective, while females are expected to be feminine, with qualities such as being reserved, quiet, caring, conflict-averse, and prioritizing of their relationships (Budgeon, 2014). Therefore, the social position of gender seems rather natural, where women have less power and privilege and resources than men

(Bourne & Russo, 1998). Though roles of gender differ in society, it is more common that women's role is defined as caretaker and homemaker as a primary responsibility, creating more challenges for women to participate in the workforce without making amends with the traditional gender roles (Coltrane, 2000; Tichenor, 2005).

The ideologies of femininity and masculinity are outcomes of intersecting sets of practices, norms, beliefs and obligations that determine gender-appropriate emotional expressions, behaviours, appearances, and sexuality (Budgeon, 2014; Schippers, 2007). The feminist theory postulates that ideologies based on femininity are a component of patriarchy which oppresses girls and women (Bartky, 1990).

1.3.1 Feminist Model.

Given the structural and societal inequality, gender roles and male dominance over women, feminist theory has argued that violence against women results from the unequal and oppressive power relations between genders on the societal level (Yllö & Bograd, 1988) perpetrated by men's individual level behaviours such as alcohol abuse, exerting power, and accepting violence (WHO, 2010). The feminist theory asserts that such variables/behaviours intensify in male-dominated societies and such male domination in a patriarchal system places woman as subordinate to men (Yodanis, 2004). Patriarchy dominates women in families as well as in economic, social and political structures (Schechter, 1982) and violence against women is propagated either subtly or overtly when men dominate both private life in the household as well as public life in the form of economic, political and social institutions (Yodanis, 2004). Therefore, feminists argue violence against women is a social problem rather than individual or family problems (Straka & Montminy, 2008) and requires a change in social power relations between men and women (Yllö, 1993; Yllö & Bograd, 1988).

The feminist stance on power and control dynamics in a patriarchal society is the main feature of psychological abuse (Yodanis, 2004). Perpetrators use various non-physical actions and behaviours such as threatening, intimidating, patronizing, manipulation on women to gain power and control (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Montminy, 2005). The dominating feature of patriarchal society further elevates the need for men to have power and control over women (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Thus, research has shown a relationship between men's adherence to patriarchal values and intimate partner violence, where the rate of wife abuse is higher in a male-dominated society (Bell & Naugle, 2008). Men's attitude towards traditional gender roles and differences between partner's acceptance of patriarchal values are risk factors of intimate partner violence (Yllö & Straus,

1999).

The power and control of women as well as the traditional gender roles and expectations to remain passive, subordinate and shame related to separation or divorce result in women feeling powerless over time (Seff et al., 2008). This is mostly seen in research in older women who believe nothing can be done as the control has continued over a long period of time, usually from the beginning of marriage (Beaulaurier et al., 2007). The abusers control women's economic and social support, leaving the abuser as an important relationship in the victim's life (Beaulaurier et al., 2007).

Though feminist theory plays a crucial role in explaining violence against women, several theorists in the 1990s argued that such theory examined the phenomenon through an isolated lens and began to explore beyond single-factor theories to recognize the complicated nature of abuse with the assumption that no one factor causes violence (Crowell & Burgess, 1996; Heise, 2011). From this perspective, violence against women is a multifaceted phenomenon and causality is an interplay among the personal, situational and socio-cultural factors, therefore, a framework to incorporate the multi-level factors such as the ecological framework explains the factors operating at different levels (Heise, 2011).

1.3.2 Ecological Model.

The ecological framework has been used in different ways in understanding the causality of violence against women (Heise, 2011), but it was Bronfenbrenner (1979) who first proposed to understand human development through the ecological model. It states that the ecological environment is where human development takes place as an ongoing process throughout life from interaction and influences of the ecological systems where the person resides. The systems are categorized as micro-, meso-, eco- and macro systems. Each layer shapes an individual, beginning from microsystems where the interaction is between an individual and his/her family, while the macro-system is the wider structure which has cultures and beliefs and ideologies. Human development is rooted and articulated through behaviour in a particular environmental context and human development as a process in which a person perceives and gains experiences from the ecological environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Similarly, Heise (1998) proposed an ecological framework to conceptualize gender-based violence as a multifaceted phenomenon based on interaction among personal, situational and socio-cultural factors. The framework comprises of four layers. The innermost layer consists of behaviour that an individual brings to a relationship as personal

history, the next circle represents the family and other relationships where the abuse takes place, the third level or the exo-system comprises of formal and informal social structures such as work, neighbourhood and the fourth circle presents the wider structure which represents general beliefs and attitudes (Heise, 1998).

1.3.2.1 Individual-level risk factors.

Risk Factors related to women: A strong association was found between women's young age and an increase in the risk of abuse in 12 sites out of 15 in the WHO study, which found that younger women aged 15 to 19 were at higher risk of physical or sexual violence (48% of 15-19 age group versus 10% of 45-49-year-old in Bangladesh) (Moreno et al., 2005). The DHS study reported that younger women were at higher risk of being abused as compared to older women in which age group 15- 19 and 20-14 reported highest experience of violence in four countries (Kishor & Johnson, 2004). Moreover, the age at first union also posed a greater risk of violence where the majority of the women getting married at 19 years and younger were more likely to report violence compared to women who were 25 or older when they married (Kishor & Johnson, 2004). This could be related to the fact that early marriage affected the women's status in the family and community as they lacked the opportunity for formal education and training (Flake, 2005).

Research has shown that education is a source of empowerment through which women are able to gather information, understand and interact in the modern world, therefore the level of education provides resources to women with abusive partners (Kishor & Johnson, 2004). The DHS study found that as the level of education increased, the risk of women experiencing violence decreases (Kishor & Johnson, 2004). Data from Cambodia, Colombia, India and Nicaragua showed that the higher level of education is associated with less experience of violence (Kishor & Johnson, 2004). In contrast, a study in Peru showed that women with more education than men had a higher risk of physical violence (Flake, 2005). This could be related to women being more educated than men are seen as a threat as it goes against the natural order of power and dominance of men (Flake, 2005).

Women who witnessed violence in the family, usually violence towards the mother, were more likely to experience physical violence in their relationships later on (Hindin, Kishor & Ansara, 2008). In some countries, the rates of violence almost doubled among women who reported parental violence (Hindin, Kishor & Ansara, 2008). A report of Amnesty International (2006) found that women who were exposed to the violence of mothers being abused as a child could not see violence as a criminal offence, therefore never reported violence in their relationship.

As for old age and violence, elder abuse was recognized in the 1980s after child abuse in 1960s and wife abuse in 1970s (Montminy, 2005). While women of all ages are at risk of experiencing violence from their partners, older women face different and specific challenges such as a reduction of support as they age, retirement, financial dependency, and deteriorating health conditions on top of experiencing violence from a partner (Straka & Montminy, 2006). Generational differences also play a significant role in how violence is perceived differently, where older women tend to be more traditional in terms of conforming to and believing in gender roles, marriage and family, believing in carrying feminine characteristics such as tolerance, acceptance, submission to a partner, and placement of greater importance in solidarity and honour of the family (Beaulaurier et al., 2008; Straka & Montminy, 2006). Such attitudes and values make it difficult for women in the older age group to be vocal about abuse, seek help or leave abusive relationships, especially when divorce and separation are considered taboo (Straka & Montminy, 2006).

Research has found that older women were experiencing abuse for a long time - usually from the beginning of the marriage, which resulted in low self-esteem and powerlessness, revealing that the women felt they could not come out of the abusive relationship (Montminy, 2005; Straka & Montminy, 2006). Psychological violence such as manipulation or negation of reality led women to take responsibility for the violence and for breaking the peace within the family (Montminy, 2005). Seff et al., (2008) found that though older women reported non-physical is more damaging than physical abuse, however, non-physical abuse 'does not count as a legitimate or reportable problem, and therefore are unlikely to seek help' (p. 371).

Risk Factors related to male perpetrators: The husband's age has been associated with women of violence, in some countries, women whose partners age 25 - 34 were most likely to experience violence in Malawi (Hindin, Kishor & Ansara, 2008). WHO study also reported that younger men tend to be more violent than older men in relation to more younger women as opposed to older women (Moreno et al., 2005). In some countries, a husband's age when first married is related with women's experience of violence, for instance, men who were younger than 20 years were more likely to abuse women than men who married at age 20 or older (Hindin, Kishor & Ansara, 2008).

Men witnessing physical abuse such as beating towards their mothers disproportionately associated with psychological violence: they were five times more likely to insult, threaten or leave their partner as compared to men who were not exposed to violence in the family (Ramiro et al., 2004). Moreover, the WHO multi-country study also

found in 10 of the 15 sites studied, men who were exposed to violence towards mothers when they were young were at a considerably higher risk of being abusive towards a partner (Moreno et al., 2005).

Men with low levels of education are seen to be more likely to perpetrate physical violence in most countries, for instance, in the majority of the countries studied, most women who had reported violence within the home had a partner with fewer years of education (Hindin, Kishor & Ansara, 2008).

1.3.2.2 Family and relationship risk factors.

A strong association with alcohol use by partners is a significant risk factor and has been seen to increase the risk of psychological violence by 2 to 5 times (Ramiro et al., 2004). Kishor and Johnson (2004) found that cases of women's experience of violence increased dramatically with partners' use of alcohol, and studies suggest that most cases of violence occur after drinking (Thompson & Kingree, 2006). Moreover, regular alcohol consumption of a partner was associated with a 9.2 times greater likelihood of being abused compared to when the partner never gets drunk (Flake, 2005).

Marital conflict in relationships influences partner violence: some sources of arguments and conflict are issues concerning children or in-laws, money, loyalty, drinking, and gambling. In other settings, men have also been known to use physical violence as a way to "correct" female behaviour or as a form of discipline (Krug et al., 2002).

Effects of violence are not limited to the abused women but also children in most cases. Children are frequently present at the time of violent incidents (Pingley, 2017). It is estimated that over 10 million children in the United States witness violence in their homes (Sullivan et al., 2004). Moreover, 90% of abused women reported that their child/children were present while experiencing violence (Rossman & Rosenberg, 1997). However, the impact on children's involvement and witnessing violence is overlooked in research (Pingley, 2017). Children witnessing violence impacts their mental health, increasing their likelihood of experiencing depression and anxiety, as well as physical and behavioural issues such as aggressiveness, anti-social behaviours, avoidance, and withdrawn behaviours (Pingley, 2017), which in the long term also affects the bond of parent-child relationships as well as having difficulty to establish good relationships in later life (Forke et al., 2019).

Many researches have shown that children who experience or witness violence in families are at greater risk of being violent as adults (Heise, 2012). Similarly, O'Leary (1988) referred to the Social Learning Theory of Bandura (1977) to explain how children

witnessing and experiencing violence as a child often resort to violence in their relationships in later life (Heise, 2012). Therefore, IPV affects not just the victim but also children who carry on the experience of violence in later life.

1.3.2.3 Community-level risk factors.

Many policymakers and theorists assert economic empowerment as a way to reduce gender inequality, and consequently gender-based violence, by improving the position of women and girls in the socio-economic structure (Heise, 2011). However, women who challenge male domination and authority, usually by taking non-traditional jobs and not conforming to the established socio-economic structure and expectations, may experience a greater risk of violence (Heise, 2011). Women who had a higher status such as higher level of education and professional status than the partner and women with employment had an increased risk of being abused compared to unemployed women in Peru (Flake, 2005). The social expectations for men to be the providers of the household also increase violence when men are unable to provide economically for the family (Heise, 2011; Narayan et al., 2000). This can be attributed to men's fear of losing power and control by not being able to make women economically dependent on men.

Household wealth or economic status within the household is also associated with women's risk of experiencing violence. 8 out of 10 countries of the DHS study found that women from the poorest household were at greater risk of experiencing violence as compared to the richest household (Hindin, Kishor & Ansara, 2008).

1.3.2.4. Macrosystem- societal level risk factors.

Social Norms: 'Norms are properties of a group- they describe the typical or desirable behaviour of a certain group, rather than 'humankind' (Paluck et al., 2010, p.9). Social norms are more influential as it functions like law, in that it is enforced; though in an informal manner, and violators are punished with certain sanctions such as shaming, shunning, and disapproval from their peers within their social group (Paluck et al., 2010). The specific need of individuals to fit inside a collective construct is motivation enough to conform to the set norms even if they may privately disagree with those norms.

A variety of norms and beliefs are associated with gender, male honour, and traditions in a family (Heise, 2011). Wife beating is normative in many countries, where this is considered a disciplinary action towards women for disobeying their husbands, or a corrective measure for incorrect behaviours of women (Heise, 2011).

A few examples of social and cultural norms that endorse violence against women was listed by Heise (2011) (sourced from WHO 2010, Preventing intimate partner and sexual

violence against women). Such as:

- men being considered socially superior, with the right to assert power over women in certain Indian (Mitra & Singh, 2007), Nigerian (Ilika, 2005) and Ghanaian (Amoakohene, 2004) cultures;
- men possessing the right to discipline women for what they consider incorrect behaviours in countries such as India (Go et al., 2003), Nigeria (Adegoke & Oladeji, 2008) and China (Liu, 1999);
- physical violence is an acceptable way to resolve conflict within a relationship, which is seen in the United States (Champion & Durant, 2001); and
- divorce being considered shameful among peers, such as in Pakistan (Hussain & Khan, 2008).

Role of culture: Culture plays a significant role in determining the risk of partner violence. Studies have examined the cultural dimension like collectivism and individualism in association with GBV (Archer, 2006). In cross-national studies, researchers found a strong link between collectivist culture and violence against women (Archer, 2006). The notion of collectivist culture is people identifying themselves as part of a community as compared to individualism where individuals have more freedom to pursue goals without ties to group identity (Archer 2006; Hofstede 1980; Triandis, 1995). The collectivist culture emphasizes loyalty and self-sacrifice in which women belonging to a close-knit group may have higher expectations to fulfil the responsibility of others. Cultures of honour in collectivist societies are also associated with violence against women, where there is usually an emphasis on maintaining the reputation and the integrity of the family as a whole, rather than promoting and respecting individual choices and goals (Heise, 2012). It is in this view where women's "purity" has become a symbol of family honour, the elevation of male status, which is inherently linked to honour, and male dominance over women (Vandello & Cohen 2005; Welchman & Hossain, 2005).

Individualism is associated with gender empowerment (Archer, 2006; Fischer & Manstead 2000) where gender empowerment is a measure of equal participation in the economic and political life in the state as well as equal access to healthcare, education, and opportunity (Eagly & Wood, 1999). Collectivism prioritises the group/collective over the self which puts individuals in rigid boxes where they have little space to question and criticize, which breeds and further strengthens the justification of VAW, individualism values the self, which provides both men and women with more choices in private and

public life (Heise, 2012). Women, in turn, are able to feel empowered because they are not hindered from learning, educating, and leading, which then leads to their empowerment and hence creates a cycle of empowered women (Archer, 2006). Therefore, women's empowerment is associated with lower victimization across nations, states, and cultures (Archer, 2006).

The WHO multi-country study showed that violence against women is widespread in all countries where the study was conducted (Moreno et al., 2005). However, there were significant variations from 'country to country' and also from 'setting to setting' within the same country (Moreno et al., 2005). The reports demonstrated differences across countries and cultures in violence against women, beginning with how some places have less data on violence against women, and the causes of violence also differ across cultures and circumstances. This can be attributed as cause and effect of repressive culture with the fact that data collection on the prevalence of VAW is not prioritised speaks volume of what the state thinks of the issue of violence. For instance, the data on controlling behaviours where the reports differed from 21% in Japan to almost 90% in the urban United Republic of Tanzania suggested some behaviours of control such as restricting women from reaching out to friends and family, ignoring women, and accusing them may be acceptable in different cultures (Moreno et al., 2005). Similarly, though emotional abuse is more frequent and detrimental than physical violence, the report of emotional abuse ranged from 20% and 75%, which WHO study explains to be the 'complexity of defining and measuring emotional abuse in a way that is relevant and meaningful across cultures' (Moreno et al., 2005, p 15).

1.4 Gender-based Violence in Albania

Violence against women is prevalent in Albania (Haarr, 2019). Cultures and traditions such as patriarchy (Young, 2001), rigid gender identities and roles, honour and shame and hierarchy within a family are significant factors influencing the prevalence of violence (Burazeri et al., 2005; Haarr, 2019).

Albania has undergone significant political, social, and economic changes, after the rigid communist regime until the 1990s (Haarr, 2019). However, the communist leader, Hoxha, advocated for women's emancipation by opening schools, universities and workplaces for Albanian women (Oxfam GB, 2000). While the communist rule opened the doors for women to participate in the large public sphere, it also curtailed their rights in other ways and privately and subtly continued to instill patriarchy in society (Burazeri et al., 2010). Moreover, the rapid transition to democracy after communist rule intensified

social disruption, with large scale closure of state enterprises and scaling down of government bureaucracies, causing high unemployment, severe housing shortages, and escalating social unrest and violent street crimes (Oxfam GB, 2000). Consequently, women were the first ones to lose jobs and were more dependent on their husbands (Oxfam GB, 2000). Though violence against women was prevalent during the communist era, the reported incidences of violence escalated after the transition (Burazeri et al., 2010; Haarr, 2013). Currently, the country still holds a conservative stance on gender roles and is regulated by traditional patriarchal rules (Çaro et al., 2012; Burazeri et al., 2005).

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a serious problem in Albania. A national population-based survey's data from 2013 found that more than half of the surveyed women aged 18 to 55, had experienced some form of violence in their lifetime (Haarr, 2013). The most prevalent type of IPV was psychological violence, with 58% of women reporting to have experienced verbal abuse, psychological threats, controlling behaviours and economic abuse in their lifetime (OSCE, 2019). Similarly, a survey in 2019 found that 3 out of 4 women maintained VAW is a major problem in Albania (Haarr, 2019). The national survey of 2018 conducted on women age 18-74 revealed nearly 1 out of 2 or 47.0% of women ever experienced one or more types of IPV (Haarr, 2019). The data also showed that psychological violence occurred more often than physical violence, with 31.4% ever experienced psychological violence as compared to 18.0% ever experienced physical abuse. The most common form of psychological violence experienced by women was insulting and making them feel bad about themselves (24.8%), and in most cases, the women experience multiple forms of psychological violence in a relationship (Haarr, 2019).

The research conducted by OSCE (2019) also showed that psychological violence which includes behaviours like verbal abuse, controlling behaviour, restriction of freedoms, humiliation and threats were so common that it was not considered to be violence at all but a socially acceptable way of how women in Albania are treated regardless of age, level of education, and residence or geographical location.

1.4.1 Culture, Social Norms and Gender-based violence.

IPV is prevalent in all societies, but societies with more traditional patriarchal practices and stereotypes of gender roles tend to have higher rates of IPV (Haarr, 2019). Social arrangements such as women living with husband and his family increase the risk of violence not only by husbands but also in-laws (Haarr, 2019). In many societies, it is believed violence is justifiable in certain cases where women do not adhere to the expected gender roles, moreover, women are blamed for disrupting the peace of the family (Haarr,

2019). Such attitudes towards violence keep women from speaking out and seeking help (Haarr, 2019). Different social norms within a social group can influence the prevalence of IPV, mostly when attitude and beliefs towards women are based on traditional gender roles, male dominance, honour and shame and inequality (Haarr, 2019).

Many women do not recognize domestic violence as a criminal offence, because they were raised seeing mothers physically abused or verbally abused by husband, brother or in-laws, so violence is normalized as husband's right to hit his wife (Amnesty International, 2006). Therefore, the reluctance of reporting violence is also linked with the lack of awareness on if violence is something to be reported (Amnesty International, 2006). The power of men is reflected in private as well as the public sphere, all the more, making it culturally acceptable for men to act stronger and better than women (Amnesty International, 2006).

The notion of honour and shame prevented abused women from sharing the experience of violence even to their close relatives with the fear of bringing shame on the honour of the family (Amnesty International, 2006). However, violating the honour of the family is not limited to adultery, premarital relationship but also when women exercise their rights to marry a man of their choice or trying to separate from a marriage (Welchman & Hossain, 2005). Moreover, women are forced to marry someone of their family's choice and forced to stay in such arranged marriage (Amnesty International, 2006).

Haarr (2019) reported some social norms related to violence against women. The data showed that 1 out of 2 women age 18-74 reported 'all or most people in the community believe violence between a husband and wife is a private matter and others should not intervene and 27.6% reported 'a woman should be ashamed or embarrassed to talk to anyone outside of her family about abuse or violence in her marriage' (p. 65). This belief affects women's help-seeking behaviour, and women keep the experience of violence as secret.

Similarly, data was collected on public perception on gender equality and violence against women with responses from 1260 women, girls and boys of age 15 to 64. This report is part of a baseline survey exercise conducted by the Observatory for Children and Youths Rights Albania under the EUUN Women regional programme 'Implementing Norms, Changing Minds' (UN Women, 2019).

Perception of gender equality: UN Women (2019) report showed that majority of the respondents agreed that women are expected to act as per the traditional gender roles and be submissive to men. One in three men and one in four women agreed to the statement

that girls should be taught to prioritize domestic work, while boys should work towards building career and leadership opportunities. Moreover, male figures are perceived to hold the status quo of dominance and power over women and shows that it is men who support beliefs that place them in positions of power over women.

Perceptions of violence against women: Some beliefs and myths related to violence against women shift its focus from making the perpetrator accountable and more towards blaming victims and placing responsibility on them. 1 in 3 male and 1 in 4 female agreed husband or male partner has a good reason to hit his wife/female partner in case of infidelity (UN Women, 2019). Beliefs such as ‘sometimes violence is a way of showing affection’ and ‘some women like to be beaten’ mostly agreed by male respondents. Such beliefs towards violence against women justify violence against women. Another key finding of this report is that most men and women believe domestic violence is a private issue and women should not seek help from police and outsiders should not interfere in cases of domestic abuse (UN Women, 2019).

Haarr (2019) reported that women did not seek help because of not wanting to bring shame to the family (12.0%), most women considered the violence was not serious enough to report (47.8%). It was also found women were ashamed or doubtful if anyone would believe them (10.9%). Violence was also considered normal (6.8%) and women were afraid relationship would end (6.5%). Additionally, women were fearful of the consequences of violence (6.1%) and also worried about separating from their children (6.0%). Moreover, some women also maintained they were not aware of who and where to ask for help (4.9%) and were in doubt whether they would be helped (4.2%) (Haarr, 2019).

Albania is a collectivist country with high power distance (Hofstede, 1980). This can be related to the under-reporting of violence stating reasons such as keeping the family together and saving children along with the emphasis on honour and shame (Douglas, 1994), all the more, violence is also considered a private matter, and separation or divorce would cost the reputation of the family and affect future of children (Douglas, 1994). There are also defined roles and expectations for men and women in both public and private spheres, where women take the subordinate role of being loyal, obedient, caring, remaining quiet, being a good mother, daughter, and daughter in law, whereas men’s roles were neither expected nor questioned at home or in public (Budgeon, 2014; Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights, 1996).

1.4.2 Individual factors related to violence against women in Albania.

Women age 18-24 were most likely to experience IPV (55.8%) as compared to women

age 55-64 years (25.8%) and 65-74 years (18.2%) (Haarr, 2019). Similarly, the age group of 18-24 were significantly more likely to experience psychological violence by partner or husband (42.9%) compared to women in other age groups (Haarr, 2019). However, psychological violence was fairly common in women aged 25-34 (28.2%) (Haarr, 2019). Comparatively, 9.4% of women age 65-74 years reported experiencing psychological violence (Haarr, 2019).

Burazeri et al., (2005) found women's socio-economic engagement in Albania were associated with partner violence activities which could be men's sense of powerlessness and consequently abuse of their wives to impose gender hierarchies.

Partner/ husband's alcohol consumption was associated with severe domestic injuries. The husband's drunkenness on a weekly basis increased risk four to ten times of head injuries, loss of hearing and seven times more likely to experience miscarriage (Haarr, 2019).

The perpetrators of domestic violence were mostly of age 35-44 years (25.8%), however, the report showed men of all ages exercised violence on women (Haarr, 2019). Most of the perpetrators had lower secondary education (47.9%), and were working or employed (68.7%) (Haarr, 2019). Therefore, evidently, the traditional gender roles, social norms, perception towards violence including the individual factors of age, education of victim and perpetrators and perpetrator's alcohol abuse are all risk factors of violence against women in Albania.

1.5 Definition of Problem:

Referring to the evidence from the literature above, all forms of violence against women are still a growing body of research, mostly focused on physical and sexual violence. Psychological violence is still an under-researched topic, and despite the challenge of lacking consensus in the definition of psychological violence and the measurement, the effects and the prevalence of this type of violence cannot be ignored. In many cases, psychological violence co-exists along with other types of violence, which only makes it more challenging to separate the impact and causes of psychological violence. Hence, this research aims to bridge this gap, shifting the focus from physical violence to its relation to psychological violence and its inherent impacts and effects on the lives of women victims. Our research goals, thus, include:

- To emphasize the presence of psychological violence in the phenomenon of gender-based violence, and to also analyze if respondents realize the presence and effects of psychological violence in their experience of physical violence;

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- To study whether social norms, gender roles, and culture play a role in the prevalence of violence against women;
- To investigate the risk factors and determinants of VAW;
- To understand if there is a difference in perception of violence between older women and younger women; and
- To explore how the experience of violence affects the self-perception of respondents.

Chapter II. Methods

2.1 Study Design

A qualitative approach was used to galvanize the stories of the survivors of domestic violence. Stories and personal experiences of the survivors were taken through group interviews. The groups consisted of four or more women in each group, sharing the experiences of violence. Survivors were defined as women who have been in an abusive relationship with husband or partner but came out of the relationship through the help of police or NGOs, community, lawyers. The sample of 24 women was drawn from seven Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) which provide services, assistance/ shelters to survivors of domestic violence. The goal was to reach out to women who have come out of the abusive relationships and reflect on the experiences and share the stories of diverse age-group of women. The survivors were contacted through the CSOs about the research and the ones who could give time and could travel to the CSO office premises were interviewed in groups. Convenience sampling was the best considering various circumstances. A trained volunteer/coordinator from the CSO explained the goal of the research and translated questions during the interview.

Data were collected through face-to-face group interviews carried out by local staff specifically trained to work with survivors of domestic violence. All respondents were informed of the objective of the study, and informed consent was taken verbally and in written prior to the interview.

2.2 Participants

A total of 24 participants were interviewed, in which 9 were older women (50 and above), and the rest were younger women (aged over 25 years old). Older women were less in number due to reasons like not being able to travel without assistance, health reasons and responsibility of the family. The Inclusion Criteria for the selection were: community-dwelling women, age 25-49 (younger) and age 50 and over (older women) who experienced Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) or Domestic Violence (DV) perpetrated by husband or partner, whose present relationship is either separated, married or divorced, and has received help or support from NGOs or CSOs, police or lawyers in Albania. The following data was collected from the participants: age at the time of the interview, level of education, work status or occupation, relationship status with partner, origin (rural or urban), number and age of children, age when married or lived with a partner, and information of partner/husband such as status (alive, in jail or other), education and

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occupation. Level of education was categorized as elementary, secondary, high school, college. The status of relations was categorized as: married, divorced, separated. Data of participants were then categorized into age levels (younger or older), origin (rural or urban), working status (occupation or not working), present relationship status (married, divorced, separated). The participants were not given any gifts or incentive for the interview. All the participants spoke only Albanian and communicated through the translator.

Table 2.2 1 Demographic Characteristics of Younger Age Group of Survivors

Code	Age	Origin	Level of Education	Occupation	No. of Children	Relationship status
01	32	Urban	Secondary	No	3	Divorced
02	32	Urban	High school	No	2	Divorced
03	42	Urban	High school	Baker	3	In process of Divorce
04	37	Urban	Secondary	No	1	Separated
07	25	Urban	High school	No	1	Separated
08	41	Urban	Elementary	No	2	Separated
09	32	Rural	Secondary	No	2	Separated
10	37	Urban	Secondary	Cleaner	3	Divorced
11	45	Rural	Secondary	No	3	Separated
12	36	Urban	University	No	1	Divorced
14	34	Rural	Secondary	No	4	Married
15	33	Rural	High school	Hairdresser	3	Separated
16	48	Urban	High school	Tailor	2	Divorced
17	41	Urban	Elementary	No	0	NA
18	45	Rural	Secondary	Janitor	1	Divorced

Table 2.2 2 Demographic Characteristics of Older Age Group of Survivors

Code	Age	Origins	Level of Education	Occupation	No of Children	Relationship Status
05	50	Urban	University	Zoologist	2	Other
06	52	Urban	Secondary	No	5	Divorced
13	51	Urban	Secondary	No	2	Divorced
19	62	Urban	Secondary	Pension	1	Divorced
20	65	Urban	Secondary	Writer	0	Married
21	62	Urban	High School	Commerce	2	Married
22	58	Urban	High School	Accounts	2	Married
23	64	Urban	University	Pension	0	NA
24	63	Urban	High School	Painting	2	Married

2.3 Instrument

The qualitative method was used in the study to get insight on the experience of violence and the perspective on the factors which influences violence (Folkestad, 2008) as it involves the collection of people's experiences, views and opinions in their own words (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The qualitative research's non-positivist research paradigm helps the researcher to understand that there are different versions of reality or knowledge, even for an individual in the same context (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The rationale for choosing this method of study was to understand the stories of violence rather than the number so that the focus is on the experiences which may differ from person to person and to get insight on how definition and understanding of violence may contradict based on age or social settings. Also, the participants were associated with an organization where the sharing stories among each other were considered empowering, so the semi-structured interview deemed as the best way to get the data. The focus of the interview was lived experiences of the participants. Each of them was given an opportunity to express feelings, concerns, and own perspective by using the interview protocol to engage the participants

and keep track of the interview questions.

The interviews were divided into three sections: the first section was the introduction of self and family; the second section was about gender roles, society and culture in Albania influencing gender-based violence, the support they received, resources that were available or could have been available through their experiences, changes from past generation to present, the contribution of the older generation and their self-perception throughout the experience of violence; and the last section was open to discussion or sharing of experiences.

Table 2.3 1 Interview Protocol

Introduction

1. I would like to start by asking you to describe yourself and your family.

Explore stories and experiences

Section I: Role of gender role, society and culture that influence gender violence

2. How do you perceive the role of gender in Albania as a factor for gender-based violence?
3. How do you perceive the role of society/culture in Albania as a factor for gender-based violence?

Section II: Support received during the experience of violence

4. What type of information, advice or support did you receive following the experience of violence?
5. What other resources you wished had been more available?

Section III: Intergenerational differences

6. What has changed from the old generation of women to the present one?
7. What contribution has the older generation made to help this generation of victims?

Section IV: Self-perception and hope for future

8. How has the experience affected your self-image and everyday life; and what are your thoughts about the future?

Ending questions/ debrief

9. Is there anything we have missed to ask that you would think is essential and wants to share regarding your understanding of gender-based violence in your country?
 10. What suggestions would you have for people and organizations working in this field?
-

11. What is your suggestion to other women who might be experiencing violence?

2.4 Procedures and Research Setting

Different CSOs working in domestic violence cases were contacted, and also meetings were arranged. Before the interview with the participants, several meetings were conducted between the researcher and coordinator of CSOs on the cases they have dealt with, the participation of survivors in the research interview, questions and expectations from both sides. Inclusion criteria of the research and model of questions were given to the CSOs. The coordinators arranged time and venue for the interview. As per the instruction of the coordinators, most of the participants did not speak or understand English. Therefore, the interview questions were translated by Albanian Colleague from UN Women, who also transcribed and translated the interview recordings. A confidentiality agreement was also signed between the colleague and researcher. During the interview, a volunteer or coordinator from the CSO translated the questions and answers. The interview questions, data collection form, a confidentiality agreement was available in Albanian as well as English languages. There were 2 cases where the participants asked to be interviewed individually, the first case had a baby of 1 month and did not want to be in a large group and frequently left during the interview to take care of the baby. Another case was a woman who needed individual attention or assistance to understand the context of the interview, and the questions asked due to prolonged exposure to domestic violence.

2.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) was chosen to analyze and interpret the interview due to its flexible method to interpret the data and also analyze the latent themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), 'thematic analysis is used to identify, analyze and report patterns or themes within the data' (p. 79). This research will be based on the approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2012). The process of analysis is divided into six phases: familiarizing with data, generating initial code, searching themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

NVivo software was used to analyze the data. The transcription of the interview was imported in the software, and many codes were generated by identifying patterns through a rigorous process of data familiarizing, data coding and theme development and revision (Braun and Clarke, 2006) which were then revised to identify broad patterns and potential themes.

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Items of interest and recurring patterns were explored analytically and critically, and codes were developed by capturing the relevant information from the data also while considering the semantic as well as latent meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The codes were then organized into potential themes by clustering similar codes and identifying coherent and meaningful patterns. Themes were constructed based on the key concepts of the research questions as well as from frequent, dominant and significant patterns in the data (Thomas, 2003). Each theme was defined based on its essence and nature and named accordingly so that it represented a coherent and persuasive story about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) (See Appendix A).

Chapter III. Results

Six themes are generated that represent the experiences of the survivors of gender-based violence perpetrated by an intimate partner and their perceptions on what factors play a role in gender-based violence. The analysis was done using NVivo software through which interviews were coded, and themes were generated.

There are six main themes: Experience of violence, Impact of violence, Individual factors contributing to violence, Role of children in violence, Role of institutions in violence, and Social and cultural factors contributing to violence.

Table 3.1 presents themes and subthemes, frequency of units of analysis and percentage of the frequency of units of analysis. The frequency of units of analysis comprises the number of times a statement related to the theme/subtheme mentioned in the interviews and the percentage (%) was calculated based on the frequency of unit of analysis and the total (100%) which constitutes the total of six themes of which units of analysis was 279.

Table 3. 1 Frequency and Percentage of Themes

3.1. Experience of violence	Frequency of units of analysis	Percentage (%)
3.1.1. Experience of Physical Abuse or Violence	15	5.38
3.1.2. Experience of Psychological Violence	26	9.32
3.1.3. Prolonged experience of Violence	10	3.58
3.1.3. Violence from Family	10	3.58
3.1.4. Continuation of abuse after separation	5	1.79
Total	66	23.65
3.2. Impact of Violence	Frequency of units of analysis	Percentage (%)
3.2.1. Emotional and Psychological Impact	10	3.58
3.2.2. Reflection on the experience of violence	16	5.73

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3.2.3. Empowerment and advocacy as survivors	17	6.09
Total	43	15.4

3.3. Individual Factors Contributing to Violence	Frequency of units of analysis	Percentage (%)
3.3.1. Age gap between partner	2	0.72
3.3.2. Alcohol Abuse	11	3.94
3.3.3. Gambling	3	1.08
3.3.4. Job insecurity or unemployment	7	2.51
3.3.4. Level of education of the women participants	1	0.36
Total	24	8.61

3.4. Role of Children in violence	Frequency of units of analysis	Percentage (%)
3.4.1. Impact of witnessing and experiencing violence on children	15	5.38
3.4.2. Children as reason to stay in the relationship	10	3.58
3.4.3. Children as strength and support	8	2.87
3.4.4. Worry and fear related to children	9	3.23
Total	42	15.06

3.5. Role of Institutions in violence	Frequency of units of analysis	Percentage (%)
3.5.1. Support received from different institutions	24	8.6
3.5.2. Lack of confidence in institutions	8	2.87
Total	32	11.47

3.6. Social and cultural factors contributing to violence	Frequency of units of analysis	Percentage (%)
3.6.1. Conservative and traditional gender roles	18	6.45
3.6.2. Gender Inequality	11	3.94
3.6.3. Honour, Shame and Stigma	16	5.73

3.6.4. Patriarchy	12	4.3
3.6.5. Secondary victimization	7	2.51
3.6.6. Inter-Generation differences in violence	8	2.87
Total	72	25.8
Total themes	279	100

3.1. Theme I: Experience of violence

The experience of violence was in varying degrees and included many different types, ranging from psychological to physical, from partner to family and over a long period of time.

All women gave accounts of experiencing one or multiple forms of violence over a long period of time, and also reflected on the violence from family members and in-laws.

As participants reflected on their personal experiences of violence, few sub-themes emerged under the theme of experience of violence: experience of physical abuse or violence, experience of psychological violence, prolonged experience of violence, violence from family, and continuation of abuse after separation.

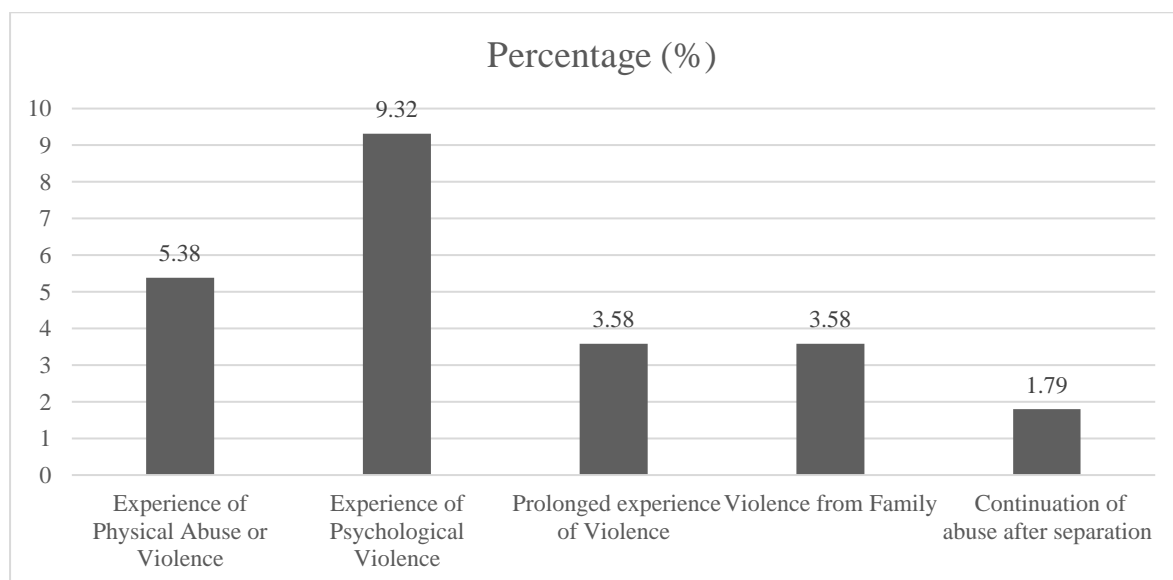


Figure 3.1 1 Experience of Violence

3.1.1 Experience of Physical Violence.

The most common forms of physical violence were hitting, which caused physical injuries in most women, such as bruises and bleeding. Some women shared experiences of

physical abuse (5.38% of the units of analysis).

Participant 7: “(...) he hit me so much that I still have marks all over my body. My face was full of bruises.”

Participant 11: “(...) my ex-husband would hit me if I moved the phone from the table.”

Some cases of physical violence were at an extreme level, which would cost the life of the participant. One woman shared her experience of her husband losing control and using a knife to harm her.

Participant 5: “(...) he lost his control; the violence was so extreme that he cut my stomach with a knife.”

3.1.2 Experience of Psychological Violence.

Almost all women shared experiences of psychological violence (9.32% of the units of analysis) and some experienced even after separation. Though the term ‘psychological violence’ was not mentioned explicitly, they outlined the examples of non-physical abuse that they experienced. Some women recognized the presence of psychological violence and termed it as unbearable and more severe than physical violence, whereas some recognized the shift from psychological violence to physical violence in the relationship. Usually, women experienced physical violence, along with intimidation and emotional abuse.

Participant 12: “(...) I experience psychological violence more than physical violence which has been unbearable.”

Participant 19: “(...) in 15 years of my marriage, I experienced psychological violence in the beginning, and then physical violence started.”

The most common form of psychological violence was controlling and restricting the wife from communicating with family and friends.

Participant 7 “(.) he was controlling, and always stopped me from meeting my friends. When he came to know about my pregnancy, he told me not to go anywhere and abort my child because he did not want to take responsibility of the child.”

Participant 8: “(...) he was controlling my life and told me where to go and where not to. He even did not allow me to visit my family.”

Participant 11: “(...) at first, he restricted me from going out and meeting friends and family, and then he abandoned me, and now he does not let me meet my children.”

The participants also stated staying in a relationship out of fear of their partner. Some men appeared to use this fear to threaten and control. The partners threatened to kill, or harm loved one such as sibling or children.

Participant 9 “(.....) violence started since the beginning of my marriage, but I stayed in the marriage because of fear, he threatened me to kill my brother and I left him when he threatened to kill my children and me with a gun.”

Participant 10 “(...) he threatened me that if I leave him, he will kill my daughters and me.”

The participants also gave examples of being humiliated and insulted. Some partners deliberately made them feel worthless by always mocking and insulting.

Participant 18: “(.) I have separated from my husband for more than a year, but he still harasses, insults and humiliated me.”

Participant 17: “(...) he asked me to leave because he found someone better and younger than me. I am born with a defect in the foot, and he kept mocking me for the defect.”

Some participants shared their partner’s refraining from taking responsibility of children or contributing to the economic situation at home which added emotional burden and stress.

Participant 4: “(...) my daughter lives with son and me with ex-husband. He has refused to pay daughter’s dues which was decided by the Court that he must pay every month. He does not allow my son to meet me or call his sister.”

Participant 3: “(...) he does not work and once he threw away the food I made for family, that night, my children and I went to bed empty stomach. Sometimes he ate so fast that there would be no food left for kids and me.”

3.1.3 Prolonged experience of violence.

Some participants outlined experiencing violence from the beginning of the relationship (3.58% of the units of analysis); however, they continued to stay in the abusive relationship out of fear or for children and social pressure. Leaving a relationship was not straightforward. The examples show that the women left when it was life-threatening or after they were old, but violence continued.

Participant 9: “(...) I was married young when I was 18 years old, and I experienced violence from my partner since the beginning of my marriage, but I stayed for my children.”

Participant 19: “(...) I am 62 years old. I had to divorce because of the continuous violence from my ex-husband.”

3.1.4 Violence from family.

The participants narrative referred to the presence of violence from childhood from the male members of the family, such as brother or father. Some women highlighted on restrictions and control from family members before marriage (3.58% of the units of analysis).

Participant 7 “(.....) my brother is into drugs, and my father is an alcoholic, my mother passed away. They do not look for me or ask me where I am. My brother told me that I am dead to him.”

Participant 20: “(...) my family did not accept my decision to marry my husband because it is not allowed for the daughter to choose partner, so my family abused me for my decision.”

Participant 21: “(...) my brother did not even allow me to go out and play in the neighbourhood as a kid, and I got married out of fear from my brother.”

Some pointed out a lack of support from family members after getting married and experiencing violence.

Participant 9: “(...) I was in Greece when my husband abused me, and I wanted to come home to my father, but he kept saying no and did not accept me when I left my husband and came back to Tirana.”

Participant 16: “(...) I experienced terrible violence from my brother too because he was too concerned what others would say if I separated from my husband even when I was experiencing violence.”

Some participants shared violence from intimate partner often involved the in-laws as well.

Participant 14: “(...) it was not just my husband but his family too who interfered in my life.... my mother-in-law tortured me, took all my monthly wage and left nothing for me”

Participant 5: “(...) my husband’s siblings are all unmarried; they forced me to do all their work at home and also earn for my children.”

3.1.5 Continuation of abuse after separation.

Few participants stated continuous abuse even after separation by law (1.79% of the units of analysis).

Participant 19: “(...) I divorced after continuous abuse from my ex-husband, but he continued to abuse me in different ways, I was so helpless that I wanted to die.”

Participant 16: “(...) when I left him, I got a court order and protection from the state, but he did not abide by the law and continued to insult and humiliate me.....”

Participant 17: “(...) despite the police protection order, he has barged in my workplace several times and hit me, insulted me in front of everyone.”

Participant 3: “(...) I have feared for my life. What if he finds me and kills me for leaving him?”

3.2 Impact of Violence

The impact of violence is categorized as emotional and psychological impact, reflection on the experience of violence and empowerment and advocacy as survivors.

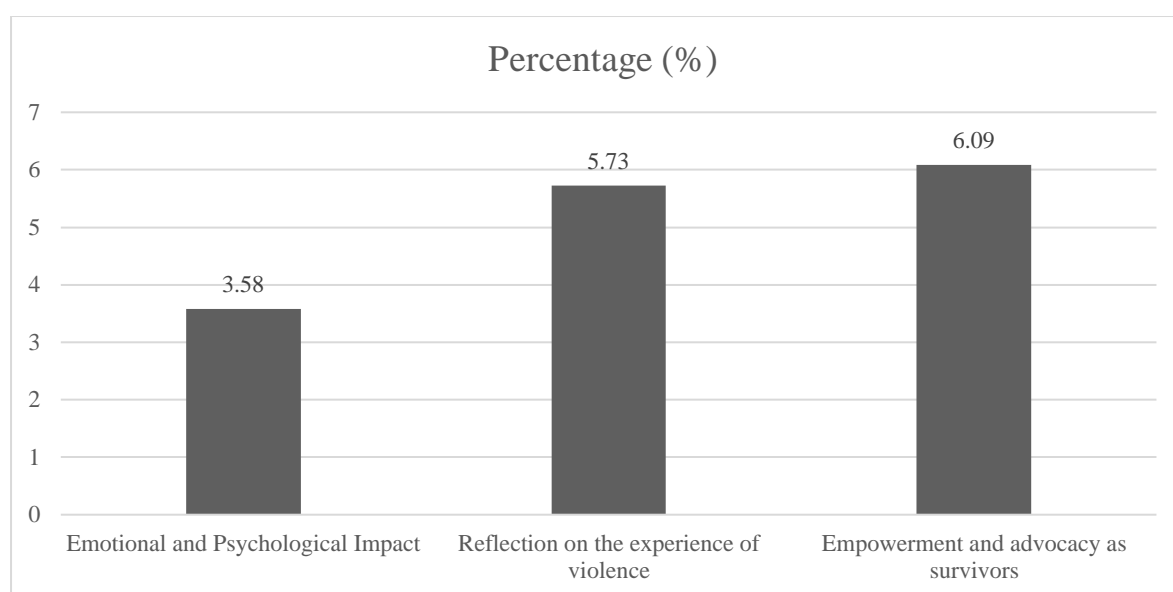


Figure 3.2 1 Impact of Violence

3.2.1 Emotional and psychological impact.

The participants shared feeling helpless, suicidal and losing their worth as a woman as a consequence of experiencing violence (3.58%).

Participant 8: “(...) I was not happy at all. I felt like a coward because I was controlled, and I could not do anything about it. I was not comfortable in my own house; I asked my husband if I am a burden to him.”

Participant 19: “(...) I wanted to die, the violence and abuse continued even after separation.”

Participant 6: “(...) I thought of killing myself, but I also knew that it was not a solution.”

Participant 1: “(...) the violence diminished my dignity as a woman.”

3.2.2 Reflecting on the experience of violence.

Some participants reflected on experiencing violence due to the lack of information of seeking help, helplessness and desperation to stop violence and finding answers to why the violence happened (5.73%).

Participant 7 “If I had not called the helpline that day, I do not know what would happen to me. I would not be in this world.”

Participant 12: “If I had enough information about where to get help, I would not have been in the situation I am today.”

Participant 21: “Physical violence comes when the psychological violence reaches its peak. When he hits you once, it is over! The violence will continue forever if you do not raise your voice.”

One participant had reached a tipping point where she just wanted the violence to stop and accept betrayal from her husband.

Participant 17: “Despite everything that was happening to me, I only wanted the violence to stop. I had also accepted the betrayal from my husband. I begged him not to destroy the family, but he could do anything that made him happy, even if it was leaving me.”

The interview was conducted after the earthquake in Albania, one of the women in the interview related her experience of violence to the disaster.

Participant 3: “(...) domestic violence in Albania is like the recent earthquake. It is difficult to explain.”

Some were still looking for an answer to why the partner abused her.

Participant 9: "(...) my husband did not even drink or gamble; I do not know why he abused me so much."

3.2.3 Empowerment and advocacy as survivors.

The participants stated their perspective on eradicating violence from our society and urged other women to speak up about the violence (6.09%). They felt empowered to come together and denounce violence, talk about their experiences and encouraged other women to do the same. They shared strong views on how they can all work towards eliminating violence of all kinds.

Participant 21: "No women should tolerate any kind of violence. As soon as it starts, women should leave the relationship. When someone abuses you one time, he will do it again and again."

Participant 23: "There is a need for the emancipation of the society for women."

Participant 24: "No women ever should be hit, no matter what."

Participant 19: "Our vote is strong; we have to vote so we can choose the government that priorities the eradicating violence."

Participant 22: "Prioritization of news about violence on media channels is needed, so women know they are not alone and how to ask for help."

3.3 Individual Factors contributing to Violence

According to the participants, individual factors such as age gap with partner, alcohol abuse, gambling, job insecurity or unemployment and level of education influenced and contributed to violence.

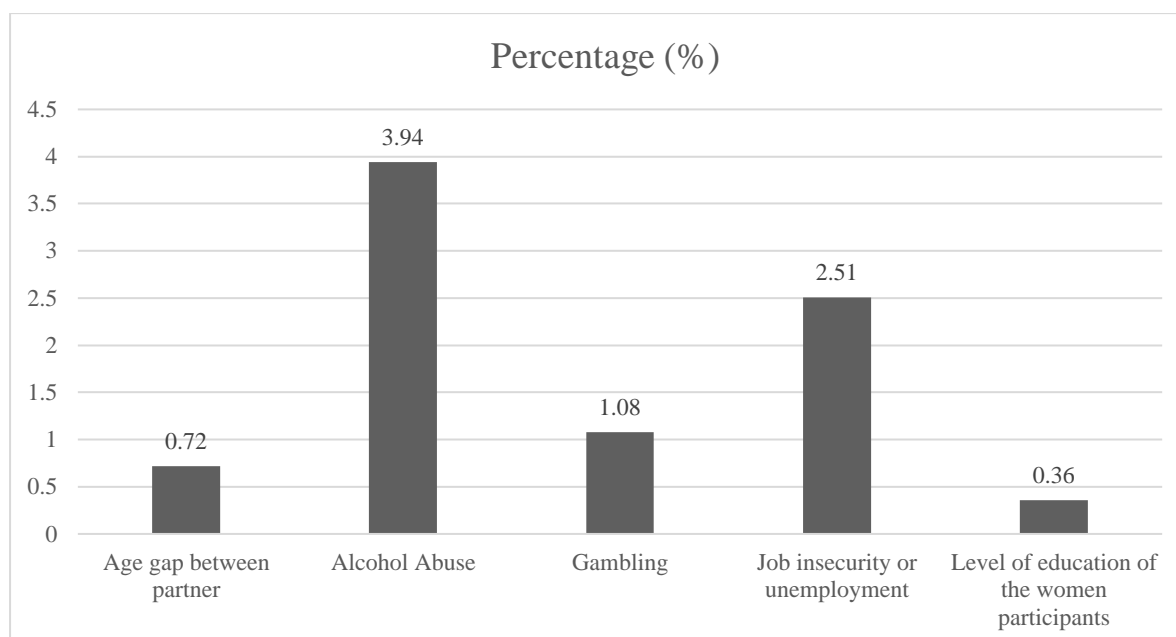


Figure 3.3 1 Individual Factors contributing to Violence

3.3.1 Age gap between partner.

Some women stated that getting married to a much older man could have contributed to violence (0.72%). The participants shared that they got married at a younger age which might have given authority to the man to make the wife obey.

Participant 10: “(...) my husband is 12 years older than me, so it was easy for him to control me when we got married.”

Participant 9: “(...) I got married young when I was 18, and my husband was 15 years older than me.”

3.3.2 Alcohol abuse.

Alcohol was mentioned by most of the groups, and some claimed alcohol to cause violence and divorce (3.94%). Alcohol disrupted relationship within the family, also affecting children.

Participant 12: “(...) my ex-husband spends most of his days getting drunk and hitting my children and me.”

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Participant 10: “(...) when he came home drunk, I was afraid he would abuse my daughter, so we all slept in one room and locked the door.”

Some women showed hope that treating for alcohol addiction might change the relationship with the husband.

Participant 5: “(...) I live with my partner, who is alcoholic, he has been trying to get sober, and I was hoping he will be normal again.”

Participant 14: “(...) my husband is being treated to get over an alcohol addiction, so the situation is calm now.”

3.3.3 Gambling.

Some respondents mentioned that gambling caused conflict in marriage and caused violence (1.08%).

Participant 3: “(...) he indulged in gambling, lost all the money, and we fought. It affected our marriage.”

3.3.4 Job insecurity and unemployment.

Some participants experienced economic burden along with violence in most cases where their partner did not have a job or did not go to work (2.51%). In many cases, the participants were forced to be breadwinners for the family as well as take care of home and children.

Participant 1: “(...) he did nothing but drink, never worked for the family and forced me to work.”

Participant 8: “(...) he did not want to work because he was lazy, but he wanted to feel like a ‘man’ in the house, so he abused me.”

Participant 6: “(...) I think my ex-husband’s unemployment is linked to the violence I experienced.”

3.3.5 Level of education of the women participants.

The participants emphasized a lack of education or being educated could influence the experience of violence (0.36%).

Participant 4: “(...) my lack of education could have contributed to violence....”

Participant 22: “(...) education and awareness can control violence...”

3.4 Role of Children in Violence

Almost all participants had children and mentioned their children repeatedly during the interview as a vital part of their life and their children’s role in the violence as well as witnessing and experiencing violence.

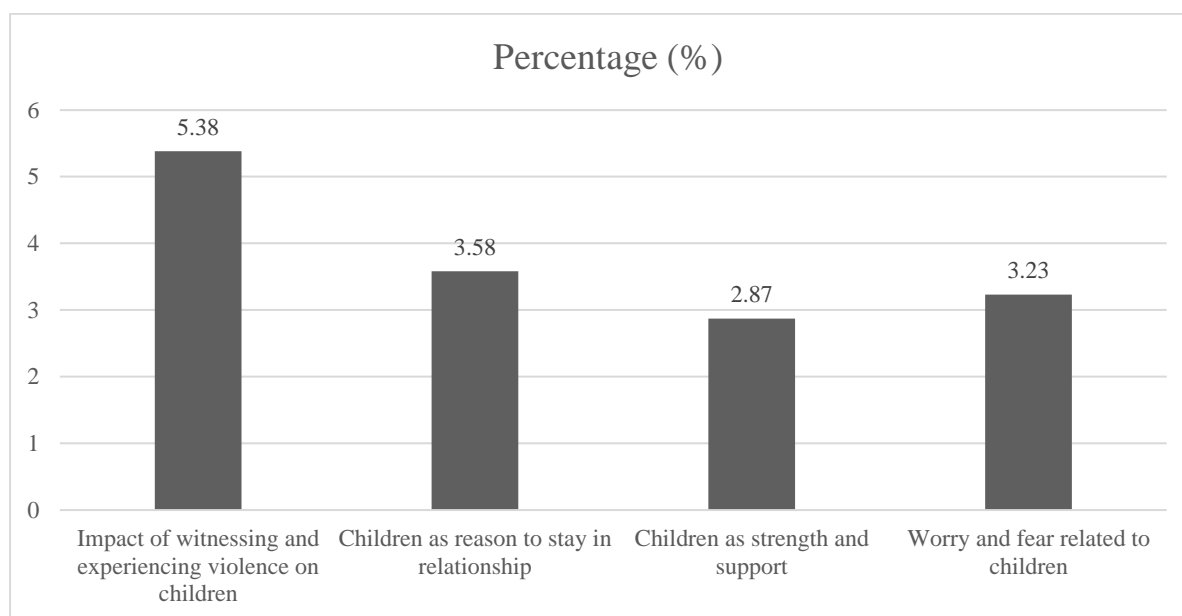


Figure 3.4 1 Role of Children in Violence

3.4.1. Impact of witnessing and experiencing violence on children.

While the women experienced violence from a partner, the children either witnessed violence or experienced it directly (5.38%). The participants expressed consequences their children faced from the violence and how it affected them. In some cases, the partners were violent towards children.

Participant 8: “(...) my kids missed many school days due to violence, so the social worker at their school reported to the director of the school, and then he reported to the police. That is when the police came to our house to check the situation.”

Participant 11: “(...) my children experienced psychological violence, my husband and his family brainwashed my children not be close to me or show any affection to me.”

Participant 5: “(...) my children lived without proper food, electricity and heating. My daughter studied with a candle, and my husband abused them when he was drunk.”

Participant 10: “(...) I was so scared that my drunk husband might abuse my daughters. He even called his daughter, sluts.”

3.4.2 Children as a reason to stay in the relationship.

Participants stated that children were one of the reasons for staying in the marriage and tolerating violence from a partner (3.58%). In some cases, they were concerned about the shame and stigma children would face if the parents were separated, and in other cases, the concern was the stigma associated with divorce.

Participant 1: “(...) I continued to live with my partner for another two and a half years after the divorce because of my children.”

Participant 5: “(...) my younger daughter told me, if I divorced her father, she would jump out of the balcony.”

Participant 6: “(...) I stayed because of my three daughters because people told me no one would want to marry someone whose parents are divorced.”

3.4.3 Children as strength and support.

Having children gave hope and strength to the participants (2.87%). Despite the experience of violence, they were motivated to work and provide a good life to children.

Participant 5: “(...) I am stronger because of my children. I tried to set a good example as a parent to my children.”

Participant 7 “(...) Now my family is my son. It is the best feeling in the world to be a mother. I have been strong because I have a son and I should fight, not for me but him.”

3.4.4 Worry and fear related to children.

The participants who were separated from partners showed great concern for their children (3.23%). They wanted to give better life and support children in way possible.

Participant 17: “(...) I requested protection order for my daughter, but the judge said: “There is no protection order, only God.”

Participant 2 “(...) my priority is my children, and I hope to give them a better life.”

Participant 6: “(...) I pray for my children every day, and I will always support them.”

3.5 Role of Institutions in Violence

Institutions such as the Police, the law and the courts have higher authority to protect victims and punish perpetrators; additionally, few non-profit organizations and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are working in supporting women who experienced violence by providing shelter or advocating for their rights and spreading awareness on eliminating violence. All the participants were getting support from CSOs, however, the support received from the State or Police varied from person to person. While most of them received support from CSOs, they showed a general lack of confidence in the law.

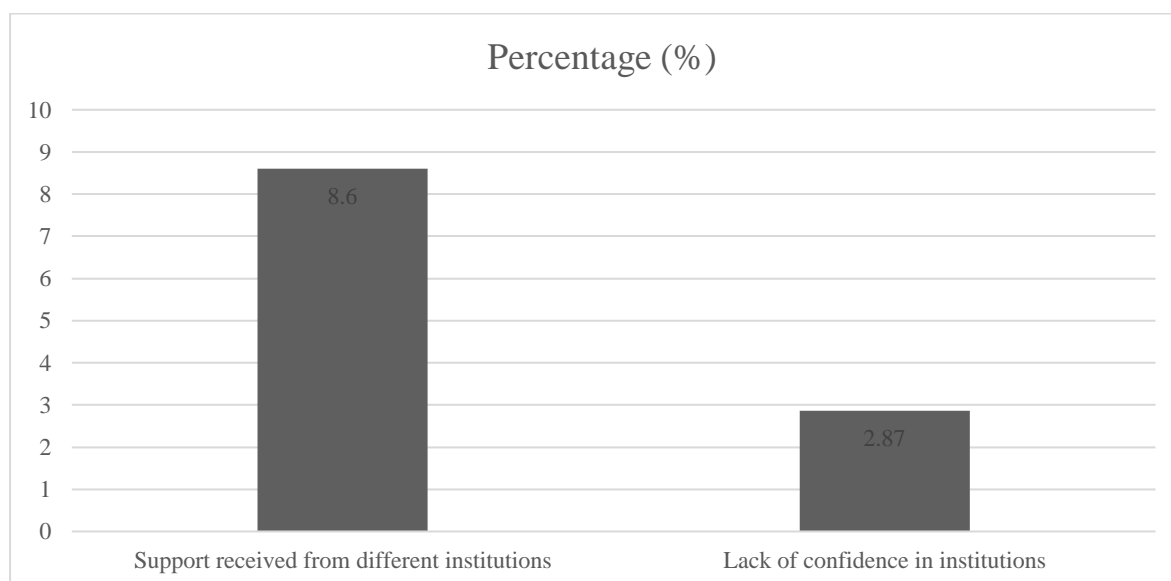


Figure 3.5 1 Role of Institutions in Violence

3.5.1 Support received from institutions.

Many women were referred to CSOs through the Police (8.67%). Some extreme cases of violence received attention from the police, and court decisions were in favour of the participants.

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Participant 7: “(..) I took a protection order from the police and then called women and girls helpline, and they brought me to this shelter. And after a few days, the police arrested my partner.”

Participant 8: “(..) after the police came to check the situation in my house, they came again two years later to see how my husband was behaving and if there has been violence and my ex-husband started behaving aggressively with the police so the police took my children and me to the police station and they decided to bring us to this shelter.”

Participant 1: “(..) this organization feels like home, I am happy to receive help from this organization.”

Participant 10: “(..) the police took me to court, and the court sent me to the shelter in Shkoder. In the shelter of Shkoder, they keep only the most emergent cases, and they keep for 24 hours but I stayed there for four days, and then they referred me to this shelter.”

3.5.2 Lack of confidence in institutions.

Some women showed a lack of trust and confidence in the Police and State law and order (2.87%). One woman shared her experience of having to prove being humiliated by her partner. Some emphasized receiving no help from any legal institutions.

Participant 16: “(..) I received protection order from the court for a year and a half, and I do not live my ex-husband, but he still harasses, insults and humiliates me. I went to the police several times but was told there was no evidence. I must have bruises on my face or body so they can take action against him.”

Participant 15: “(..) do not expect too much from the state if you do not have connections.”

Participant 6: “(....) there were many court hearings, but no help, my life is ruined, and I have nowhere to turn and complain. There is no trust in the State.”

Participant 17: “(...) I have approached the municipality, police station, the court and the mosque and applied for social home, but my application was not accepted.”

3.6 Social and cultural factors contributing to violence

Social and cultural factors comprise of the belief’s society holds that normalizes violence or contributes to escalation or prevalence of violence. The social and cultural factors are divided into six sub-themes which are: conservative and traditional gender roles, gender inequality, honour, shame and stigma, patriarchy, secondary victimization, and inter-generational differences in violence.

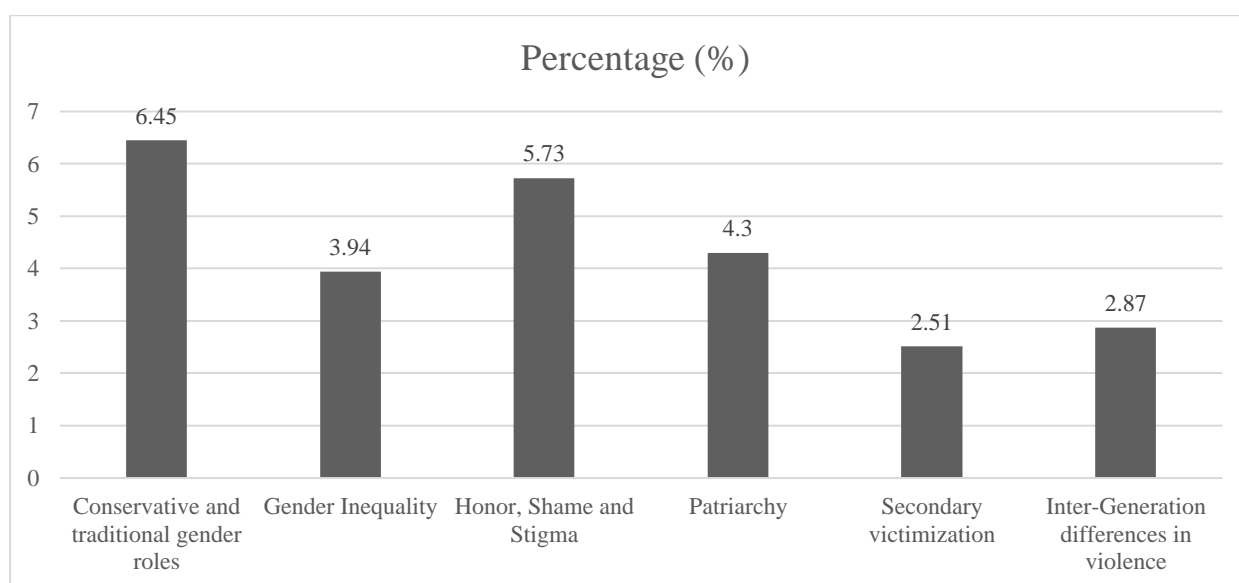


Figure 3.6 1 Social and cultural factors contributing to violence

3.6.1 Conservative and Traditional Gender Roles.

Here, the participants recalled how they were expected to fulfil their assigned roles by the partner and in-laws (6.45%). Women are referred to as caregivers, child-bearers, and not abiding by these roles would have sanctions.

Participant 18: “(...) he expected and ordered that I keep food ready when he comes home even if we did not have money to buy food.”

Participant 11: “(...) my in-laws had no mercy on me, they never considered my pain and suffering because they believed the daughter-in-law should take responsibility of everything at home and take the role of a caretaker.”

Participant 20: “(...) my husband divorced me because he wanted kids and I could not have. kids”

Participant 24: “(...) I told my son's girlfriend how my son is and how she should behave and change her behaviour because it was affecting my son.”

Participant 5: “(...) his family used to say to me “The wife was only necessary to take care of the kids and work.”

3.6.2 Gender Inequality.

The participants referred to the lack of rights and gender inequality present in society (3.94%), and they were well-aware that inequality contributes to violence.

Participant 7: “(...) I wish there were equal rights for men and women in reality as well,because of lack of rights, there is violence..... that is the reason I want to go in another country and live because I know I will not be comfortable here because of inequality and how women are being abused.”

Participant 21: “(...) I have fought for gender equality for a long time, I tried to claim my rights in 40 years of my marriage, but I still do not think I have gained equal rights due to different circumstances.”

Participant 2: “(...) here, we have the mentality that men have more rights, are more powerful than women, especially in a rural area.”

There was a contradictory perspective from one participant, who indicated that women having equal rights has caused insecurity in men, and they use violence to feel powerful.

Participant 3: “(...) now, women have more rights in their hands, and men feel inferior with this fact. Maybe this affects the men, that is why they use violence against women.”

3.6.3 Honour, Shame and Stigma.

The participants stated that divorce and separation were considered shameful, and single women with children were stigmatized (5.73%). They shared the experience of pressure

from society to maintain the honour of the family by keeping silence on the violence and conflict in marriage, and it is only women who are stigmatized, not men. They also shared that children, especially girls, might face consequences such as not getting suitable partner if her parents are divorced.

Participant 6: “(.....) I experienced violence from my brother because he was afraid of the other’s opinion and what they would say about me. He kept saying my place was next to my husband no matter what.”

Participant 5: “(.....) I did not report in the police station because of my children so they would not be ashamed of their parent’s situation.”

Participant 10: “(.....) I wanted to go back to live with my dad, but he always said no, and he did not support my plea to take her home. He said he would be ashamed if I returned home divorced and told me not to divorce even if the violence continued. Once I returned home without telling my father, but he asked me to go back to where my husband is..... Other family members were not powerful enough to help me with my decision and go against the will of my father.”

Participant 1: “(.....) I still have my husband's surname for the sake of my children.”

Participant 3: “(.....) I was ashamed to denounce my husband, and I was scared of the other’s opinion.”

3.6.4 Patriarchy.

The participants shared the lower-status position of women in society as compared to men (4.3%) and the struggle to have equal rights and position in society.

Participant 8: “(.....) I think that it was related to my husband not wanting to work, but he wanted to feel like a “man” somehow in the house, so he abused me.”

Participant 21: “(.....) the typical man wants to dominate a woman and refuse to give a woman the place she has in the society and family with respect.....even if the woman or wife is educated and has her opinion she is never valued.”

Participant 22: “(...) in our society, leaders, have generally been men because of the belief that men are more capable of being leaders.”

Participant 19: “(...) my parents had left one real-estate property for me, but my brothers took it without giving me my share of the property, and I have been trying to claim my right at the court for years.”

Participant 20: “(...) my ex-husband could not stand the fact that I was smart and educated and used to say: I am the smartest in the family, there is no need for you to be smart.”

3.6.5 Secondary Victimization.

Some participants stated that, in their opinion, women were also responsible for violence (2.51%). Some, especially in the older group of participants, expressed that women were at fault if they did not fulfil the traditional gender roles of taking care of the children and husband.

Participant 23: “(...) another important fact is that women do not do anything to change this situation. Also, the current situation, where most women do not work and are housewives, is a factor that negatively impacts. It shows that women in rural areas are more separated and do not join forces with other victims. There are some of my friends who have never gone to the cinema, theatres, for lunches/dinners with friends because the husband does not allow them to go out.”

Participant 20: “(...) while I was attending many forums and conferences on this topic, I think that it is not only the men’s fault it is women’s too ...it is a women’s fault if she does not take care of the children, goes out does not care about her husband and her husband can hit her if he wants because is not a worthy wife.”

Participant 21: “(...) character of women plays a role in the violence.”

3.6.6 Intergeneration differences in understanding violence.

Women in the younger group referred to the differences between the older generation and the present (2.87%), and the silence and tolerance of violence have contributed to the present scenario.

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Participant 7: “(...) women were silent in the old generation. They were abused by my husband and son and never talked or complained about it. If they take the step like I have done, things would have changed, but I do not think they took that step (... ..) my mother was a victim of domestic violence, but my mother could not do anything because of me and my brother. She told us do not worry, he is your father.”

Participant 8: “(...) women in the older generation were more tolerant of the violence, they suffered more and rarely went to the police. Today, this generation can raise their voice, can denounce violence and can be protected by law or shelters.”

Participant 10: “(...) the older generation never supported the victims and said that women need to tolerate whatever the husband does.”

Chapter IV. Discussion

The study aimed to emphasise the presence and effects of psychological violence in physically abusive relationships and analysed the risk factors incorporating feminist and ecological perspectives. The study also explored the difference in perception of violence between older and younger women regarding, adherence to social norms and traditional gender roles.

The findings from this study support the prior research that stated psychological abuse predicts, precedes and coexists with other forms of violence (Marshall, 1996; Straka & Montminy, 2008). Almost all participants who were physically abused also reported to have experienced psychological abuse. Some women experienced psychological violence at the beginning of the marriage, which preceded physical violence, whereas some reflected that physical violence started when psychological abuse reached its peak. Findings showed that psychological abuse included active and passive behaviours such as controlling, restrictions, threatening to harm loved ones, ridicule, humiliation and abdication from taking responsibility for children and the economic situation of the family thus confirming that psychological abuse was not limited to what the partner say and do but also what they do no say or do (Montminy, 2005). As maintained by Seff et al., (2008) that justice system is not prepared to respond to the invisible or subtle acts of violence and their consequences, the study also provided evidence where participants were unable to report the experience of psychological abuse due to the invisibility of abuse and its effects.

In line with the feminist theory that violence against women is prevalent and reproduced in a patriarchal society by which male dominance and female subordination become 'cultural prescription' (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Heise, 2012), the study highlights the existence of such values. Moreover, psychological abuse acted as an instrument for men to gain power and control over female partners (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Johnson, 1995; Straka & Montminy, 2008). Participants stated that men continued to want control over the wife, with behaviours such as restricting from meeting and communicating with friends and family, controlling women's movements/ decision making, threatening to kill and harm loved ones if women ended the relationship.

Expanding on the feminist theory, the present analysis showed that violence stems from gender inequality and societies with more traditional patriarchal practices and stereotypes of gender roles influences violence against women (Haarr, 2019). The participants mentioned they were expected to follow traditional gender roles, such as family caretakers, child bearers and were expected to uphold the honour of the family. Ultimately this also

meant having to continue these preconceived duties and responsibilities despite experiencing physical and psychological abuse from partners. Moreover, participants described how patriarchy in the society placed them as subordinate with examples such as men refusing wife to give the status and privilege she deserves despite her education and work status and hold the belief that men are natural leaders. This is consistent with other researchers who suggest violence against women in Albania is influenced by patriarchal traditions, rigid gender identities and roles, male dominance, imposed honour and shame on women (Amnesty International, 2006; Haarr 2019; OSCE, 2019).

Relating to the cultural aspects, a collectivist society emphasises group identity and close-knit families (Traindis, 1995); however, the disadvantage is expectations from women to self-sacrifice and place family wellbeing above themselves (Archer, 2006; Heise, 2012). We found similar social arrangements in Albania where living in a joint family is common, and such arrangements increase the risk of violence not by a partner but also family and in-laws (Haarr, 2019). Therefore, the study found that most participants were abused by male members such as fathers and brothers before marriage and in-laws after marriage. Moreover, most women were abused in the name of maintaining the honour of the family, which emphasised integrity and reputation of the family over individual priorities (Heise, 2012; Welchman & Hossain, 2005). Honour is dictated by traditional family ideology and violation of honour is not limited to infidelity but also when women want to leave abusive husband, resulting in being forced to remain in the marriage and punished for leaving (Welchman & Hossain, 2005). With the imposition of the culture of honour, participants lacked social support from family members to come out of an abusive relationship or in most cases, asked to compromise to maintain the honour. Therefore, many participants refrained from taking actions such as calling police or filing for divorce to end or come out of an abusive relationship.

As anticipated in this study, there was a distinction between older and younger women in perception about gender-based violence. Older women were more likely to justify violence with the behaviours of women themselves, usually stating that women were responsible for the violence that they experience. These were often justified with examples such as women not acting to change and to refuse to abide by their husbands, and wives making mistakes and not fulfilling their duties. These findings build on previous research that older women show their stronger adherence to social norms and traditional gender roles (Straka & Montimony, 2008).

As Heise (1998) proposed that gender-based violence should be studied from the

ecological perspective as it is a multifaceted phenomenon, the individual-level risk factors of violence were also identified in this study such as age gap between partners and level of education of women. The result of an age gap is, however, contradicted with other research such as DHS survey (Hindin, Kishor et al., 2008) which reported a lower risk of violence for women who had at least five years older husband, and the WHO study found a weak association between age gap and violence (Moreno et al., 2005). However, this study found that a large age gap between partners provides men with greater authority to control women. Similarly, the low level of education of women limited them from exposure to resources and autonomy to leave the abusive relationship (Kishor & Johnson, 2004). Alcohol abuse was one of the significant reasons for violence as it increased the risk of abuse dramatically, and most participants believed that alcohol was the leading cause of abuse (Ramiro et al., 2004). Household economic status or job insecurity was also found to be a risk factor of violence (Heise, 2011; Hindin, Kishor & Ansara, 2008) as unemployment of husband added burden to the wife to provide for the family and created conflict in the family.

It appeared from the present study that children of the abused women were also part of the violence in different ways. On the one hand, children either witnessed the violence or both witnessed and experienced violence and resulted in adverse effects on health (Hindin, Kishor & Ansara, 2008) and deprivation of basic need. On the other hand, there was also social factor attached to this. Most women stayed in abusive relationships for the children, this was mostly so that the children are not ashamed of the parents' condition, or to avoid stigmatisation of belonging to an abusive family.

Lastly, the experience of violence affected all the participants, and previous research has indicated (Aguilar & Nightingale, 1994; Follingstad, 2009; Sacket & Saunders, 1999) that experiencing psychological abuse such as fear and humiliation affects women's self-esteem, making them feel powerless. The research also confirmed that participants in an abusive relationship had a feeling of helplessness and fear. Some expressed that the whole experience diminished their dignity as a woman. However, as Aguilar & Nightingale, (1994) previously observed social support, counselling and distancing oneself from abuse have a positive impact on self-esteem and self-confidence. Thus, the participants in this study confirmed that receiving social support from organisations as well as other women with similar experience helped in feeling empowered for themselves as well other women who are in an abusive relationship.

4.1 Limitations

Despite the findings, we want to acknowledge the limitations of the study. The major

limitation of this research is the sample was small, with even lesser representation of older women. Barriers such as health constraints and travelling to the organisation were challenging for older women, therefore, the sample size of older women was smaller compared to the younger women moreover, there is also underrepresentation of minority women. The interviews were conducted in the urban area of Albania, therefore, minority women from rural areas and the Roma community were not included in this study. Another limitation was that the participants of this study include the ones who sought help from organisations working on VAW, so the situation of women who have not received or sought help is unknown.

Since the interviews were conducted with a translator from the organisations who had been working with the victims directly, there was a general assumption that the researcher was also aware of the individual cases, so the participants did not go in-depth explaining their cases. Additionally, there was also a group effect because women knew one another (e.g. in one situation, one woman spoke for all while the others agreed). Also, questions were not linked directly about the experience of abuse as per the suggestion of a psychologist in the organisation, thus, the experiences shared about the violence were voluntary. Lastly, one of the limitations is reliability index, in terms of time and logistics, we were not able to have a collaboration with another independent researcher to analyze part of our interviews, so we were not able to get inter-rater reliability.

Despite these limitations, we believe a few implications can be drawn from the study. Applying feminist theory and ecological theory to explore the risk factors of gender-based violence provided valuable implications. The research aimed to understand the social factors influencing the acknowledgement of psychological abuse. It was observed that risk factors of violence should be studied as the interaction between different layers of society. Moreover, it was known through this study that shame, honour and stigmatisation of violence play a significant role while experiencing violence which can remove them from social support from family members, therefore, intervention is needed at the societal level to change attitudes towards gender-based violence.

Several participants expressed that they found courage after coming to the organisations and meeting women with similar experiences, and they felt empowered by sharing their personal stories. Therefore, creating a safe space where victims can share the experience allows them to move beyond the fear of shame and stigmatisation, so the availability of information on such organisations and resources like shelters are also crucial to support the victims of gender-based violence. Interventions from organisations play a significant role

in developing attitude and behaviour towards violence.

Another crucial finding from this study was the lack of evidence to report psychological abuse. This poses a greater threat to psychological abuse to go undetected and encourages women to stay in a psychologically abusive relationship. Therefore, the police force and laws should consider intervention and identification of psychological abuse.

The study also found that gender-based violence was not limited to partner/husband but also from family and in-laws. Therefore, psychological violence from family members, in-laws and the community should be taken into account along with intimate partner violence. This also gives an idea of the rigidity of social norms, male domination and gender inequality in the societal level.

Psychological violence is an important factor and should be studied extensively, therefore, future research should have in-depth qualitative research on psychological abuse to provide a deeper understanding and different dimensions of causes and risk factors. Moreover, a cross-cultural study to identify a range of behaviours and actions that constitute psychological abuse in different societies would also provide evidence on how culture and social norms influence gender-based violence.

Conclusion

The present study contributed to filling an important gap in the risk factors of gender-based violence and the perception of psychological abuse in a physically abusive relationship. The study also explored the generational difference in perception of gender-based violence, and self-esteem of abused women while experiencing abuse and after coming out from the abusive relationship.

Despite the traditional gender roles, social norms of normalising violence in Albania, the presence of psychological abuse was acknowledged with examples such as control, abuse, humiliations and also explained such behaviours are more common and unbearable than physical abuse. As for the risk factors of gender-based violence, this study also identified multiple factors that contribute or influence violence. One of the significant findings was shame and culture of honour, which played a significant role- from losing social support to being forced to stay in abusive relationships. Shame and honour were (and are) imposed on women and girls, expecting them to follow traditional gender roles to maintain the honour of the family as well as staying in abusive relationships to avoid bringing shame to the family. Furthermore, patriarchy or male domination also forced women to be subordinate of partners despite women's education and work status.

Additionally, alcohol abuse and unemployment of husband were also leading cause of violence, creating disruption in the family and adding burden to the wife. The research also gave the context that there was an intergenerational difference among women in regard to violence. Older women were more inclined to follow the traditional cultural prescription of subordination to men and also placed responsibility on abused women. Consequently, most abused women felt helpless and lived in fear while experiencing abuse, but with the support from organisations, the participants felt empowered to fight against violence. However, the primary concern of all the abused women was to be able to provide for the children as they were also affected by violence.

Violence against women is prevalent in Albania, but the knowledge gap on the actual lived experiences of abused women and lack of need assessments have resulted in the scarcity of resources and a dearth of information of available resources for abused women. Social support is crucial in taking women out of abusive relationships, and such support should exist in the form of shelters to provide an escape from harm and danger from abusive partner and organisations to help in receiving protection order, reporting abuse and legal separations. Finally, exploring this research topic has allowed the researcher to examine

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the gender-based violence as a social issue which requires structural and ideological change.

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Appendix A

Table A: Description of Themes and Codes

Theme I: Experience of violence	
Experience of Physical Abuse or Violence	Women experiencing physical force such as beating, kicking, slapping, kicking, hitting with to hurt, abuse, causing physical, emotional, psychological injury and trauma.
Experience of Psychological Violence	Range of behaviors and actions that affects the partner psychologically and emotionally such as threaten to loved ones, depriving wife and children of basic needs, insulting harassing, destroying property or possessions, ignoring needs, false accusations, controlling, restrictions, demeaning, using coercion and threats, intimidation, isolations, minimizing, denying and blaming
Prolonged experience of violence	Long term exposure and experience of physical and psychological violence by intimate partner
Violence from Family	Enforcing restrictions, control, imposing power, expectations to follow traditional gender roles, limiting freedom and exposure, especially by a male figure of the family to the female member as well as in-laws after marriage
Continuation of abuse after separation	Continuation of abuse (Psychologically, physically and emotionally) after separation by not following court orders, protection order, law or not fulfilling responsibility stated by law and continuing to abuse
Theme II: Impact of Violence	
Emotional and Psychological Impact	Impact on mental and emotional wellbeing causing disruption in normal life caused by suffering and experience of violence
Reflection on the experience of violence	Reflecting on the events, experience and feelings while the women were with the abusive partner
Empowerment and advocacy as survivors	Participants voicing their opinion to stop violence and shared feeling of empowerment, independence, and growing sensitivity and awareness on violence and inequality
Theme III: Individual Factor	
Age gap between partner	Age gap between the husband and wife (usually older husband married to younger women)
Alcohol Abuse	Partner's use of alcohol contributing to violence and separation
Gambling	Gambling causing conflict and violence in the relationship

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Job insecurity or unemployment	Partner not working or unemployed, or working low paying job, not enough to provide to family
Level of education	Participants' knowledge and awareness of violence as well as experience of violence due to the level of education

Theme V: Role of Children

Impact of witnessing and experiencing violence on children	Child experiencing or witnessing violence of parents causing emotional, physical and behavioral impact
Children as reason to stay in relationship	Women staying in relationship and tolerating violence from partner and in-laws for the sake of children
Children as strength and support	Participants considering child/children as strength and support while experiencing violence as well as after separation from partner
Worry and fear related to children	Participants showing worry about the child/children's future and concern about providing security, education, food and accommodation

Theme IV: Institutional support

Support received	Support received from Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) or NGOs, Police where action was taken against the perpetrator and Court decisions in support of victims/ survivors
Lack of confidence in law and policies	Lack of trust in law, police and court with evidences and past experience of not receiving protection or security, not trusting the victims of violence and not having strict punishments to the perpetrators in cases where perpetrators did not abide by the court orders or protection orders

Theme VI: Social and cultural factors contributing to violence

Conservative and traditional gender roles	The expectation of women to take the role of 'care-taker', submissiveness to husband/ partner, and in-laws, gender roles resulting in poverty for women and lower levels of education, Blaming women for violence, separation,
Gender inequality	Attitude and perception of "Men and women are not equal", unequal treatment and opportunity in different sectors of society based on gender
Honor, Shame and Stigma	The stigma of divorce and single women, the importance of other's opinion, women bringing shame to family and expectation of

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Patriarchy	maintaining honor by following traditional roles Male dominance over women in the society and family, fostering male superiority and discrimination of women, women are subordinate to men, prevent women from acquiring equal status as men, Underestimating ability of women
Secondary victimization	Insensitive remarks /statements/questions on victims' character and actions to understand the context of violence by shifting focus from perpetrators to victim
Inter-generation differences in violence	Difference of opinion between older women and younger women in regard to social norms, tolerance of violence and women's experience of violence
