

Approaching Domestic Violence against Men in Iranian Context: A Qualitative Study from Tehran, Iran

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ABSTRACT

Using qualitative method the current study attempts to examine Iranian men's perception of domestic violence (DV) based on their own narrative. Fifty married men who had volunteered to participate in the study were interviewed. In this study the instances of DV towards men, its context, and the role of the police and the judiciary system were examined. According to the findings of the research, extracted from analyzing the interviews, the instances of DV towards men were categorized into: psycho-emotional, physical, sexual, financial, legal, social, and failure in homemaking duties. Regarding the formation of DV, the factors were identified in three levels: micro, middle and macro.

Keywords: Domestic violence, patriarchy, Iran, men

Until the first decade of the 21st century, domestic violence (DV) was considered a woman oriented issue but since then DV against men has been taken into account as well (Eisikovits & Bailey, 2011; Nowinski & Bowen, 2012). Controversial topic of DV against men gained more attention when fathers' and men's rights movements were augmented in western countries (Gavanas, 2004; Kaye & Tolmie, 1998). Paying more serious attention to the topic of DV against men might be a result of an alteration in attitude towards DV issue. This is to say that a gender view towards DV in which men usually played the role of perpetrators and women were the victims (Barber, 2008; Dekeseredy, 2011; Dekeseredy & Schwartz, 2003; Dutton, 2012; Johnson, 2011; Migliaccio, 2002) turned to be considered an interactive and situational behaviour (Eisikovits & Bailey, 2011; Felson & Outlaw, 2007; Fiebert, 2004; Johnson, 2006; Williams & Frieze, 2005). Obviously, there is ongoing debate about the symmetry or asymmetry of DV by investigating the similarities and differences in the prevalence rate,

the context, motivations, causes and consequences of DV (Allen, Swan, & Raghavan, 2009; Dutton & Corvo, 2006; Dutton, Corvo, & Hamel, 2009; Gerstenberger & Williams, 2013; Johnson, 2006, 2011; Kimmel, 2002; Robertson & Murachver, 2007; Straus, 2011). However, DV against women is seen as more negative (Douglas & Straus, 2006; Stewart, Moore, Crone, DeFreitas, & Rhatigan, 2012). Various studies have been conducted in recent years about DV against men (Archer, 2000; Barber, 2008; Drijber, Reijnders, & Ceelen, 2013; Durfee, 2011; Hines & Malley-Morrison, 2001; Jungnitz, Ienz, Puchert, Puhe, & Walter, 2004; Migliaccio, 2002; Swan & Snow, 2006; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Some studies have reported that men can experience DV as women (Du-Plat Jones, 2006; Kessler, Molnar, Feurer, & Appelbaum, 2001; Williams & Frieze, 2005). However, in terms of prevalence rates of DV against men, different research as provided contradictory results. The reasons of such results may lie in the methodological differences in examining the phenomenon of DV (Chan, 2011; Cho,

2012; Dutton, 2012; Nowinski & Bowen, 2012). DV against men is also likely to remain secret, because many men think it is humiliating and ineffective to report violence to the police (Barber, 2008; Drijber *et al.*, 2013).

Studies conducted in Iran and the Middle East in recent years are generally based on DV against women, and patriarchal structure of the society and family is said to be one of important reasons of the formation of DV against women and its continuance (Al-Nsour, Khawaja, & Al-Kayyali, 2009; Ammar, 2006; Ghazi-Tabatabai, Mohseni-Tabrizi, & Marjai, 2004; Haj-Yahia, 2003; Haj-Yahia & Uysal, 2011; Haj-Yahia, Wilson, & Naqvi, 2012; Linos, Khawaja, & Kaplan, 2012; Sadeghi-Fasaei, 2010; Zakar, Zakar, & Kramer, 2012). However, there have been an insufficient number of researches conducted in regard with DV against men, as it is contrary to the public impression of patriarchal societies. In a study conducted in Iran the sample included 460 men and women were examined out of whom 69.1% of men and 74.3% of women were subject to physical violence; 72.6% of men and 73.5% of women suffered from psychological aggression; 46.5% of men and 53% of women had been sexually assaulted; 62.6% of men and 63% of women were subject to injury (Mohammadkhani, Rezaee, Azadmehr, & Mohammadi, 2006). The results of another research in Iran which involved 40 couples referring to family courts indicated that when conflicts arise men usually use physical violence and women use psycho-emotional violence to make their point (Pournaghash-Tehrani & Tashk, 2007). Pournaghash Tehrani and Faizabad (2007) found that men who were victims of physical violence were more educated and had better income than those who were the victims of psychological violence.

It is the main objective of present study to examine how Iranian men perceive and experience DV against them. The findings of this paper might be useful to increase our understanding of DV against men in Iran and probably in the neighbouring countries. The results also can help family therapists and counsellors if they want to tackle violence in family. The main study questions as follows: (a) What is men's perception of DV against them?; (b) What are the instances of DV from men's view?; (c) In what context does DV against men take place?; (d) What is the role of the police and the judiciary system in

connection with DV against men? The proposal of this study was approved by the Department of Sociology of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Tehran in October 2010. This study is indeed a preliminary research on DV against men in Iran, the subsequent results of which will lead in the better understanding of the topic.

DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY

Forty-eight (96%) male participants in the research were married and two (4%) of them were divorced. Men ranged in age from 29 to 81 and the average age of the sample was 46 years old. Thirteen (26%) men had lower education or were illiterate, however, seventeen (34%) had Diploma or Associates Degree, twenty (40%) had Bachelor of Art (B.A), Master of Art (M.A), or Ph.D. The men were employed or retired, (except two of them who were unemployed) and their average monthly income was reported to be \$718. Forty-one (82%) participants had children and the average length of their married life was 18 years. The age difference of twenty-two(44%) men and their wives was less than 5 years, twenty- five (50%) of them between 5 and 10, and three (6%) of them over 10 years. In all the cases the age difference was reportedly in favor of men.

In the autumn of 2010, fifty married men who had volunteered to participate in the study were interviewed. Since the authors' priority of the study was "DV against men in the society", therefore the sample was not solely based on men who were recognized as victims of DV by the court.

Purposive sampling was used to select interviewees. In purposive sampling participants are selected according to the specific purpose of the research (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Therefore it has been attempted to have a sample with maximum variation in terms of variables like age, education, job, income and length of married life in order to present suggestive relations between demographic variables and DV against men in the stage of formulating hypothesis. Contrary to quantitative studies, in qualitative studies the size of the sample is not predefined and sampling process usually continues to theoretical saturation stage, i.e., a phase after which no new data can be collected (Darlington & Scott, 2002).

Following the mentioned sampling method in-depth interviews continued to the theoretical saturation stage.

In order to collect the data needed for the research, in-depth (open-ended) interviews were used in semi-structured form. When we cannot directly observe the phenomenon under study, in-depth interviews are one of the best methods to collect data (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Face-to-face interviews give the opportunity to the researchers to document not only the interviewees' verbal responses but also their nonverbal expressions such as: status of their face and their tone of voice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

To perform the interviews, ParkShahr and Park Laleh two crowded public places of Tehran city were selected. The reason for selecting these two public parks is that people in them usually have enough time to spare answering in-depth questions which are rather long and time-consuming. Moreover, park benches are located distant enough from each other so that the participants not worry about being heard by others. Based on techniques and ethics of qualitative research (Darlington & Scott, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), first the interviewer (second author) introduced himself as M.A student in sociology from Tehran University and explained the topic of the interview as well as its purposes to the participants and they were told that they had the choice to accept or reject the interview. The way to respond to the questions was not compulsory and it was solely based on their discretions. They were also ensured that their identities would not be questioned during the interview. Participants were not paid for their participation and all of them voluntarily agreed to be included to in our study.

Due to the sensitive nature of the research topic and the importance of being an ordinary interview from the perspective of the interviewee, and despite many advantages of audio tape recording, note taking was simply used to record the interviews. Written interviews were reviewed with small intervals, and they were completed and corrected if needed, to make sure that the statements were documented in their original form. The quotations were kept in their original form, unless changes were necessary to be made to make them more understandable. The mean duration of interviews was

one hour. Also, the shortest interview lasted 23 minutes and the longest one 103 minutes.

In the analysis of the research data, authors inspired by Grounded Theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), after selecting a coding system, categorized and reviewed the recorded data to identify codes and themes and to gradually extract the concepts and categories related to instances of DV against men, the context of DV against men, the role of the police and the judiciary system, etc. (Tables 1 and 2). To avoid personal judgment and bias in the data analysis, it was tried to consider negative cases and opposite hypotheses and the reliability of coding was increased through continuous discussions of authors with each other on how to encode and interpret the data. One of the features of grounded theory is the cyclical nature of the research process which allows the researchers to rethink about the whole research process and its elements (Flick, 2009). After designing the initial questions, the authors conducted several interviews and analyzed the responses, aiming to eliminate bugs and shortcomings of questions, and made some changes in the questions for later interviews.

RESULTS

Do Men Consider Their Wives' Violence against Them as a Crime?

About two-thirds (67%) of participants did not consider their wives' violence against them as a crime and believed that men should not inform the police or make a complaint to the court. According to the justifications that they made, men should tolerate such problems to the possible extent, and try to keep it privet as a family matter. They also believed that the police and the judiciary system cannot help much in such cases. It is considered unpleasant as a man to make complaint to the police against a woman and men should avoid it because it may make women more rude and aggressive. Therefore, in such cases it is better for a man to get divorced rather than informing the police or complaining to the court. For example, a 50-year-old man, who had been married for 25 years stated,

Such matters should be kept in the family, because so many of the young generation may suffer from the same

problems. If they release their problems, it may have bad influence on the others so, family problems must be resolved by senior members of the relatives. Another participant stated, they'd better say nothing about the problem, because people would say: you are so helpless that your wife roughs you up. He should go to the family court to sort things out. We cannot complain for being mentally harassed. Notably, about one-third (33%) of interviewees who believed that women's violent behaviour against their husbands should not be considered crime, stated that the same behaviour from the husband is a crime and the police and court must be involved. A 34-year-old man who had been married for 7 years, stated, I disagree. Such issues must be psychologically studied. The man, himself should meet a consultant but not the police to complain.

[Regarding man's violence against his wife] If the husband goes violent against his wife, one hundred percent yes [the police must be involved] because if the man does that regularly it turns to be a habit and physical punishment is hard. The woman should inform the police first to warn the man and then she must pursue the judicial process.

Instances of DV against Men

Participants had a variety of views towards instances of DV, however it is possible to categorize them more generally (Table 1). The important point is that based on men's statements, instances of violent behaviour could not be differentiated from their context, in other words, men's perception of violent behaviours was sometimes general, but what they considered as important was explaining the happenings and the context of their formation.

Psycho-emotional Violence

Men reported psycho-emotional violence as the most common form of DV. Almost all the men (except four) stated an example or more of such violence. Moreover, most of the participants considered psycho-emotional violence as being more abusive than other forms of violence. A 45-year-old man who had previously decided to divorce several times but gave up because of his children explained his wife's verbal violence as:

[Her verbal violence] is shouting and screaming. I don't know, perhaps it's my fault. Perhaps, I better let her scream as much as she wants till she loses her voice and shuts up. But I get really agitated and nervous and it drives me crazy, perhaps it's my weak point that I don't want her to raise her voice. And she taps on this weak point. I hate arguing and fighting, and I'm that kind of person, I really control my anger, perhaps it if weren't bad, I would have choked her, she really makes me suffer...Currently, I try to leave home for a couple of days, for example, I go to a hotel. But she doesn't like it, she says, "If I swear and use abusive language you do the same too."

Physical Violence

Physical violence was less reported in comparison with other forms of violent behaviour. But since in patriarchal societies admitting to such violence is considered as a lack of masculinity, therefore it could be stated that there's a strong possibility that men deny the physical violence against themselves. A 45-year-old man who was married for 16 years stated, Yes that screaming and physical fighting...It has happened that she throws objects at me. Of course not many times, but yes there have been a few occasions...A couple of times she swore and I hit her and then she hit me with her hand and punched me...There have been a number of times that she initiated a fight, for example, she slapped me in the face.

Sexual Violence

In this study, woman's sexual violence was reported as depriving men of having sex. A 53-year-old man who was married for over 27 years stated, because I had a job in the military, her mother forced her to marry me, but she doesn't like me. She says she wishes to get divorced and remarry. I told her brother she must be ashamed [of such sayings] you have three children. Who would marry a woman with three children? Even if she divorces from me she can only marry as mutah [temporary marriage]...She prevents me from having sex with her and she says, "I feel I'm sleeping with a stranger."

Regarding the influence of depriving men from sex,

the participants expressed diverse and sometimes contradictory views. Some men considered it as a powerful tool at women’s disposal which has great impact on men. They even believed this to be more efficient than other tools for controlling and dominating the husbands. A 34-year-old man who was married for 13 years stated,

First one is [feeling of] humiliation and the second one is sex. Whoever denies this is lying. So why do we get married? You get married to spend your money for her, or to bear children for you, or have fun with her? You get married so you don’t make any sins. Anyone who puts his hand on the holy Quran and swears not is lying... For me the sexual factor is more influential. In fact men get humiliated for this reason. When your woman says no to you, you feel humiliated, it gets on my nerve and drives me crazy, it’s better to get beaten up than this. It shows how much she’s making fun of you, she doesn’t value you as a human, and she doesn’t reckon you. A man might say damn her, “I’ll go out and flirt and have sex outside home.”

Other men viewed sexual violence as having the least influence and considered it as a woman’s last resort. A man stated, A woman’s sexual desire is eight times more that of a man. So she cannot deprive a man from sex, because women need sex more than men.

Table 1: Themes Relating to Instances of DV against Men

Types	Instances
Psycho-emotional	Insult and humiliation Crying, screaming and shouting, frowning, nagging To be sulky and not on speaking terms Constant repetition of a demand Expressing regret and disappointment for marriage Threatening to leave home or divorce Threatening to harm physically Having a suspicion Labelling of not being devoted to family life Insulting husband’s family Instigating husband’s zeal and masculinity Lying

	Being stubborn Mistreating the children Leaving house without telling Telling others about the family affairs Bragging about and twitting others about issues such as dowry and financial help Having obsession
Physical	Slapping, punching, kicking, scratching and pushing Throwing and breaking objects Slamming and locking the door as a sign of wrath Preventing the husband from entering the house or throw him out of the house
Sexual	Denying men from sex
Financial	Expectations beyond the financial ability of the Squandering and spending money lavishly Wasting and improper use of food and other products Stealing money Taking out money and other properties from home
Legal	Demanding and enforcing the dowry and maintenance
Social	Restrictions on contact with close relatives and friends Forcing the husband to attend events and parties Forcing the husband to display certain behaviour in public
Failure in homemaking duties	Failure to do chores such as cleaning the house, making food, washing, shopping, looking after children....

Financial Violence

Having expectations and demands beyond the financial ability of the husband, squander and lavish spending, wasting food and other goods, stealing money, giving money or household properties to others, holding too many parties and family events are among the examples of financial violence men cited during the interview. The participants considered such behaviour extremely annoying and believed that it often occurred deliberately. A participant stated:

She first spends the money and then tells me about it. Another one is giving our household properties to her own family. If she gives out anything, she must tell me about it. Otherwise, I take it as a lie. Lying is an insult. It means she takes you as naïve, gullible and fool.

A 38-year-old man who had been married for 15 years stated, violence is not only fighting and going crazy... Excessive demands are one form of violence.

Participants repeatedly expressed their concern over being compared with other men in terms of their financial resources. For example, a man 29 years old, with 3 years of marriage stated when she compares me with my brother and says, "You don't like me and your family. You don't care about our life." My brother is twelve years older than me and he's got a truck. It's hard for me. It's as if I don't have any masculinity. My suffering was that I wished I was the same age as my brother and I could save money... But I get pessimistic and hopeless.

In terms of complaining about women's demands beyond men's financial resources, Men with working wives did not differ significantly from those with housewives.

Legal Violence

Some of the participants complained about marriage and divorce laws, in particular those relating to *mahr* (dowry) and *nafakah* (maintenance).¹ For example, men cited the dowry in its prevalent form as contradicting their rights and interests. According to them, such rights enable women to demand their dowry following trivial quarrels and fights. While in most cases the payment of dowry is beyond their financial abilities but they had been forced to accept it during the proposal ceremony. And of course in case of failing to pay the dowry, the husband would face heavy penalties such as imprisonment. According to the participants, dowry provides women with an effective tool to put pressure on men. Moreover, dowry can provide incentive for some women to marry solely for the purpose of gaining money.

Regarding maintenance, some of them expressed concern about having to meet family living expenses on

their own. They considered this as unfair. According to them it was unacceptable for working women to spend their income exclusively for their own personal use. A participant stated,

Dowry is demandable any time. From the moment you marry, upon having a little fight, she will demand her dowry. Even they might have not moved in together yet. Their utmost favour was letting the man to pay the dowry in instalments. Her dowry is four hundred gold coins. The man has to pay a coin each month, and each coin costs about three hundred thousand tomans. This is while the man earns about four hundred thousand tomans. How can he pay for that? Doesn't he need money to buy food and rent a house? This is even worse if he has a child or two. The woman says, "We don't have anything in common." This is swindling. Why didn't she think of all these first? She says, "He's addicted." Didn't you see him first? If you didn't, you made a mistake. Many men are imprisoned for this reason. Why should the man bear all the responsibility? He says, "I don't have money." She tells him, "Go to prison." Why are men being so humiliated? Why are women being given so much value? Islam holds great value for woman, but a court must give a warning to women. Many young men have fled away and left home for this reason. They have even abandoned their child and fled.

Social Violence

According to the interviews conducted with men, women's sensitivity and restriction on men mostly evolved around men's relationship with their close family and friends. A 64-year-old man stated that his wife humiliated him for his rural lineage:

She treats her own family really well. Her brother comes to our house and she cooks the best food. But she doesn't treat my family well. She doesn't respect my family. I'm not happy about this. Women are more inclined towards their own family... Putting limitations is that she ignores my family. It's about a year that my sister hasn't come to my house.

Other than enforcing limitations, women can force men a number of compulsory relationships. For example, a woman can force her husband to take part in parties

which he is not interested in and is even unpleasant or women can force their husband show certain behaviour and actions in public which he is not happy with and does not want to.

Failure in Homemaking Duties

Some of the men expressed their deep concern about their wife's failure in duties which are traditionally assigned to women such as homemaking, taking care of children, and etc. A participant stated, my mother was a housewife and our house was always clean and tidy. But now when I get home I have to help my wife clean and tidy our home. She says, "I can't clean the windows." It gets on my nerve. I lose my nerve. I say, "Why you haven't ironed my trousers, at least you have told me so I could have done it myself." When she says, "I forget." It annoys me... That is my wife's untidiness.

During the interview, men with the lower social class and a more traditional attitude towards family complained more about women's failure in homemaking duties as compared to men with a higher social class and a modern attitude towards family. They found such failures as annoying and unpleasant.

Table 2: Themes Relating to the Context of DV against Men

Level	Factor
Micro	Forced marriage
	Early marriage with a huge age disparity
	Couple's inadequate knowledge of each other
	Lower education level or a great educational difference
	Lack of knowledge and skills necessary for marital life
	Difference in personality pattern of the couples
	Lack of agreement and mutual understanding
	Couples suffering from psychological disorder and physical illnesses
	Dissatisfaction from sexual relationship
	Bad behavioural habits such as being scurrilous, easily manipulated and sceptical,
	A man's multiple marriages
Middle	Failure in taking advantage of marital counselling
	Couples belong to different social classes
	Incompatible religious, cultural and ethnic characteristics
	Couple's Family interventions

Women's great devotion to their own family
Tense relationship between couple's families
Man not having support from his children or family
Change in traditional marital relations

Macro Economic constraint
Inefficiency of family laws
Patriarchal system
Consumerism and emulation culture among women
Political and social crises, occurrence of events such as war

The Context of DV against Men

The participants cited various factors influencing the formation of DV against men. Such factors can be classified into three levels of micro, middle and macro (Table 2). Some of the factors are examined in brief.

Economic Constraint

Although Pournaghash-Tehrani and Feizabadi (2007) did not find a significant relationship between income level and DV against men in Iran, but most of the participants considered unemployed, low income men or those with lower income than their wives or being financially dependent on their wives as more vulnerable to DV (some of the participants cited men who had an affair or those addicted to drugs or alcohol as being more vulnerable to DV).

A 37-year-old man who had lost his job and been married for three years with a child and housewife stated,

I was working in an organization. After 10 years of working, I'm not there anymore. I have started a job relating to real-state agency but now am recession and people don't buy as before. I come out of house, as if I'm going to work. I don't want to upset her. I didn't tell her that I was not able to get employed. I come here [Park Laleh]. You can see what's going on in this park, the youth come here to take crack drug. If I come for one or two more days, I'll get addicted too. She tells, "You don't care," but God is the one who provides. I try my best however I can. She's told me that she wants a dishwasher. I've told her, "OK, I'll put your request in my to-do list." But when she repeats her demands, it annoys me. It annoys me when she says, "What happened? What happened?"

Table 3: Characteristics of Study Participants (n=50)

Socio-demographic characteristics	Number	Percent
Age (years)		
29-46	32	64
47-64	11	22
65+	7	14
Marriage duration (years)		
0-9	13	26
10-19	19	38
20+	18	36
Age difference		
Husband 0-5 years older	22	44
Husband 6-10 years older	25	50
Husband 11+ years older	3	6
Education		
Self		
Illiterate	1	2
Lower education	12	24
Diploma/Associates Degree	17	34
University	20	40
Spouse		
Illiterate	1	2
Lower education	13	28
Diploma/Associates Degree	22	47
University	11	23
Employment status		
Self		
Employed	39	78
Retired	9	18
Unemployed	2	4
Spouse		
Employed	7	14
Retried	3	6
Housewife	40	80
Current Marital status		
Married	48	96
Divorced	2	4
Children		
Yes	41	82
No	9	18

Change in Traditional Marital Relations and Men’s lack of preparation

It is annoying for men when women violate the

traditional marital relations and ties. Because men are deeply accustomed to such traditional family relations and customs which are based on masculinity and femininity patterns (Abbott, Wallace & Tyler, 2005). And many of them are not ready to accept the new marital relations and ties. Just as women consider men’s violation of femininity patterns as a form of DV [e.g., men’s verbal abuse about women’s appearance or humiliating them about their manner of performing feminine roles or threatening them with multiple or temporary marriage (Ezazi, 2010; Ghazi-Tabatabai *et al.*, 2004; Sadeghi-Fasaei, 2010)], men also find it annoying when women violate the masculinity patterns. Therefore, men consider those behaviours that attack and violate the customary marital relations as annoying (e.g., triggering men’s zeal, leaving home without telling the husband, failure in homemaking duties).

Inefficiency of Family Laws

Some of the participants expressed dissatisfaction about marriage and divorce laws. So far, there has not been any comprehensive research conducted on men’s overall attitude towards marriage and divorce laws in Iran. The few studies that have been carried out focus on how men view law enforcement procedures rather than identifying men’s attitude towards the law itself. Therefore, there is not a sufficient understanding of how men view laws. However, this has given rise to a vast amount of legal and jurisprudential discussions (Alimoradi, 2009; Imam & Razavi, 2010; Khairallahi, 2010; Malekzadeh, 2007; Sardoeinasab, 2009; Vahdati-Shobeiri, 2008; Vishteh, 2009).

It seems that considering the current laws on marriage and divorce, men are faced with serious challenges in their family life. For example, in the case of dowry, many families demand huge sums of money with incentives to ensure stability of the marriage or preventing the man from divorcing the woman or having a second marriage, provision of financial support for the woman in case of a divorce, and raising the social status of the woman. However, dowry payments in many cases are beyond the financial ability of the husband and this is also true for maintenance as well; although there are no accurate statistics about the number of divorce which rise from

the husband's failure in paying the maintenance.² According to customs and law, men are tasked with paying for family living costs even for working women, therefore it is evident that at times of financial recession, high inflation, high unemployment and unequal distribution of income, men who have difficulty in meeting their family living costs, are threatened with the risk of family break-up.

Patriarchal System

The patriarchy is often used to justify DV against women (Hamel & Nicholls, 2007; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000) but the analysis of the interviews pertaining to DV against men reveals the hidden influence of patriarchal system. For example, participants' statements reveal that many men influenced by the patriarchal culture who want to maintain their authority in their marital relationship and to control the wives, prevent them from working outside home. Even if this means that they have to shoulder the heavy responsibility of family living costs and be consistently under financial distress arising from the wife's excessive demands and squandering. Moreover, in order to maintain their authority, many men control the wife's social relations, homemaking duties, and comings and goings. It's obvious that in many instances things do not go as men desire and this annoys them greatly. This becomes even more important when we take into account that nowadays at least in some social classes and influenced by modernity Iranian women's values and beliefs about their duties in the family has changed (Delkhamoush, 2009; Kazemi, 2010; Nikparvar, Pnaghi, & Mazaheri, 2011).

Therefore, it appears that in the current era the patriarchal system has a dual impact on men's family life in Iran. Namely that the patriarchal system on one hand preserves the men's interests by accepting men's dominance in marital relations but on the other hand by putting men in sensitive and tense family roles inflicts great pressure on them.

Police and the Judicial System

According to the statements of the participants, the police are basically not ready to accept a man's claim that he's been subjected to DV by his wife, and it is likely

that they would ridicule and humiliate the victimized man. For example, a participant stated,

It depends where this happens, in Iran if you say, "My wife beats me up," the first thing the police say is "Shame on you. You should have beaten her up too! Why have you called us?"

Moreover, the participants have cited the discriminatory behaviour of police and judges towards men and women victim of DV. A 36-year-old man stated,

Do you think the police can solve the problem? I believe he must leave. If he goes to the police, the officer [of Javadieh Street] tells him, "Shame on you. If she were my wife I would have hung her from the wall." Our police are not 21st century Nevada police!

[But regarding police manner of dealing with DV against women the same participant stated,] I support this. No conscious allows us to subject a woman who we call as "weak gender" to violence. It's not manly. And be certain that the police will attend to the problem because the same police officer that humiliates a man gives support to a woman.

This quote illustrates that men's gender attitude towards social relations has an impact on their perception. For example, those men heavily influenced by patriarchal ideology believe that DV against women is legally pursuable, because women are at a lower position. However, they consider DV against themselves as debilitating male dominance; therefore deny it as much as they can.

DISCUSSION

This study examined how Iranian men perceive and experience DV based on their own narrative. Most of the participants did not consider a woman's violence against her husband as a crime. They believed that men must not inform the police or file a complaint in the court about such behaviour. The participants believed that men should cope with such problems as much as possible and try to keep it as a private family matter. Drijber *et al.* (2013) found that a sense of shame, fear of retaliation, fear of not being taken seriously and inefficiency of police in these kind of issues prevent men

from reporting violence to the police. The participants had diverse views about instances of DV. The instances of DV towards men were categorized into: psycho-emotional, physical, sexual, financial, legal, social, and failure in homemaking duties. Consistent with other research (Mohammadkhani *et al.*, 2006; Pournaghash-Tehrani & Tashk, 2007) psycho-emotional violence was reported as the prevalent form of DV. In addition, most of the men considered psycho-emotional violence as being more annoying and abusive.

Iranian men's perception of DV is basically not distinct from their value system, their attitude towards family and couple's roles, and their objective position in the structure of family and society. Therefore, it is quite natural for them to experience DV in a different way than women. Men's view about instances of DV differed depending on their social class and cultural background. Men from lower social classes and with a traditional attitude towards family cited their wife's failure to abide by traditional gender roles such as homemaking duties more often than men from higher social classes and a modern attitude towards family. This could be further interpreted that for this group of men women's gender roles in the family is more important. So that when a man's wife violates such norms, it mounts more pressure on the man. Therefore, the role of men's social class and cultural background in their perception of DV must be taken into account.

Some research suggests that there is a significant relationship between demographic factors such as age, education, employment, income and the experience of DV in men (Cunradi, Todd, & Duke, 2009; Harwell, Moore, & Spence, 2003; Pournaghash-Tehrani & Feizabadi, 2007; Seow & Foo, 2006). In respect of attitudinal factors, some studies have shown that men with more traditional views about family, are more vulnerable to physical and psychological violence (Fitzpatrick, Salgado, Suvak, King, & King, 2004; Robertson & Murachver, 2007). Factors and conditions influencing the formation of DV against men, which were derived from the analysis of the interviews, were categorized into micro, middle and macro levels. Micro level is related to the personal characteristics of the couples. It includes factors such as early marriage and large age disparity between husband

and wife, forced marriages, couple's lack of sufficient knowledge and understanding of each other when getting married, lack of knowledge and skills necessary for marital life, not taking advantage of any marital counselling, couples suffering from mental disorder and physical illnesses, etc. The middle level includes factors such as: couples belonging to different social classes, incompatible cultural and ethnic characteristics and attributes, tense relations between couple's families, changes in traditional family relations and men's lack of preparedness for this, etc. The macro level is related to cultural and value system, social structure, economic conditions, and includes factors such as economic problems and crises and in particular men's unemployment, or inadequate income, consumerism and emulation culture among women, inefficiency of family laws, and patriarchal system, etc.

With regards to patriarchal system, the in-depth interviews led the researchers to the conclusion that in social and cultural conditions where the remains of patriarchy is still to be found, DV against men can also be noticed and these two social phenomena do not empirically contradict each other. Moreover, the impacts of patriarchal system is more significant when identifying the context of DV against men, because one of the major consequences of the patriarchal system, is men being pressured by their family roles at the time when most of the economic, social and cultural institutions have undergone fundamental changes.

There are some limitations regarding the present research, for instance, despite the many advantages of the qualitative methods in descriptive and exploratory studies, they are limited in generalizing their results (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Regarding present study, it is not simply possible to distinguish about the extent of DV that men were actually exposed to. At the data collection stage, considering the sensitive and private nature of the issues, it was observed that many of the participants were not willing to talk about the raised issues in spite of utilizing in-depth interviewing techniques, and perhaps many of the violent acts considered as taboo (unmanly) or perfectly normal (manly) were denied by the participants (Jungnitz *et al.*, 2004).

Given the broad nature of DV, and that it was examined among married men (in the general sense) and not among a particular group of men, the researchers faced limitation while focusing on specific aspects and having a deeper analysis of the issues. However, according to the statements of the participants unemployed, addicted and disloyal men are more vulnerable to DV, therefore the necessity of research for such groups of men becomes more important. Additionally, due to lack of literature on DV against men, data analysis was faced with many difficulties. However, regardless of these limitations, research findings raise important issues about intervention programs and policies on DV against men. Considering the scarcity of information about DV against men in Iran, developing such programs requires extensive research of the topic in the academic and public domain.

Results of some of the past studies suggest poor performance of the police in dealing with DV (Cao, 2006; Ghosh & Choudhuri, 2011; Liu J., 2004; Liu W., 2001). As there are signs implying that the response of court to DV is gender biased (Basile, 2004, 2005; Muller, Desmarais, & Hamel, 2009). Most participants believed that the police and the judiciary system were not efficient enough in relation to DV. Moreover, the participants cited the discriminatory behaviour of police and judges when dealing with DV against men. Men's complaint about the discriminatory behaviour of the police in favour of women is important because it contradicts previous research findings on DV against women. Iranian women have often expressed that the police display a clear bias in favour of men when dealing with DV against women (Moazzemi, 2004; Sadeghi-Fasaie, 2010). This contradiction is probably related to the performance of police and law enforcement officials. In many cases, instead of enforcing the law impartially they try to make peace between the couples and play the role of a family counsellor. Therefore, their performance is influenced by their personal beliefs and values. Accordingly, specializing police services as well as training and upgrading police knowledge and performance in dealing with family related issues and in particular DV becomes important (Corcoran & Allen, 2005; Ghosh & Choudhuri, 2011; Horwitz *et al.*,

2011; Watkins, 2005). So that the police have the ability to firmly and impartially implement the law, regardless of circumstances such as the gender of violence victim. Moreover, through mutual relationship of police and health and social welfare organizations, care and counselling services must be offered to victims (and perpetrators) of DV.

Men's reluctance for marital counselling has to be considered as important (less than 10% of the participants visited the counselling center). This calls for more research and adoption of appropriate strategies by the relevant organizations, especially that the studies conducted in Iran, confirm the effectiveness of marital counselling in reducing marital conflicts (Danesh, 2010; Farahbakhsh, Shafieabadi, Ahmadi, & Delavar, 2006; Ghamari, 2009; Nazari & Beyrami, 2008; Pakgozar, Mahmoudi, Bonab, & Golian-Tehrani, 2007; Rahnama, 2002).

The importance of legal system in connection with DV against men can be considered from two aspects. First, it is necessary to review and make changes to some areas of family law (e.g., dowry and maintenance laws) which for some reasons, such as failure to adapt to today's economic, cultural and social circumstances, seem to be inefficient and consequently put men under many financial, social and psychological pressures. Second, it is necessary to legislate specific criminal laws for dealing with DV (from any members of family).

Strategies in the field of culture and education on DV against men, covers a wide range of programs which can be implemented by educational and cultural institutes such as schools, universities, mass media, NGOs and health and welfare organizations. Accordingly, it is important to raise awareness about marriage and promote non-violence culture, and in particular train people to use non-violent skills and strategies in dealing with family problems. The need to review and change gender attitudes and patriarchal culture is also emphasized.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 According to Islamic laws, mahr is a mandatory required amount of money paid by the groom to the bride at the time of marriage, for her exclusive use. And the term *nafaka* refers to the

provision of all reasonable needs of a woman proportionate to her social status including housing, clothing, food, furniture, home and health care costs and servants (Mir-Hosseini, 2000). See also articles 1078-1101, 1106-1113 and 1127, 1129 of the civil code of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Jahangir, 2004).

- 2 According to Islamic laws, in case a man refuses to pay for the maintenance of his wife, and impossibility of implementation of court ruling and considering the man's obligation to give her maintenance, she can go for divorce to court and the husband is forced to divorce. Also in case of incapability of the husband is to provide for the maintenance costs of his wife (Jahangir, 2004).

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