

# Intimate Partner Sexual Violence in Traditional Societies: Challenges and Solutions

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## Dear Editor

Any type of sexual assault that happens within an intimate relationship is referred to as intimate partner sexual violence (IPSV). It includes not just rape committed during a marriage but also all other types of sexual assault committed during an intimate relationship, whether the partners are married or not. Most victims are female as they have a lower physical strength and they experience different kinds of physical and mental health issues following such experience (1).

According to the evidence, women are mostly reluctant to disclose their experiences of sexual violence. Some women might not even recognize their experience as a sexual assault, making it difficult to be identified as victim. So, the prevalence of IPSV are likely to be underestimated and this issue may be more prevalent in societies with traditional and patriarchal culture, in which men have power and authority over women and violation of women's rights is more common (2).

In some traditional societies such as Iran, there is a legal gap regarding marital rape (3). We would like to comment on the work of Ghodrati F, recently published in this journal emphasizing the importance of appropriate legislations to fill the legal gaps (4). Also, this legal gap has become very important these days, as the rate of domestic violence increased due to recent coronavirus pandemic (5, 6). Based on the evidence, only in case of being the victim of physical violence and proving that, the husband should pay *Diyah* (blood money) (4). However, it is clear that in traditional cultures, women are advised to put up with

marital rape and other forms of secondary wounding by religious figures, family, or friends and they are told that it is their duty to do anything to satisfy their spouse. So the number of IPSV survivors who refer to forensic medicine for being abused by their spouse is few. Continuing marital life in such situations makes women to suffer from IPSV for a longer time and lead to family conflict which have a potential for putting all family members specially children at risk of behavioral problems and committing different types of crime in the society (6).

The issue is more serious in non-marital intimate relationship particularly in societies, where premarital sex or sex with anybody except spouse is forbidden like Iran. In case of IPSV, if a woman files a court complaint against her partner, the issue will be handled after they have both been whipped for having sex without marriage. Also, she may be afraid of dishonoring herself and her family with making the violence public and even being killed by her family members. Additionally, fear and shame of being blamed and criticized makes her not to go to counselors and not be treated regarding the emotional damage caused by IPSV, which may even have a negative impact on her future marriage (7).

Therefore, countries' legislative bodies are responsible for protecting women's rights more than before, regardless of their ethnicity, religion as well as marital status. There should be law reforms leading women to ask for help once they faced IPSV, without fear of legal punishments or public stigma. Also, fostering the culture, raising

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public awareness and training therapists specifically for IPSV victims are necessary in this regard. Moreover, educational potentials of anti-violence campaigns of national or international NGOs should be strengthened and used for improving public awareness in this area, which can play an important role to reduce violence against women and lead to establishment of gender equality in the society.

### Conflicts of interest

Authors declared no conflicts of interest.

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