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# Spousal Role Expectations and Marital Conflict: Perspectives of Men and Women

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Parveen Azam Ali,<sup>1</sup>  Julie McGarry,<sup>2</sup>  and Aneela Maqsood<sup>3</sup>

## Abstract

Intimate partner violence (IPV) affects millions of people across the world and is associated with a significant impact on physical and mental health of the victim. IPV often takes place within the context of marriage, where gender role expectations can play an important part in shaping attitudes towards it. While there is much research carried out to understand the phenomenon of IPV, little relates to how a husband and wife's accounts of spousal role expectations of each other contribute to marital conflict. The issue of IPV within marriage is highly sensitive, particularly in a patriarchy such as Pakistan. The aim of this unique study was to explore the perspective of Pakistani men and women about a husband and wife's role expectations and how fulfillment of such spousal role expectations impacts on marital conflict, and thereby IPV. Using the community setting, data for this qualitative study were collected through 41 individual interviews, including 20 from Pakistan and 21 from the UK. The findings are presented in two main themes, each containing two subthemes. The theme "provider and protector" relates to the role expectations from a husband, whereas "caretaker and household manager" relates to the role expectations of a wife. Overall, husbands and

<sup>1</sup>University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK

<sup>2</sup>Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, Nottingham, UK

<sup>3</sup>Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan

## Corresponding Author:

Parveen Azam Ali, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, S10 2LA, UK.

E-mail: [parveen.ali@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:parveen.ali@sheffield.ac.uk)

wives have numerous expectations of each other, and these expectations are shaped by gender role attitudes alongside cultural and societal norms. Unmet expectations and deviation of behavior from the perceived norms can result in the development of marital conflict which can escalate to IPV. The significance of this study lies in understanding spousal role expectations from the perspectives of husbands and wives and how unmet expectations contribute to marital conflict and IPV is important for health care professionals within family health contexts. This article provides a detailed insight of this largely hidden phenomena.

**Keywords**

role expectations, role fulfillment, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, marital conflict

**Introduction**

Intimate partner violence (IPV) impacts one in three women across the world. One of the reasons for this is how women are valued by the society and how their role is recognized. We as individuals, groups, communities, and societies have sets of ideas about gender and gender role expectations requiring men and women to conduct themselves in a certain way and dictate what they should or should not do; how should they dress, behave, or present themselves in public and private. Gender roles are considered society's shared beliefs which apply to individuals based on their socially identified sex. Gender role expectations can be descriptive as well as prescriptive (Eagly, 2009; Eisenchlas, 2013). The descriptive aspect relates to beliefs about what men and women typically do, and the prescriptive aspect shapes expectations and appropriateness of behavior of self and others (Eisenchlas, 2013; Rudman & Glick, 2001). These aspects stem from interdependence between men and women that not only facilitates the creation of cognitive schemas of how men and women act but also frame the individual and societal expectations for how they should act (Koenig, 2018). Individuals tend to have configured expectations from their partners in an intimate relationship. More specifically, spousal role expectations encompass behaviors, roles, and responsibilities that men and women as intimate partners/spouses expect from each other.

Traditionally, gender role stereotypes ascribe authority and dominance as male traits and submission and powerlessness as female traits contributing to power differences in society (Koenig, 2018). In many countries, and especially Eastern and Asian countries, men are expected to be providers and

decision-makers of a family and women are expected to take the role of a caretaker and take a secondary role when it comes to decision-making. A striking example is Saudi Arabia, where women's social mobility up to the age of 21 is restricted with the condition of requiring male guardians to access employment and medical care (Zuhur, 2011). Such gendered internalizations when transformed into the context of intimate relationship and marriage shape spousal role expectations with respect to employment, decision-making, household responsibilities, and decision-making authority within a household (Ogletree, 2014) and may also contribute to the burden of hostile sexism (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005).

Empirical research has shown that hostile sexist attitudes as the basis of preserving men's dominance over women are grounded in traditional gender role expectations (Mastari et al., 2019). This results in shaping attitudes towards IPV leading to disharmony in many countries and cultures and raises conflict in intimate relations (Vives-Cases et al., 2014). Gender roles stemming from the concept of masculinity and societal norms are further fixed through cultural expectations. Evidence suggests that when individuals (especially men) hold inflexible gender role expectations of themselves and others, the likelihood of stress, conflict, aggression, and IPV increases (Baugher & Gazmararian, 2015). Gender role attitudes and expectations also remain an important predictor of marital satisfaction (Falconier, 2013; Loscocco & Walzer, 2013). Men who hold traditional views about gender roles are more likely to justify and use IPV when feeling neglected, not listened to, or challenged (Akin & Ozaydin, 2005; Luke et al., 2007). At the same time, women with gender equitable attitudes are more likely to be abused by their intimate partners, as they may appear challenging and unwilling to submit to men (Jewkes et al., 2002; Luke et al., 2007). Here, it is also important to recognize that each partners' gender role expectation may not be congruent and aligned with their actual role behavior or role performance (Hengstebeck et al., 2015; Peplau, 1983).

The role of culture is evident in making role expectations stronger, and, therefore, a failure to meet expectations by any of the partners, and especially the woman, can give rise to marital conflict that can possibly escalate into IPV (Ali et al., 2019; Loscocco & Walzer, 2013). Among well-established risk markers of IPV, relational aspect of partners has been given prime importance in collectivist and individualist cultures (Mallory et al., 2016). Marital conflict stemming from disagreements and differences of opinions between intimate partners (Papp, 2018) can be handled positively—through discussions, negotiation, and acceptance of individual differences—or negatively—through abuse and IPV. The coercive control using physical, psychological, and sexual violence in an intimate relationship is a concerning problem

affecting the lives of one in three women around the world. It should be clarified that marital conflict does not, inevitably, lead to IPV and is a separate issue. Nevertheless, IPV can arise as a result of marital conflict, especially where the respective gender roles lead to that conflict

Gendered spousal role expectations and attitudes towards IPV may contribute to marital conflict, one of the important contributors of IPV (Vives-Cases et al., 2014). Research conducted in the past few decades suggests that couples reporting verbal conflict are 16 times more likely to experience physical IPV (Hoffman et al., 1994; Straus et al., 1980; Vives-Cases et al., 2014). The presence of male dominance and marital conflict is identified as a predictor of IPV, used as a corrective mechanism or punishment for deviating from the gender role expectations or to exercise power and control. Explaining and understanding marital conflict as a risk factor of IPV is often challenging as a marital conflict "... is often considered as a type of violence against women in its own right" (Vives-Cases et al., 2009, p. 177).

Gender role expectations generally and with regards to marriage/intimate relationship are slowly changing with men and women moving towards more egalitarian gender expectations (Ogletree, 2014), where household, economic, and social responsibilities are shared between both partners (Katz-Wise et al., 2010; Koenig, 2018; Rogers & Amato, 2000). Egalitarian attitudes are expected to be much more associated with modern societies and in groups with higher education and being raised by a working mother (Boehnke, 2011). However, it is going to take a long time for this phenomenon to reach an equitable balance in all societies. Evidence suggests that, even in developed societies that claim to have progressed with regards to gender and gender role expectations, women are still expected to be much more submissive and less capable than their male intimate partner (Loscocco & Walzer, 2013), and household responsibilities are still considered a woman's role (Papp, 2018). Expectation states theory provides an explanation of how men are prone to be more hierarchical because of culturally grounded performance expectations that further explains why traditional gender roles are more dominant (Mast, 2004). The author further explained that men tend to perceive partner's egalitarian attitude as controlling towards themselves which, in turn, might lead to aggression.

Cultural, societal factors, and the fact that childcare responsibilities predominantly lie with women also mean that certain gender role expectations are not easy to change, especially in South Asian countries such as Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. For many of these countries, lower literacy level especially among women, wider socioeconomic conditions of the country, limited opportunities for women to work, social makeup and the patriarchal structure of society, and the influence of religious and cultural practices make

change in gender role expectation and spousal role expectation a much slower process (Ali et al., 2018, 2019). All these factors contribute to an acceptance of IPV in these countries. Despite of gender equality awareness and related campaigns, gender equality is still a concerning issue for both Western and Asian societies.

Research related to gender role attitudes, gender and spousal expectations, and its relationship to marital conflict and IPV originated from Western and developed countries. It is often assumed that men and women from developing countries (those living in developing countries and migrant in other countries) hold traditional gender role expectations and as such there has been little exploration surrounding whether and/or how gender role expectations of men and women are changing and how it contributes to marital conflict and IPV.

Pakistan is a patriarchal society with dominant emphasis on gender role, gender role expectations, and spousal role expectations. Women are considered more restricted compared with men in personal and social life spheres. Marriage is taken as the only acceptable intimate relationship between a man and woman. Marriage is often arranged by family members (Ali et al., 2009; Hamid et al., 2011) and people often live in a joint family system in most parts of the country (Hamid et al., 2009). Much emphasis is placed on the importance of family as an entity, and failure to meet role expectations results in criticism from family members, community, and society and may result in marital conflict which can then escalate to IPV (Hadi, 2017; Saeed Ali et al., 2017). IPV is considered a private matter that happens within a family and should remain within and be dealt with in the family (Andersson et al., 2010; Fikree & Bhatti, 1999). There is a high acceptance of IPV as a way of ensuring women are controlled and perform their role effectively as they are considered the property of men and, therefore, expected to be controlled by men. In addition, because marriage is the predominant form of intimate relationship in Pakistan, almost all IPV takes place within marital relationships. As such, the effects of expectations within marriage as a source of conflict are also a source of IPV in Pakistan.

The findings of the Demographic Health Survey of Pakistan (2012) suggest that 38% of women between 15 and 49 years of age experience physical violence at least once in their lifetime (National Institute of Population Studies & ICF International, 2013). A systematic review of studies conducted in Pakistan, however, highlighted a variation between prevalence rates for different forms of IPV. The prevalence rate reported in the review was as follows: verbal (31%–100%), psychological (42%–84%), physical (28%–35%), and sexual (1%–77%; Ali et al., 2015). This wide variation in prevalence was attributed to the differences in the definition and measures of IPV in Pakistan

across studies. The review highlighted a need to explore definitions of IPV from the perspective of Pakistani people to ensure the development of appropriate tools to measure IPV in the country to minimize variation and to help develop culturally appropriate strategies to tackle IPV. A body of literature related to IPV in Pakistan is developing; however, there is little research exploring gendered spousal role expectations and their contribution to marital conflict and IPV.

There is a need to explore what men and women expect from each other as husband and wife and how such role expectations—in the context of Pakistani families—may ultimately contribute to marital conflict. It is also important to compare the views of Pakistanis living in Pakistan and abroad as people migrate and take their attitudes, traditions, and practices with them. Nevertheless, these may change over time (Qureshi et al., 2014) resulting in change of attitudes and practices. Such exploration may facilitate a greater understanding of the context of marital conflict, the relationship between gendered spousal role expectations, attitudes and marital conflict, as well as IPV. We believe that such knowledge will also facilitate development of culturally appropriate preventive strategies to minimize marital conflict and IPV in such groups.

### *The Present Study*

This study makes an original contribution as, to the best of our knowledge, no such study in the context of Pakistan has previously been conducted to gain an in-depth understanding of individuals' perspective about spousal role expectations and its impact on marital conflict and IPV. The findings presented here are part of a larger study conducted to explore the meaning of IPV from the perspectives of Pakistani men and women using a constructivist grounded theory approach. The findings and the resultant theory are reported elsewhere (Ali et al., 2018, 2019). This article presents the perspectives of Pakistani men and women about gendered spousal role expectations and their impact on the development of marital conflict that may or may not escalate to IPV.

### **Methods**

A qualitative approach that explores subjective experiences and perspectives of participants while assuming that people construct their own realities and that the researcher interprets reality from the perspectives of participants was used (Charmaz, 2008). The study population was Pakistani men and women living in Pakistan and the Pakistani diaspora living in the UK. We decided to study these groups as we believe that the inclusion of participants from inside

and outside Pakistan would take into account the issues of the diaspora and aid an in-depth exploration of IPV and how marital role expectations and role fulfillment contributes to marital conflict and IPV in different societal contexts. Participants were recruited from Karachi, Pakistan, and Sheffield, UK, as these cities are home to a diverse Pakistani population belonging to various parts of Pakistan. Both cities were known to the first authors; therefore, conducting research in these cities was logically and practically conducive.

Participants were recruited from community organizations, mosques and Asian shops in Sheffield, and from community organizations and communities in Karachi. This enabled selection of appropriate individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds, different individual experiences with regards to marriage, marital conflict, and IPV. Flyers inviting people to participate in the study were placed on notice boards and the staff (receptionists, nurses, shopkeepers, Imams) helped with the identification and recruitment of participants. People who showed an interest in the flyers by reading and inquiring about the study (to staff working in the setting who noted their names and telephone numbers) were approached and invited to participate in the study.

### *Participants*

Purposive and theoretical sampling was used to identify and recruit men and women (at least 18 years of age) who may or may not have experienced violence in their intimate relationships, as we were interested in their understanding of the gendered spousal role expectations and its impact on marital conflict and IPV. We believed that given the close-knit family structures and preference for an extended family system, they—married or not married—would be able to share their perspectives about marital conflict and IPV. At the beginning of the study, participants were selected purposely on these predetermined characteristics. Decisions about further sampling were made on the basis of provisional theoretical ideas as they emerged during simultaneous data collection and analysis (McCann & Clark, 2003; Patton, 1990). For example, participants who had an arranged marriage (a marriage where the bride and groom are selected by parents and or family members with or without consent of the bride and groom) stated that marital conflicts are less prevalent in love marriages (a marriage where the individuals meet each other and get married with or without consent of their parents or other family members). To explore this proposition, we interviewed participants who had a love marriage. Sampling continued until theoretical saturation was achieved (Creswell, 1994), and no further information could be elicited.

Forty-one participants (15 males and 26 females) contributed to the study. Twenty participants were from Karachi, Pakistan (referred to as Pakistani from this point forward) and 21 were from Sheffield, UK (referred to as British Pakistani from this point forward). Participants were aged between 20 and 62 years. Twenty-six participants were married, and most had an arranged marriage. Years of marriage ranged between 1 and 45 years. In addition, except one British Pakistani, all participants' spouses were Pakistanis. Participants varied in terms of languages spoken, education, employment, socioeconomic status, and family structure (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Characteristics of Study Participants.

Characteristics	Pakistan N = 20	UK N = 21
Age (in years)		
<21–30	08	07
31–40	08	08
41–50	03	00
50+	01	06
Gender		
Male	07	07
Female	13	14
Level of education		
None	02	03
Primary	04	01
Secondary (up to 10 years)	06	03
Higher secondary	02	02
Degree level	05	07
Postgraduate	01	04
Language		
Hindko	05	05
Pahari	00	06
Pashto	03	03
Punjabi	07	03
Urdu	03	03
Sindhi	02	01
Religion		
Islam	19	21
Christianity	01	–
Family structure		
Nuclear	10	14
Joint	10	07

(continued)

Table 1. continued

Characteristics	Pakistan N = 20	UK N = 21
Marital status		
Single	04	03
Married	14	13
Divorced	02	02
Widow	–	03
Mode of marriage		
Arrange marriage	12	16
Love marriage	04	02
Not applicable	04	03
Economic status		
Working	13	11
Not working	07	09
Years of marriage	1 month–28 years	1–45 years
Number of children	1–9	1–7

### Data Collection

Data were collected through individual face-to-face interviews using a semi-structured interview guide. With the progress of data collection, questions were added or deleted to explore each emergent category to ensure saturation. Depending on a participant's preference, interviews were conducted in Urdu ( $n = 26$ ) or English ( $n = 15$ ). Each interview lasted 60 to 90 mins and was audio recorded. Following each interview, detailed notes were taken to record significant features of each interview such as the setting, the participant's non-verbal behavior, and any interruptions during the interview process. Throughout data collection, a reflexive diary was maintained to help us analyze our feelings, values, and beliefs related to the issue of marital conflict and IPV. These notes and reflexive diary were also coded and used in the data analysis. Data collected in Urdu were first transcribed in Urdu and then translated into English. To check the accuracy of the translation of Urdu interviews, three translators who were fluent in both Urdu and English translated excerpts from 12 interviews randomly selected by the translators from the Urdu interviews.

### Ethics

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the ethics review committees of participating universities in Pakistan and the UK. Potential participants were provided with an information sheet—in English or Urdu depending on their preference—and informed written consent was obtained. We ensured to approach participants in a culturally sensitive manner, and confidentiality and anonymity of all participants were ensured.

## **Data Analysis**

For the larger study, data were analyzed using constant comparison, a method of comparing and contrasting data, merging codes and categories throughout the data collection and analysis period (Charmaz, 2008). The process involved three stages: open, focused, and theoretical coding. In the open coding stage, the data were analyzed line-by-line enabling development of 150 codes and labels (in each interview), which were then clustered into categories. In the next phase, the relationship between various focused codes and categories was explored and specified. Memos were kept through the period of data collection and analysis to note thoughts and ideas clarifying concepts. The role expectations emerged as a significant theme.

To ensure robustness of the findings related to gendered role expectations, data were analyzed again using a thematic analysis approach. This involved familiarization by reading and rereading transcripts. Each line or sentence was coded. Similar codes were clustered into categories/subthemes and themes. Themes were examined in relation to each individual case and were compared across cases to ascertain similarities and differences (Braun et al., 2014).

## **Rigor**

Rigor and trustworthiness are important in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). There are four elements that demonstrate quality and rigor of a qualitative study and these include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). To ensure the study was rigorous, various strategies, including member checking, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, theoretical sampling, reflection, and validating emerging concepts were used to ensure rigor of the study. Appropriate information about where the study was conducted, findings, and context of findings is provided to enable the reader assess quality.

## **Findings**

Spousal role expectations, as mentioned previously, refer to the behaviors, roles, and responsibilities that men and women as husband and wife expect each other to perform. As stated earlier, in Pakistani culture, the only acceptable form of an intimate relationship is a marital relationship; therefore, the terms “husband” and “wife” are used here. While this study only focused on the perceived spousal roles from the perspectives of men and women, it is important to mention that the societal, religious, and cultural context in which people live play a key role in shaping people’s expectations of each other. Participants believed that there are many spousal role expectations that

couples have from each other that they should meet during marriage. A failure to meet expectations may contribute to the development of marital conflict that may escalate to IPV. As stated earlier, the predominance of marriage in Pakistani culture means that IPV occurs almost exclusively within marriage, hence the strong link between marital conflict and IPV. Participants believed that in addition to role expectations, a constant and complex interplay of other factors and process contributes to marital conflict which may escalate to IPV. These include individual's attitudes towards IPV, the relationship dynamics (nature and strength of husband and wife's relationship), personal characteristics (positive or negative personal attributes), conflict management practices (how individuals solve conflict), the role of family, and socioeconomic and cultural factors. A detailed discussion of these factors is presented elsewhere (Ali et al., 2018, 2019). This article focuses only on the spousal role expectations and how these contribute to marital conflict and IPV (Figure 1). The findings are described in two main themes: "Be a provider and protector: Expectations of a husband" and "Caretaker and household manager: Expectations of a wife".

### *Provider and Protector: Expectations From Husband*

Participants identified many roles and responsibilities that a man as a husband in Pakistani society is expected to undertake. These spousal role expectations from men are presented in the following two subthemes.

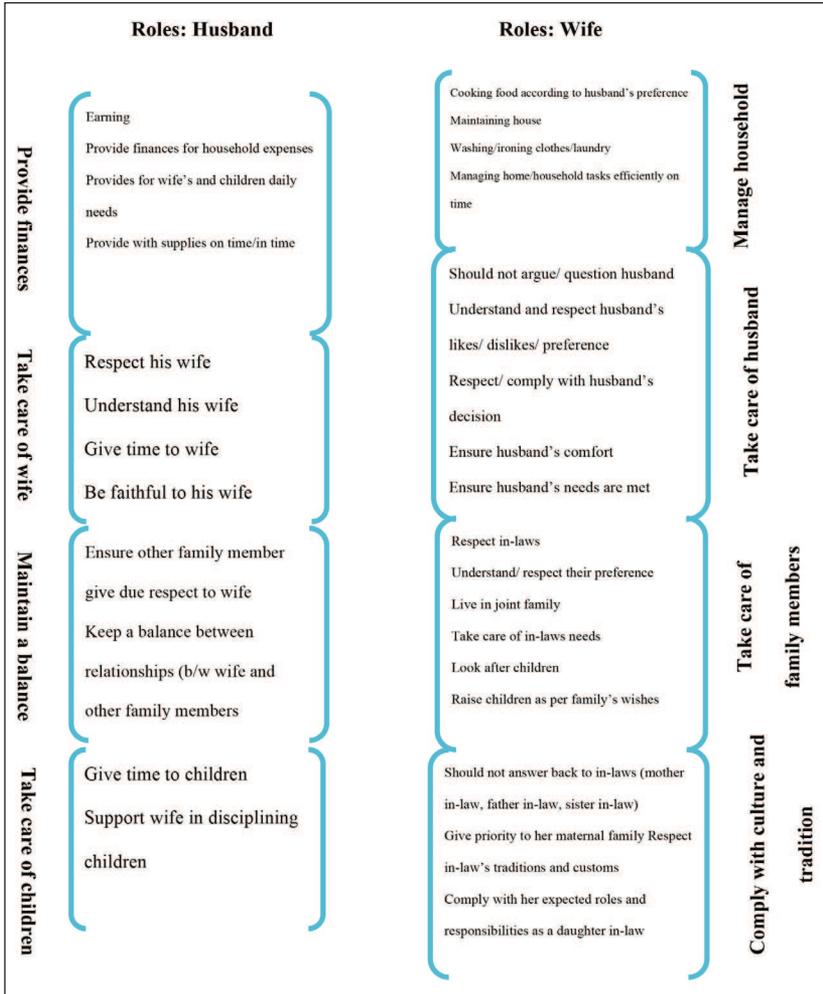
#### *Provider for the family.*

Every participant in the study (regardless of their gender) expected a husband to provide financially for the family. For them a husband's prime role was that of a provider who should go out, earn money, and support the needs of his wife, children, and family. As Sabeeha mentioned,

What I would expect is that he [husband] should be the provider. He should go out, work and bring in a good wage, and provide the means to pay the bills, pay the mortgage, and provide for daily living expenses of his wife and children. (Pakistani female participant)

Similar perceptions were evident from male participants as Sahil mentioned,

I think, earning for the family and giving part of it to the wife, so that she could take care of her own needs. The husband's main responsibility is earning the money and basically taking care of the expenses for the children as well, not just leaving it to the wife; it should be the husband's job as well. (British Pakistani male participant)



**Figure 1.** What do Pakistani husbands and wives expect from each other?

The expectation of the husband as a core provider for the family was not only articulated from the perspective of the wife but also from family members as well as society. It was also identified as a cultural and religious obligation as highlighted in the following account by Beena who stated,

The man is responsible for the needs of his wife and family, as per Islamic teachings, and he should fulfill his responsibilities. The wife is his responsibility and he should take care of her needs. (Pakistani Female Participant)

Beena mentioned this from the Islamic perspective; however, similar thoughts were shared by a non-Muslim participant suggesting an influence of the culture on such expectations. Participants stated that if a husband is unable to provide for the family, he is criticized by other family members as well as the wider community and society. It also contributes to marital conflict which can escalate into IPV if not managed well by husband and wife.

A perception among participants, however, was that the situation was not viewed so negatively where the root of an inability to provide support for the family stemmed from an event outside the husband's control, for example, temporary loss of a job due to sickness or any other reason. In such situations, other family members try to support the family in the short term until the husband finds a new job. In such circumstances, participants believed that a wife's parents and siblings also support the couple, although expecting financial help from the wife's family was viewed as something to be frowned upon in the society. Participants also considered, in such situations, a wife should try to support her husband by minimizing expenses and financial demands. Participants, however, stated that a husband who is unable to provide for the financial needs of the family due to his irresponsible attitude and unwillingness to take on that role may not get support from other family members and relatives.

Financial instability and demands from the wife who may ask for money to meet her and her children's needs could potentially contribute to marital conflict. Participants thought, for example, that the temporary loss of a job or unemployment could contribute to stress, anger, and a feeling of failure for the husband due to his inability to fulfill his role as a man and as a husband. He may also feel embarrassed for needing help from other people to fulfill his responsibilities towards his family. Participants believed that such circumstances may contribute to marital conflict between husband and wife, which could escalate into IPV. On the other hand, a husband unable to meet his family's financial needs due to his irresponsible attitude may not feel any remorse about the situation. When confronted by his wife or asked for money, he may resort to IPV to keep her quiet. This is reflected in the following quote:

It's just that whenever we talk about finances or I ask him for money for anything, we end up arguing. He does not give me any money and gets annoyed. If I ask him for any money to pay for the doctors' fees or to buy something, conflict arises. (Gul, female participant from Pakistan)

According to participants, a husband is also expected to ensure that the supplies needed for daily living are provided at home in time. Failing to meet this expectation could result in conflict and disagreement, especially if the

wife questions him or reminds him of his responsibility. Such marital conflict can escalate into IPV as suggested by Raheem:

If there is no flour at home to make the bread and prepare food for the family, and if the wife asks her husband that flour needs to be bought and if the husband fails to provide it, then in that situation the husband is to be blamed. If he goes out and comes back after three hours of wandering and the wife and children are still waiting for the flour and are hungry, then the husband is the one to be blamed. (Pakistani male participant)

Participants considered that a husband is expected to support his wife financially for her personal needs and expenses. In addition, to providing for the daily living expenses of the family, a husband is also expected to provide his wife with some money for herself as Tariq illustrated,

Obviously to keep their wife happy in terms of being clothed and fed and looked after and protected. I mean you as the male are actually the breadwinner in terms that you are the one bringing income into the household, then obviously your responsibility would be to make sure that your wife is actually in a safe environment, that she is looked after, that she is clothed, that she does have money to actually spend, and to do shopping. (British Pakistani male participant)

A perception was that some men may not fulfill this expectation and this, in turn, becomes a problem for the wife who may not have other financial means for her personal expenses. Such circumstances may give rise to conflict between husband and wife where a wife asks her husband to provide for her financial needs. A husband may not agree to his wife's requests and resort to IPV to suppress such requests. Where he is unable to fulfill these demands due to financial difficulties, the wife's demands may be perceived (by her husband) as a cause of stress, anger, and frustration, and thereby contribute to marital conflict and use of IPV.

#### *Maintain a balance in the family.*

Participants believed that a husband is the link between his wife and his other family members because a wife comes to his family after marrying him. His role in this situation is to act as a bridge between his wife and other family members and to maintain a balance between them. To fulfill this expectation, he needs to understand his family and his wife. A perception was that on the one hand, his family members—especially his mother—may find it difficult to share her son with another woman, and on the other hand, for a wife, her husband is the only person she is related to the marital home. Participants maintained that dealing with such competing responsibilities could be quite

taxing and challenging for the husband who may not be able to cope with the situation and resort to IPV. Shazia explained this as follows:

Like the mother expects her son to give her his salary because she thinks that she has more rights to her son, whereas, the wife thinks that because she is the wife so she has more rights on her husband and the husband should give her all his salary and everything. So this makes the situation difficult for the husband, taking mother's side makes wife unhappy and taking the wife's side makes the mother unhappy. So eventually, this could become a reason for marital violence and obviously, the husband can be violent, the wife cannot be. (British Pakistani female participant)

Participants thought that a husband is expected to be a person of good character. Participants elaborated by mentioning that a husband should not be involved in gambling, drug addiction, and should not have illicit relationships with other women as Ali, a male participant explained,

There can be many reasons. The husband's company is not good, or he goes to the wrong places, or he has illegal/illicit relationships or if he doesn't give time to his wife. I mean having illicit relationships with other women (extra marital affairs) and getting involved in wrong things. So in this situation a wife has a right to argue with her husband or to confront him. Second, it is important that a husband should take care of his wife's needs and he should give money for household expenses as well. (Pakistani male participant)

Unfaithfulness of a husband may result in marital conflict which can escalate into IPV. A participant, while talking about her marital life experiences explained the reason of marital conflict and IPV in her relationship:

He [husband] had an affair. He used to come home drunk, he used to lash out at me because he was having an affair. He blamed everything on me like I was a bad wife, I was not good enough for him. (Naila, female British Pakistani participant)

Participants identified a husband's involvement in gambling as another reason for marital conflict and consequent IPV. Involvement in such activities means that the husband may not be able to provide for the needs of the family. Participants also felt that a husband can resort to IPV under the influence of drugs or if he is being pressured to refrain from addiction and or to change his behavior:

He [my brother] gives very less money for household expenses and spends a major portion of his earnings in gambling. So, every month he spends about 1,500–2,000 rupees in gambling. His wife is unhappy with him. She asks him

not to do that, but he does not refrain from his behavior and due to this, they end up arguing with each other almost every day. (Ali, Pakistani male participant)

### *Caretaker and Household Manager: Expectations From Wife*

Participants believed that a wife's role is to complete household chores, look after her husband, children and in-laws, and respect and adjust to her in-law's customs and traditions. Failure to meet these expectations may contribute to marital conflict. Every participant in this study identified preparing food according to the taste and preference of the husband, as a major expectation of a wife. Faiza articulated this as follows:

Food on the plate: I honestly believe the way to every man's heart is through their stomach. I honestly believe that, and I think all men across the spectrum no matter whether they are Eastern or Western, deep down in their heart they want a home bird. They want to have that wife, who they know, nice house, food on the table as well, as they obviously want her to be clever, intelligent, to look good in their arms, etc. (British Pakistani Female Participant)

In Pakistani society, most women are homemakers and their sole responsibility is to keep up with household work and prepare and provide food according to the preferences and likes and dislikes of the family members. In this context, repeated failure of a wife to fulfill this role expectation may give rise to marital conflict and IPV. Participants also identified washing, cleaning, and ironing the clothes of the husband as important expectations from a wife, as Ali explained,

If the husband has a habit of keeping clean and wearing clean clothes, and after marriage his wife does not wash his clothes timely or she does not iron them properly. And when he asks his wife, she does not do it for him, then such instances could result in conflicts and problems between husband and wife. (Pakistani Male Participant)

Again, failure to meet these expectations is considered to cause marital conflict as participants felt that it puts pressure on the husband and other family members to complete that responsibility in addition to their own responsibility.

#### *Raising children.*

Participants maintained that a wife is responsible for taking care of her children (if there are any) and raising them in accordance with the cultural norms and standards of her in-laws, as Asim suggested,

I would expect her to obviously bring up the children, look after them, and educate them as well. (Pakistani male participant)

Most participants in the study mentioned children-related issues as a reason for conflict between a husband and wife. Participants felt that a wife is usually considered responsible for children's behavior, habits, attitudes, and activities. Therefore, children's deviant or inappropriate behavior (in the eyes of a father) may raise a question about how the mother is disciplining the children and may give rise to conflict and or IPV between husband and wife. Participants maintained that if a wife is expected to take care of the children, a husband is expected to play his role by keeping a close eye on the children's upbringing and making sure that they are supervised and guided in the right direction as and when needed. His failure to fulfill this responsibility may give rise to marital conflict. The following is an example of difference in thinking in this respect, and thus a reason for conflict between husband and wife as Rida mentioned,

When I ask him to talk to children about something, he replies that because I am already dealing with the children, then what is the need for him to deal with it. Only one parent should speak to the children at one time. (Pakistani male participant)

#### *In-laws a priority.*

According to participants, most often, a wife is expected to live with in-laws in a joint family, especially during the initial years of marriage. Her unwillingness to live in a joint family could give rise to conflicts in her marital life. Participants maintained that in situations, where a husband is the only son of his parents, it is almost impossible for him to live separately, as he will be responsible for supporting and taking care of his parents. In addition, it could be financially unaffordable for him to support two families, if he decided to live separately with his wife. This is evident in the following quote in which Mehran, while describing an example, identified the unwillingness of a wife to live in the joint family as a cause of IPV and subsequent breakup:

The reason was that the wife did not want to live in a joint family and husband's problem was that he was the only son of his parents, so he could not afford to live in a nuclear family leaving his parents alone. (Pakistani male participant)

Participants maintained that a husband and his family expect the wife to give priority to her marital home and in-laws over her maternal family and expect her not to spend much time with her own family members. Participants

acknowledged the importance of relationships (for the wife) with her family members, but still stressed the need to spend less time with them and to prioritize her marital family, as Ali mentioned,

Relationship with them [parents] is such that she cannot desert them. So she should see them but for a limited time only. The wife should go to her family after finishing her work at her husband's home and should come back when her husband advises her to come back. (Pakistani male participant)

While a wife was expected to spend less time with her maternal family, participants identified taking care of in-laws, specifically the mother-in-law and father-in-law, as an important expectation of a wife as a daughter-in-law as well as a wife. Participants felt that her success in meeting this expectation keeps her in-laws and husband happy and, consequently, reduces the likelihood of marital conflict and IPV.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this unique study demonstrate that general spousal expectation contributes to development of marital conflict that can escalate into IPV. Of course, IPV is not merely about marital conflict or even about violence as it is about consistent patterns of abuse to maintain power and control. In Pakistani culture, where marriage is the only endorsed intimate relationship between men and women outside of families, such marital conflict is the central source of IPV. The study is unique as it aimed to explore gender role expectations of husband and wife from each other within the context of marriage and how fulfillment of such role expectations, or not, contributes to marital conflict and IPV. Most of the participants, as shown in the findings section, talked about IPV as something developing from marital conflict and, therefore, their accounts were heavily related to reasons for disagreement, arguments, and marital conflict, and not necessarily IPV. While marital conflict is not the reason or contributor to IPV, for the participants of this study, IPV escalated from marital conflict. The influence of gender role expectations and spousal gendered role expectation is evident in the findings. While a number of studies have explored accounts of IPV within Pakistani communities, these have often not combined husband and wife within the same study (Ali et al., 2015). There is a general discussion about gender role expectations and what women should and should not do, there is an assumption that societal norms have changed and therefore gender role expectations within marriage have changed too (Fisher, 2013; Hayati et al., 2014). However, recent evidence suggests that despite modernization, men and women still hold gender-specific

expectations and that these shape attitudes of people towards IPV (Jesmin, 2015). Men and women are still expected to perform gender-specific roles. For instance, men may have started contributing to household chores, but it is often seen as a help extended upon request rather than an equal share. Similarly, women have started working and contributing economically to the family, but burden of family responsibilities, cooking, cleaning, organizing, and other household aspects are still considered women's responsibilities. Findings from the present study highlight the importance of fulfilling various spousal role expectations in the context of Pakistan, where a husband is expected to be the breadwinner and to provide for the material needs of the family, taking care of his wife and children's psychological needs by giving them time and attention, taking care of his parents, and maintaining a balance between his wife and other family members such as his mother and sisters. A wife, on the other hand, is expected to manage the household, take care of her husband's, children's, and in-laws needs according to their culture and traditions. A failure to meet these expectations can cause marital conflict which can escalate into IPV if not managed appropriately.

Very little research has been undertaken to date to explore the expectations of the spousal roles and responsibilities in marital life in contemporary contexts and how gender shapes it. However, research exploring factors contributing to IPV in Pakistan have identified disobeying and arguing with in-laws and her husband, not looking after her in-laws (Ali & Bustamante-Gavino, 2007; Fikree et al., 2005; Haj-Yahia, 2003), neglect of household tasks, arguments over child-rearing practices and financial matters (Ali & Bustamante-Gavino, 2007; Chaudhry, 2004; Fikree & Bhatti, 1999; Fikree et al., 2006; World Health Organization [WHO], 2005; Zareen et al., 2009), stress caused by the husband's job, and unemployment of the husband (Farid et al., 2008; Zareen et al., 2009) as contributors to IPV. Similarly, arguments over child-rearing practices and the husband's responsibility for financially supporting his family in Pakistan have been identified as reasons for argument, dispute, and conflict between husband and wife (Charsley, 2005) from studies conducted on the Pakistani diaspora.

In the present study, from the perspective of many of the participants, acknowledging and fulfilling such gender role expectations was still perceived imperative for a successful marriage free from marital conflict and IPV. The present study also illuminates the asymmetry of expectations between husbands and wives, and this arguably reflects the patriarchal structure of the society and the role and status of women in Pakistani cultural context. For example, after marriage, a woman must live with her husband and his family, and her position within the household becomes much more vulnerable as she does not have her support system around her and

developing trust in new relationships requires time and effort. It was also interesting to note that the views and expectations of participants living in both the UK and Pakistan were very similar, highlighting that the difference in the geographical location did not necessarily appear to lead to a difference in gender role expectations. This may be explained by the fact that, except one, all married participant's spouses were from Pakistan. Being born and raised in the same country may have contributed to similar expectations. At the same time, close-knit family structures, shared religious beliefs, expectations, and cultural tradition may also have played a role in perpetuating these shared expectations. Recent research suggests that there appears to be a shift in attitudes and preferences with regards to matchmaking, marital choices, and degree of the family's involvement in marital decisions (Qureshi et al., 2014); however, gender role expectation is another aspect and despite the mode of marriage (arranged marriage or love marriage), husbands and wives are expected to abide by somewhat traditional gender norms. It will take a very long time to shift the attitudes of men and women about spousal role expectations in the Pakistani context. On the one hand, more and more people are living in nuclear families and therefore have less pressure from extended families to behave in a certain way with each other. On the other hand, the fact that most women remain homemakers or work part-time or less hours mean that house chores and looking after the family's need remain the major responsibility for women and this in turn contributes to gendered role expectations. As mentioned earlier, it was interesting to note that participants living in the UK also had similar expectations from each other. It will be useful to explore and compare the views of third generation of British Pakistanis—who are more likely to marry in the UK and may be less influenced by the practices and views of their grandparents (first generation migrants)—to identify any difference in the gender role attitudes and expectations and its impact on the development of marital conflict.

These findings are important as they highlight the importance given to spousal families and how this aspect can be used to develop strategies to prevent marital conflict and IPV. While the extended family is important for every individual, the influence of family and their needs are of paramount importance to not only the Pakistani community but also to other South Asian communities. There is much research that highlights the role of family in instigation and the perpetration of IPV, but not enough has been done to explore how expectations related to family can be used positively to minimize marital conflict and IPV. This is an important point, and as we have identified in the present study, wider societal structures and different geographical locations may not necessarily translate into a shift in traditionally held values and the significance attitude to gender role expectations in the

context of marriage. At the same time, extended families remain to be an important part of husband and wife's relationship and in some ways limit the possibility of developing more gender egalitarian attitudes, and this aspect needs to be studied further. While evidence indicates that IPV is often used as a way to maintain control over the victim, it is important to respect and acknowledge cultural and societal causes and relevant interpretations to allow development of culturally sensitive interventions and strategies to help people learn conflict management and IPV prevention strategies.

### *Limitations*

Data were collected from two different settings at two different times for this qualitative study. While we ensured inclusion of people from different socio-economic backgrounds, the sample did not consist of people at the higher and lower ends of the earning spectrum who may think differently about role expectations in relation to IPV. However, every effort has been made to ensure transferability of the findings by providing ample detail about the setting and the sample. The findings are based on participants' perspective as they were not asked to disclose their personal experiences unless they themselves volunteered. The findings also are not applicable to situations of extreme violence as it was not in the scope of study.

### *Implications*

The findings of the study can be used to develop appropriate strategies to enhance understanding of spousal role expectations in the context of Pakistani families. Creating opportunities for individuals and families and especially husband and wife to talk about expectations from each other may help individuals and families to better understand each other and find ways to manage expectations. One way to encourage such discussion would be through television soaps and dramas that many people in the country watch. Portraying gender egalitarian characters and usefulness of gender egalitarian attitudes may help people become more comfortable in reflecting on their attitudes and changing their behavior.

As mentioned, expectations related to family, and more specifically husbands and wives, is an important component in understanding marital conflict and IPV. This is especially important for a range of professionals and organizations in increasing their understanding of hidden aspects of marital relationships and may also illuminate the often hidden or private facets of marital relationship experiences. For those working with young people, efforts to enhance young girls and boys' understanding of such expectations

and understanding of healthy relationships may help them develop a balanced view of what to expect following marriage. It may help them to think of ways of working together as couples and family members to meet and manage each other's expectations, minimize marital conflict, and refrain from IPV. In addition, relationship education in the school may help youth to learn about the importance of various relationships, relationship expectations, communication, dealing with emotion and conflict in a positive way. This, in turn, will improve their ability to resolve conflicts in their relationships positively rather than use of violence.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study highlight, for the first time in Pakistan, how husband and wife's expectations from each other affect their relationship and how not meeting these expectations contributes to marital conflict which may escalate to IPV.

The study contributes to the body of knowledge around marital satisfaction, marital conflict, and IPV by providing an in-depth understanding of role expectation that the husband and wife have for each other in Pakistani families. The findings may help develop appropriate strategies to explore the perspective of people from diverse communities about the spousal role expectations and its impact on marital conflict (Ali et al., 2018, 2019). Public health professionals can use these findings to develop programs aimed at young adults to improve the understanding of role expectations in the context of marriage and management of conflicts.

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## **ORCID iDs**

Parveen Azam Ali  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7839-8130>

Julie McGarry  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7629-2447>

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## Author Biographies

**Parveen Azam Ali**, PhD, MScN, RN, RM. SFHA, FRSA, is a senior lecturer in Health Sciences School, University of Sheffield. She completed her PhD from School of Health and Related Research, University of Sheffield in 2012. She is a public health researcher with 20 years of experience in the field of nursing, health care teaching, and research. She is interested in understanding and exploring gender-based violence, health, inequalities in health care experiences and health outcomes, consanguinity, and genetics. She is particularly interested in understanding and tackling health inequalities relating to gender and ethnicity. She is the Associate Editor of the journal *Nursing Open*.

**Julie McGarry**, PhD, is an associate professor within the School of Health Sciences, University of Nottingham, UK. Her clinical background is in adult and mental health fields of nursing practice working with vulnerable and older adults both in hospital and community settings. Julie is an established qualitative researcher and has held a

number of locally and nationally funded grants and awards as principal investigator and coinvestigator in her area of research expertise of domestic violence and abuse (DVA) with a focus towards survivors' experience of abuse. She has considerable experience of working with survivors of abuse and health care professionals, in often sensitive environments. Her recent work has involved exploring narratives of abuse among older survivors and the development of effective health care professionals' responses. Using a co-production approach, Julie also has considerable experience in the development of e-learning resources in the field of DVA and is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.

**Aneela Maqsood**, PhD, is head of department of Behavioral Sciences at Fatima Jinnah Women University, Pakistan. She completed Post Doctorate from Queen Mary University of London, UK. Dr. Maqsood with 16 years of teaching and research experience at higher education level has extensive experience in leading international collaborative research projects. With background in mental health and wellbeing, she is an advocate of action-based research engaging adolescents and employed women and men as target groups. Her research output has been credited as clinical guidelines with demonstrated interest in developing and implementing the psychosocial and therapeutic interventions in health care. She has won various competitive research grants and awards. She has given the status of subject expert in various Universities and in Psychological Assessment & Testing Centers. She is honorary consultant psychologist in Counseling Centers of various Universities.