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Perspective of Saudi Men

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Abstract

Purpose

The aim of this study was to develop a theory of intimate partner violence (IPV) from the perspective of Saudi men. This facilitates understanding of the social processes that underpin the phenomenon as well as the development of culturally specific explanations for IPV in Saudi Arabia (SA).

Methods

The study used a constructivist grounded theory approach. In-depth, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with 26 Saudi men. The basic principles of grounded theory were explained along with an example to explain how key concepts were identified.

Results

The following categories emerged through the process of data analysis: marital dynamics, the role of family, the role of culture and religion, definitions and perceptions of IPV, causes of and factors contributing to IPV, and addressing and preventing IPV. Marital dynamics, the role of family, and the role of culture and religion were identified as core categories. Throughout the data analysis process, we recognized the critical significance of the *notion of understanding* in the marital relationship. The findings suggest that IPV occurs in Saudi society as a consequence of the continual and complex interactions among multiple factors and processes that impact the *notion of understanding*, which inhibits or promotes IPV in the marital relationship.

Conclusions

This study provides insight into the meaning of IPV from the perspective of Saudi men. Findings from this study have several implications for practice and future research, which include developing awareness and educational programs to educate Saudi women and men about IPV.

Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a significant public health and social concern. It has been described using many different terms, and no consensus has been reached regarding the proper terminology to use when referring to IPV. Commonly used terms include wife abuse, spousal violence, spousal abuse, wife cruelty, relational violence, household violence, wife lashing, and partner abuse, among others (Shipway, 2004; Nicolaidis & Paranjape, 2009; World Health Organization [WHO], 2013). Both women and men can experience IPV, and it can occur within both gay and heterosexual couples. Furthermore, IPV can transpire in any community, regardless of an individual's financial status, age, education level, cultural background, race, or religious conviction. Intimate partner relationships comprise current or previous girlfriends or boyfriends, partners who are dating, continuing partnerships, such as married spouses, civil union or common-law spouses, and domestic partners (Breiding et al., 2015). Worldwide, approximately 30% of all women experience some form IPV at some point in their lives (Bacchus et al., 2018). According to the WHO (2013), Southeast Asia has the highest regional incidence (37.7%) of sexual and/or physical IPV, followed the Eastern Mediterranean (37%), and Africa (36.6%). This rate was highest (37.8%) among women aged 40–60. The psychological and physical impacts of various types of IPV on women have been extensively documented (Duvvury et al., 2013; Scott, 2015). Some of the most prevalent physical signs of IPV include chronic pain, headache, and bodily injuries.

Due to cultural differences between Saudi Arabia (SA) and other worldwide cultures, the issue of IPV requires an understanding within this nation's unique context. For example, scholars have long argued that "the family is the most important social group in Saudi Arabia" (North & Tripp, 2009, p. 52). Although this is also true elsewhere, as the family remains the core unit in all societies, the concept of family takes different forms in different cultural contexts. In SA, IPV primarily occurs in married relationships, as these are the most frequent and socially acceptable type of intimate relationships; both societal and cultural standards strictly limit relationships between unrelated men and women, virtually prohibiting them. (Alzahrani et al., 2016;

Long, 2005). Therefore, a couple in SA has no way of living together legally unless they are husband and wife, and all sexual relationships except those within marriage are considered taboo (Coker, 2018). In addition, marriages in SA are traditionally arranged with tribes or families in mind, rather than any consideration of Western/contemporary self-identity or romantic love (Zuhur, 2011; Long, 2005). Daughters and sons in Saudi Arabian culture are usually encouraged to marry their cousins or other relatives as a means of strengthening the family (Zuhur, 2011). In some Arabic cultures, including SA, most husbands and wives maintain traditional roles as breadwinners and housewives, respectively (Moghadam, 2013; Zalcberg-Block et al., 2023; Haj-Yahia, 2003). For example, in SA, men are responsible for providing the family's primary income, safety, and security. In contrast, women have traditionally assumed responsibility for the domestic space as the nurturers and the foundation of the family (Evason, 2019). Various cultural and social factors in SA can influence the occurrence of IPV. For instance, Al-Badayneh (2012) argued that conservative culture and society, by which the author means the significant influence that the male guardianship system and cultural rigidity have on gender roles, are the primary causes of IPV.

The available empirical research on IPV in SA employs quantitative approaches and collects data using surveys (Alhalal et al., 2021; Alqurashi et al., 2023). Survey questionnaires use definitions of IPV that may be appropriate for other countries and cultures, but are not necessarily applicable within SA. The authors embrace the assumption that respondents' definitions of IPV align with their own, which may not be true, given cultural and social differences. Furthermore, given the sensitive nature of the topic, participants' responses may be biased because they wish to conceal unsavory information. Thus, with the Saudi population, it is likely important not to impose the definitions of IPV that are commonly accepted in much of the literature. In particular, best practice is likely to avoid applying Western definitions of IPV to SA; instead, it is appropriate to understand how Saudi spouses perceive the phenomenon of IPV and what it means to them personally. Most of the available empirical research on IPV studies in SA has involved female participants. Thus, it is necessary to examine Saudi men's perceptions of IPV to provide a better understanding of the phenomenon. Globally, either men or women may commit IPV, but it in Saudi culture, it is primarily committed by men (Alhalal et al., 2021; Alqurashi et al., 2023). Thus, highlighting the issue of IPV from the perspective of Saudi men is crucial, as they can play an important role in preventing IPV in their families and communities. In addition, exploring Saudi men's roles will highlight the complex dynamics of abuse in marital relationships and uncover the variables related to IPV in SA (Alqurashi et al., 2023).

Given the subjective nature of perceptions of IPV, a qualitative methodology was deemed the most suitable research design, as earlier studies have failed to explore the problem of IPV through this lens, thus creating a research gap regarding attitudes and perceptions related to this phenomenon. In addition, a qualitative approach allows for description and interpretation of socially related phenomena by presenting them clearly and truthfully to research participants within the participants' cultural

context. Although various qualitative research approaches can discover delicate and complex issues, the social issue of IPV is best addressed by employing an intense and logical framework for analyzing its fundamental factors and features. According to Charmaz (2014), grounded theory is a practical framework, as it is a structured and logical, yet flexible, manifestation of the qualitative approach. Therefore, this approach may be valuable for exploring participants' perceptions of IPV and assisting in the development of culturally unique understandings of IPV (Alqurashi et al., 2023). Furthermore, the choice to use Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT; Charmaz, 2014) was essential, because it helped to elicit the social situations that highlight the issue of IPV from the standpoint of Saudi men. Hence, this qualitative study aims to develop a theory of IPV from the perspective of Saudi men.

The following are the key components of the current research design:

- *Research Problem and Gap*

  Earlier studies have failed to explore the problem of IPV through the lens of Saudi men, thus creating a research gap regarding their attitudes toward and perceptions of this phenomenon.

- *Research Purpose and Aim*

  - To understand the phenomenon of IPV from the perspective of Saudi men

  - To obtain comprehensive background information regarding men's perceptions of IPV and the factors that contribute to it

  - To generate an appropriate evidence-based theory

- *Research Questions*

  - What perspectives do Saudi men have regarding violence in intimate relationships and how do they define it?

  - What is the meaning of IPV from the perspective of Saudi men?

  - What are the reasons for and factors associated with IPV from the perspective of Saudi men?

Method

This study used CGT, a comparative, inductive, open-ended approach that includes theoretical sampling, memo writing, constant comparative analysis, and theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2014).

Sample and Sampling Procedure

In this study, all Saudi men (single or married) over the age of 18 were eligible to participate. Any individuals who have either witnessed or heard of IPV in their family, tribe, or neighborhood was part of the inclusion criterion. The initial purposive sampling was first conducted to select participants based on broader characteristics; for example, Saudi men were selected regardless of if they were married, divorced, or single. However, at this phase, theoretical sampling was applied to provide

direction regarding which data we needed to obtain subsequently (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1965). Theoretical sampling entails making conscious decisions about what questions to ask in the subsequent rounds of data collection, what type of participants to include, and which categories to develop. Thus, a typical example involved the first five participants, who were Saudi married men, whereas the next interview required involving a single and divorced Saudi man. The resulting data were compared with the data collected previously, and codes and categories were developed. Similarly, after acquiring data on individuals in traditional, arranged marriages, we felt that it was necessary to interview a participant in a nontraditional marriage that had not been arranged. Moreover, because most of the participants were employed and educated Saudi men, we felt that it would be beneficial to explore the ideas held by unemployed and uneducated Saudi men. Concurrently, we recognized that elderly male participants, in particular, should be interviewed to explore their perceptions; thus, we interviewed two older Saudi males (51 year or older). The role of religion was a common theme throughout the first 15 interviews. Therefore, it was deemed crucial to explore the opinions of two experts in Islamic religion concerning IPV to develop and narrow the categories and theory. In total, 26 Saudi participants, including single, married, and divorced males, participated in the study. Supplemental Table 1 displays demographic information for these 26 participants. Pseudonyms and code numbers were used to protect participants' anonymity and ensure confidentiality. Participants were diverse in terms of age, education level, occupation and marital status.

Recruitment

Participants for this study were identified through a social media platform. Using social media to send out questionnaires may not be a typical research technique in some geographical areas; however, this technique is widespread and works well in SA. The first author implemented several strategies to ensure that we reached the target population. For instance, he distributed flyers and invitations via text messages to relevant Facebook, Telegram, WhatsApp, and Instagram accounts, including Saudi student club accounts in the UK and US and other accounts run by Saudi students. We targeted these groups because they have many followers and reach hundreds of thousands of people. Therefore, we were confident that many people would read the messages and be encouraged to participate. Furthermore, the administrators of these accounts were asked to encourage people to participate and share the flyer and invitation texts, which provided information about the study and instructions regarding how to contact the first author directly through email and WhatsApp, with their social circles. Based on the account descriptions, it can be assumed that the followers of these accounts were Saudi citizens. However, once a potential participant contacted the first author , we requested their age, sex, and nationality to assess their eligibility for participation. After confirming eligibility, we sent them the information sheet and consent form via email or WhatsApp. Subsequently, we scheduled semi-structured interviews with participants to be conducted over Zoom, a video conferencing software program, at a mutually agreeable time.

Data Collection

Data for this study were gathered via individual interviews between July 2020 and July 2021. Individual interviews were deemed the most suitable method for this study, as we sought to discover Saudi men's perceptions and attitudes towards IPV. We developed a semi-structured interview guide based on the three-phase approach to in-depth interviewing proposed by Seidman (1998) and Ali (2012). During the first phase of the interview, participants were asked questions related to demographic characteristics, such as age, marital situation, education and occupational level, children, and for married or divorced participants, the type of marriage they were in. The second phase of the interview was designed to record participants' perceptions related to the subject under study. For example, participants were asked non-intrusive questions about marital life and a happy/successful relationship. The third phase of the interview was designed to encourage participants to reflect on their views on the topic. For instance, participants were asked questions about IPV, which offered insight into their perceptions and understandings of it. We used two vignettes to shift questions from the second phase to the third phase of the interview (see Supplemental Appendix 1). The vignettes posed two scenarios, one in which the male partner was the perpetrator of relationship violence, and the other in which the female partner was the perpetrator. During the data collection period and analyses, the first author kept a reflexive journal to assist him in analyzing beliefs, values, and feelings related to the topic of IPV. For example, although IPV, globally, may be committed by either men or women, but it is mostly committed by men in Saudi culture. As the first author is a Saudi man, he already had the perception that men frequently play a major role in and bear responsibility for the issue of IPV. Because of the way gender roles are constructed in SA, he believed that the role of head of the family may be misconstrued as male dominance, leading to IPV. Furthermore, individual perceptions regarding IPV, the dynamic of a couple's relationship, and social and cultural attitudes toward and expectations of each gender can all influence IPV. Thus, the first author needed to be aware of and explicit about his own personal thoughts and perspectives, as failure to explore them might influence his interpretation and presentation of the research findings. Thus, he kept an open mind during the study and remained open to participants' perceptions.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics Committee. All potential participants were provided with a sheet (written in Arabic) that informed them their participation in the study was completely voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. The information sheet also clearly explained the aim of the study, the content of the interview guide, and the data collection method. After participants agreed to participate in the study, they were provided with a consent form via email or WhatsApp. It was made clear to participants that they had the right to withdraw at any time or decline to answer any question during the interview without providing any explanation.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed utilizing Charmaz's (2014) CGT concepts, including analytic coding, memo writing, constant comparison, and theoretical saturation, which are essential principles for developing a theory. Because the data were obtained in

the Arabic language (the official national language of SA), particular attention was paid to interpretation and associated concepts. It has been argued that translation is more than translating words from one language to another, but it also involves conveying and interpreting the meaning of two languages (Buhler, 2002). Therefore, the interview guide, information sheet, consent form, invitation flyer, and text messages were all translated from English to Arabic and then back translated from Arabic to English. For this study, the first author served as the interpreter, and he was conversant in both languages. He also had the benefit of coming from the same culture as the participants. To ensure accurate translation, the first author used English-to-Arabic and Arabic-to-English dictionaries and sought advice on the usage and meaning of terms and idiomatic expressions. To guarantee accuracy and transparency of the translation, back translation was performed by a colleague who holds a doctorate, is a native Arabic speaker, and who was not otherwise involved in the research project. We then scheduled a meeting to address translation-related issues and any inconsistencies between translations so that we could work reach a mutual agreement. However, no significant differences were discovered. Hence, the analysis began after all data were translated, transcribed, and made available in English. We used MAXQDA, a straightforward and practical data coding and analysis software program, to analyze the data.

Grounded theory (GT) research relies heavily on the constant comparison approach to analysis. It necessitates application of data-to-data comparisons throughout the entire analytical process. Thus, the first author frequently compared his own memos and transcripts to identify the degree of diversity and complexity in the information. Each transcribed interview was analyzed utilizing a constant comparison approach during data display, data reduction, and analytical distinction phases. Coding is another GT tool that involves "categorizing portions of information with a concise name that sums up and represents each piece of information" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43). By using a CGT approach to coding, we sought to capture cultural and contextual meanings that individuals connect to key concepts, such as marital dynamics, factors associated with IPV and conflicts, abuse, and the role of culture and religion. Charmaz (2014) proposes using two levels of coding, initial and focused coding, to describe the data collected. Initial coding involves coding information line-by-line, word-by-word, or incident-by-incident, and it relies on the size and significance of the information to construct the theory. We employed line-by-line coding, which involves labelling or coding every segment in the data. Focused coding is defined as "using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to shift through large amounts of data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). Therefore, each transcript was compared and revisited with existing codes, categories, and concepts to affirm abstraction and corresponding adequacy within the data. When analyzing data, comparing focused codes also facilitated the identification of gaps, frequency, and emergence. After analyzing the data using focused coding, categories and properties began to emerge. Identifying the core categories in this study was essential for developing the theory. A "core" or "central" category is one that has immense analytical power and the greatest likelihood of connecting the remaining categories. Corbin and Strauss (2008) state that to define a core category, it is necessary to write thoughtful memos to facilitate the inclusion of different concepts. The primary reasons for writing memos are: to justify every code; to define, label and compare data; to

identify relationships between categories; and to maintain a record of progress. Memos were used to record reflexive observations, write short interview descriptions, plan what questions should be asked in subsequent interviews, and record what type of participant should be recruited next. Furthermore, in this study, saturation was assessed according to "theoretical sufficiency," regardless of the number of interviews conducted, the number of participants recruited, or repetition of concepts (Dey, 1999). Thus, we expected to achieve theoretical saturation or sufficiency when the categories were sufficiently developed in terms of their properties as well as dimensions, relationships between categories were developed, and no new properties were found. The theoretical model deployed in the study was clear, well-developed, and seamlessly matched the concepts developed. Quality is essential in evaluating the originality, credibility, integrity, authenticity, and transferability of any study. Although there are a number of standards and criteria for qualitative research (e.g., Seale, 1999), this study used the criteria suggested by Charmaz because they are relevant to GT studies and therefore more appropriate for use here. Thus, the current study adopts a CGT methodology and employs the four key aspects of the quality evaluation criteria suggested by Charmaz (2014): credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness.

Findings

The current study sought to develop a grounded theory that could explain the issue of IPV from the perspective of Saudi men. Through data analysis, six interconnected, overlapping categories were developed: marital dynamics, the role of family, the role of culture and religion, definitions and perceptions of IPV, causes and contributing factors of IPV, and addressing and preventing IPV. Supplemental Table 2 provides an overview of these categories., which contribute to the understanding and explanation of the issue of IPV from the viewpoint of Saudi men. A comprehensive analysis of initial codes, categories, and theoretical memos identified three core categories: marital dynamics, the role of family, and the role of culture and religion. These core categories represented important aspects that participants considered to contribute substantially to marital conflict and eventual IPV. The *notion of understanding* seemed to be a prevalent thread that both connected the core categories and appeared to be associated with all categories.

Marital Dynamics

The term marital dynamics refers to the characteristics of the intimate relationship, as well as the roles and responsibilities of each spouse, that may contribute to IPV. According to the research participants, the strength and nature of the relationship between spouses seemed to be a significant factor in both marital conflict and IPV. As noted above, arranged marriage is the most common type of marriage in Saudi society. When describing this type of marriage, participants mentioned that although there is an engagement period before the marriage, it is often the case that the engaged couple do not see one another at all during that period, or only see each other in a brief meeting before their wedding day. One participant explained the importance of understanding in the engagement period:

> I see that the couple, in traditional marriage, can meet and understand each other during the engagement period. I think that this is a legitimate right for both because you are looking for a successful partnership, and this partnership may not succeed if one partner does not know the other partner well. (AHF 8/3)

Whether spouses are married via arranged marriage or not, participants emphasized the importance of discovering their partner's characteristics so that spouses can understand one another and prevent conflict, including IPV.

Characteristics of the intimate relationship

This subcategory refers to the characteristics of the intimate relationship between the spouses that may contribute to or prevent IPV. Participants identified many characteristics that they considered essential in marital life; they described how these characteristics were important for a successful relationship and how their absence might lead to IPV and an unsuccessful relationship. For instance, understanding was important not only in the engagement period but also throughout marital life. Most participants also believed that mutual understanding could assist spouses in resolving marital issues, which could, in turn, lead to a successful and happy life. One participant elaborated:

> It is assumed that a successful marital life must have depth and mutual understanding between a couple. Depth and mutual understanding help both spouses to solve any issue between them as well as live in a happy relationship. In my opinion, no marriage can be successful if both spouses do not understand each other. (AAJ 22_6)

Participants believed that intellectual compatibility is also an important characteristic of marital life. According to them, there is an association between intellectual compatibility and the ability to understand each other. Also, several participants considered honesty and devotion to be fundamental characteristics of a strong and successful relationship. Mutual respect and appreciation between spouses are also essential characteristics in marital life, helping couples to solve their issues and understand one another. Participants also identified stability as another essential characteristic of the intimate relationship. They explicitly stated that marital stability depends on understanding the partner and solving marital issues together. One such participant elaborated: "In my view, a happy married life is a life of stability between spouses, meaning that each person understands the other and is able to overcome their marital problems" (AZFAD 20/3).

Spousal duties

This category discusses the roles and responsibilities that spouses expect one another to fulfill in their marital relationship. Having highlighted the characteristics that participants identified as essential to smooth marital life in Saudi society, it is important to discuss each spouse's roles and responsibilities within the marriage, as most participants indicated that knowing these was also an important aspect of marital life. According to participants, fulfilling one's responsibility in the marital relationship has a beneficial impact on it, whereas failing to fulfill one's responsibility contributes to conflicts, including IPV. Participants discussed

a variety of responsibilities that the husband should fulfill in Saudi society. Most participants believed that the husband is the head of the household and that he holds guardianship (*wilayah*) or authoritative responsibility for his wife and children. Male guardianship (*wilayah*) means that the guardian (*wali*) will be responsible for supporting *mahrams* (i.e., members with whom a marriage is prohibited, such as mothers, sisters, nieces, and daughters; Musawah, 2018). Participants described a husband's *wilayah* responsibilities as protecting the family, providing financial support as the sole or primary earner, and providing for the family's needs. One participant explained the true meaning and responsibilities of *wilayah*:

> Some people may think that the meaning of *wilayah* is to control and dominate their wives, but this is wrong. *Wilayah* means that you perform your responsibilities as a husband who works hard to provide financial support for his family and look out for their happiness. All husbands must have these responsibilities. (ABS 16/2)

It is worth noting that participants stated that a lack of understanding of the true meaning of *wilayah* may lead to some husbands abusing their wives or treating them unfairly as long as the husbands gain control over them. A participant highlighted this point:

> Control always belongs to the man because he is the person in charge of the house, and he must protect the house. But, if he feels that his wife is provoking him and he wants to gain control, he may abuse her physically (APFT 26/3).

Although interpretations of *wilayah* are influenced by both culture and religion, many participants also believed that the husband is responsible for being faithful to his wife and treating her with love and honor, which is clearly influenced more strongly by religion. Many participants also indicated that for a marriage to be successful, the husband must also share decisions with his wife and listen seriously to her opinions. Ignoring a partner's viewpoint and excluding them from decision-making may thus be associated with marital conflict and IPV. One participant stated:

> If you are thinking of getting married, you must accept all of the responsibilities that come with it. If you are ready for these responsibilities, such as allowing your wife to participate with you in all your decisions in your life, giving her enough attention and time, and listening to her as well as to your children, I expect that your married life will be happy, God willing. (AM 18/6)

Participants also identified several responsibilities that the wife must fulfill. They believed that the main responsibilities for a wife in Saudi society are to be a housewife (i.e., to do household chores, such as making the food, doing the laundry, and cleaning the house) and to take care of her husband and children as well as. Participants also stated that the wife is responsible for being faithful to her husband and raising the children. They described the wife primary teacher in the family. Participants stated that failure to fulfill the wife's responsibilities may be associated with marital conflicts, including IPV. One participant explained the wife's responsibilities:

God has summarized a wife's responsibilities only in the home. First, she must take care of her husband and children, do household chores such as cooking, cleaning, and washing, and be faithful to her husband. If she fulfills her responsibilities, the married life will succeed between the two and prevent marital issues and IPV in their life. (ABS 16/2)

According to participants, another part of a wife's responsibilities in Saudi society is obedience to her husband, which includes listening to him and not leaving the house without his permission. Participants also noted that this expectation is rooted in religious guidelines, which specify that a wife must obey her husband, for example, if he requests intercourse. Thus, the wife is expected to not refuse sexual intercourse with her husband unless there is an appropriate reason, such as menstruation. The Quran describes a wife's obedience to her husband as a responsibility. Verse 34 of the Quran's Surah Al-Nisa talks discusses this: "As to those women on whose part you see ill conduct, admonish them, and abandon them in their beds, and beat them, but if they return to obedience, do not seek a means against them." However, a wife does not have to obey her husband if he commands her to do something that would be a sin. One participant explained a wife's obedience:

A wife who has a real concept of marriage and obedience to her husband will know that obedience is part of religion. I know that some people avoid speaking about obedience to their husbands in the media. But obedience is one of her responsibilities. (AAJ 22_6)

Disobeying one's husband may be linked to IPV, as one participant reported:

In our religion, the wife must obey the husband, but she does not do any such thing as committing a sin against God. She obeys him by accepting the husband's request for intercourse, for example, and not leaving the house without his permission. We know that some husbands may abuse their wives if their wives are disobeying them. So, obedience for her husband is important. (ABM 24_6)

Within SA, there has been significant progress in women's empowerment in recent years. A new crop of rules and legislation emphasizes and promotes female education. Several long-standing restrictions no longer exist: women can now drive alone, travel alone, become a guardian for their children, and even take high-ranking positions on the Shura Council (Saudi Embassy, 2019). Because these strides, a few participants believed that some of the wife's and husband's responsibilities might be changed. For example, a husband can now help his wife with household responsibilities, and a wife can help her husband financially. Such scenarios would challenge the idea that a husband must be the sole or primary earner in family, given that a wife is now able to work and support her husband and family financially. As one participant reported:

I think that the current period is witnessing a lot of changes in the country. Past ideas [about the husband being the breadwinner] may no longer fit with today's ideas, and there is flexibility in responsibilities. I think that women's empowerment has given a lot of space to a wife so that they can work and go beyond the scope of the housewife in their responsibilities. (AHF 8/3)

Many participants identified several mutual responsibilities that each spouse needs to fulfill. For example, participants singled out respecting each other as an important responsibility for both spouses and identified it as a core component of a successful intimate relationship. A few participants reported that patience is also important in marital life, and that each spouse is responsible for being patient with his/her partner. Many participants also emphasized the need to keep marital matters between the couple. For a marriage to succeed, participants stated that marital matters and issues should not be disclosed to or shared with anyone else. One participant highlighted the importance of this:

> They should keep their marital life private as far as they can, and they should try to manage their relationship together, just the two of them. I think they can succeed and continue forward because they keep their private matters between them. (AF 18/6)

The Role of Family

This category is concerned with participants' perspectives on how the family influences IPV. A spouse's parents and siblings are considered members of the family and blood relatives of each spouse. Participants expressed that family members can have a significant impact on a couple's relationship. They reported various characteristics of spouses' families as well as roles that can either positively or negatively influence marital life that the families are expected to play before and after the marriage. For example, participants indicated that members of both families can influence the couple before they are married in ways that either reduce or increase the likelihood of IPV between a husband and wife. Most married participants reported having had an arranged marriage, and most families would advise a man to refrain from getting married if he was not employed or sufficiently mature. As discussed above, one of the husband's responsibilities is to support his wife and children financially. To fulfill this responsibility as breadwinner, the husband must earn income from employment or a personal business. Both families would discourage or possibly even reject marriage if the man had no income. Furthermore, most participants expressed that a man should be sufficiently mature before getting married. Participants indicated that this precondition for marriage would clearly decrease marital conflict and IPV, as maturity helps a man fulfill his responsibilities after marriage. One participant elaborated on this idea:

> I have three sons, and all of them are employed. People have asked me multiple times, "Why don't you get them married?" But I, as a father, do not want them to get married now. My wife and I want them to be mature and have fully developed minds [when they get married] so that they understand life more because [married life] is very difficult. I mean, if one of them gets married now, I would say that there is a 60% to 70% chance that the marriage will fail. The reason is that he may act completely recklessly and immaturely. As my sons get older, their minds will mature, and they will be able to take on responsibility and overcome obstacles. (ABS 16/2)

As discussed above, one of the wife's main responsibilities in Saudi society is fulfilling the role of housewife. In preparation for this role, the wife's family (usually the mother and older sisters) must teach her how to perform the responsibilities of a housewife and take care of her future husband and children. One participant described this:

> A wife's family usually tries to teach her how to take care of household matters, such as cooking and cleaning, so that she will be ready for marriage. Of course, mothers and older sisters have an important role in teaching wives how to be good housewives and deal with husbands and her children appropriately in the future. (APFT 26/3)

When a husband's family feels that he is responsible, mature, and financially stable, they will encourage him to get married. Similarly, if a wife's family feels that she has learned the skills of being a housewife, they will encourage her to get married if a suitable husband emerges. However, participants acknowledged that families may place pressure on a couple to get married, even if the man and woman have no desire to get married and start a family. Participants expressed their view that the likelihood of such a couple succeeding in marital life would be lower than that of those who married with conviction and who were satisfied with the idea of marriage. In addition, a husband's family is responsible for choosing a wife in the case of the arranged marriage. However, several participants stated that even in self-selected marriages, the husband must receive approval from his family before he marries his chosen wife. Participants indicated that in some regions of SA, some families may not accept this type of marriage. For example, one participant stated:

> I knew my wife before we got married, and my marriage was not arranged. Frankly, the issue of marriage was not easy, especially since I came from a conservative area and was afraid of whether my family would approve of the marriage. So, I spoke to my mother because I knew that my father would not agree, and I tried to convince her. Thank God, she eventually agreed, but my father was not aware of this matter, nor was my wife's family. After that, my mother contacted my wife's family and told them that we wanted to marry their girl. (AM/81/6)

Study participants stated that members of both families may also play an important role after a couple marries, and thus they can both positively and negatively impact their marital life. Several participants stated that regardless of whether a couple has a self-selected or arranged marriage, they may have to live with extended family members (usually the husband's family) if the wife and her family agree to her living with the husband's family. Most participants stated that they live with their spouses in their own houses, though a few participants stated that they live (or had lived) with extended family members. Couples may face obstacles when discussing and dealing with marital matters privately, whether they live with extended family members or not, and family members (father and mother) may intervene in a couple's life, which may lead to marital issues and IPV. For example, one participant stated:

> One day, I was discussing my wife's studies with my father because she had been accepted to a master's degree program, but the program was not in the city in which we were living. It is very likely that my wife would have to live in another

house, and we may only be able to meet on the weekends. My father responded, stating, "We want you together in one house, and we want the children to be with you." He also told me, "Don't let her complete her master's studies." So, I told my wife this, and there were problems between us on this subject, but in the end, I agreed, and I let her study without telling my father. (ABF 24/6)

Many participants also expressed their view that turning to family to solve marital problems would have a negative impact on a couple's relationship. They stated that revealing small marital issues to members of either family may exacerbate these issues and make them more complicated to solve. Most participants also agreed that disclosing minor issues to family members could negatively impact the marital relationship. However, in the case of major conflicts, such as IPV, they indicated that it is advisable to rely on one's family and ask for help. In addition, because separation is seen as undesirable, families will make every effort to maintain a couple's marriage. Moreover, participants stated that if a wife asks for help from her family to solve her marital issues, they will likely ask the husband to give her *redwah* and pledge that he will not repeat the act. Subsequently, they will pressure her to return to her husband. Thus, *redwah* is a family practice in which the husband is supposed to provide his wife money as an apology if he has harmed her in any manner, including IPV. One participant stated:

> When she [the wife] goes to her family and asks for help [to solve her marital issues], they often seek reconciliation, not separation. Mostly, these issues are resolved by *redwah*. If the wife moves to her family's house, she will eventually return to her husband's house because her family will pressure her to return, especially if she has children. For the husband, her family will ask him to promise to his wife that he will not repeat the act again, and they will tell him to come and give his wife the *redwah*. (AA 22/6)

Role of Culture and Religion

This category represents participants' perspectives on the role of culture and religion in contributing to or preventing IPV in Saudi society. Religion has a significant impact on the culture of SA, and it may, in turn, have an impact on a couple's marital relationship. As Ezzi et al. (2014, p. 3) noted, "As the birthplace of Islam, the Saudis have assumed the religious leadership position for Muslims around the globe." Being the birthplace of Islam has significantly shaped SA's society, which has in turn defined the country's culture.

Role of culture

Several participants believed that the culture of SA may play an important role in marital life and may impact spouses' lives either positively or negatively. For example, according to participants, Saudi society's ideas regarding family, as well as pressure from people close to the family, may force parents to encourage their sons and daughters to marry when they enter middle age (30). Specifically, participants indicated that the family (particularly parents) may insist that their sons and daughters honor the cultural expectation that 30–35 is a suitable age for marriage. Encouraging marriage—or even insisting that couples get married

when they reach this suitable age—was highlighted above as one of the roles family plays before spouses get married. One participant reported:

> Some people get married when they reach a certain age, and I expect over the age of thirty or thirty-five. Age is one factor that forces people to get married, whether they are men or women. So, the family [parents]will insist the man get married, and they will insist the woman accept the marriage if someone proposes to her, because the people who are close to the family and the neighbors will ask "Why did your son or daughter not marry until now?" (AZFAD 20/3)

Privacy in marital life is another cultural aspect that may impact the intimacy of the relationship in Saudi society. As discussed above, participants stated that marital matters be kept private between spouses and their families. In Saudi society, it is inappropriate for friends, neighbors, or anyone else to ask a couple about their marital matters or issues. It is also important to note that participants acknowledged cultural and societal obstacles to reporting IPV. For example, participants stated that doing so might affect the reputation of both the wife's family and the husband's family, who may then be subject to negative stereotypes from their neighbors or in their communities. However, participants also believed that husbands who were victims of IPV might face more cultural barriers to reporting it, compared with women who are victims. This cultural barrier arises as a result of the husband's authority and control in Saudi society. As a result, the family may see the battered husband as incapable of responsibility and having a weak personality. One participant explained his view:

> I cannot go to her family or my family and tell them, "My wife beat me," because they will evict me from the house. This is very embarrassing for any husband in this position. The family will see him as having a weak and shaky personality, not as a man of the house, and unable to take on the responsibilities of the house. This is the prevailing view in our society. It is better to go to a social worker or family counsellor. (AAB 19/6)

Furthermore, participants believed that a Saudi husband has control over his wife and therefore she should obey him. Participants also indicated because of this control, a husband had the right to abuse his wife. Although many participants stated that the idea of husbands maintaining control may still exist in Saudi society, as discussed above, it has decreased since the country has made changes in terms of women's rights and empowerment. It is important to note that in recent years, particularly after the changes of 2019, SA has shown significant progress in women's empowerment and rights, such as driving alone, travelling alone, becoming a guardian for their children, and even taking high-ranking positions on the Shura Council (Saudi Embassy, 2019). As discussed above under "Spousal duties," some husbands may have the idea of dominating and controlling their wives as a result of misunderstanding the true meaning of *wilayah*. One participant expressed his perception of husbands being dominating and controlling of their wives in Saudi society:

> In our society, we believe that the wife belongs to the husband [obeys him]. When he married her, he expected that she would belong to him and be under his control. Unfortunately, this is a societal idea that may still exist. However, we used

to hear stories and say that the husband has the right to do such a thing [IPV]. But this idea in society has begun to change gradually with the societal change in SA. (ABA 23/6)

Witnessing how daughters, mothers, sisters, or wives are treated in a community, and in society in general, can also positively or negatively impact marital life. Participants believed that witnessing women being abused or treated badly in the family or the community can culturally normalize these behaviors and therefore make people consider it to be acceptable.

Role of religion

As discussed above, religion has a tremendous influence on the culture of SA; thus culture and religion are inextricably linked in Saudi society. According to several participants, religion may play an essential role in marriage, and this role may have an influence on the relationship between the spouses. Through the Hadith and the Quran, Islam places emphasis on the importance of marital life and family life. Thus, many participants indicated that some spouses in SA get married to receive the benefit of completing half of the religion. One participant shared his view:

> For me, I got married to complete half the religion, and the second thing is that in our society, a man without a home and without a family feels something different from the rest of the people in our society. Whatever your financial affairs, social position, or job situation, a man without a family feels inferior. (ABMH 15/2)

Several participants believed that religion emphasized and preserved the value of marital and family life. They indicated that their religion was keen on marital life and wanted to promote good families to develop a good society. They reported that Islam provided Muslim spouses with many marital guidelines via the Quran and the Hadith, and that these helped spouses to succeed and be happy in their marital life. One of the Islamic guidelines that many participants reported was that a wife was to be "retained with honor and love or allowed to leave with kindness and grace" (Al-Baqarah: Verse 229). They believed that the husband should treat his wife in a decent and consistent manner, and this included both verbal and physical behavior. One participant stated:

> The woman is vulnerable, and she is supposed to be "retained with honor and love or allowed to leave with kindness and grace" (Quran). Even if you see something dishonorable from the wife [cheating], do not abuse her, and you can let her go to her family and then divorce her. (AF 18/6)

Many participants believed that Islam not only does not accept IPV, it also explicitly rejects it. They indicated that Prophet Mohammed is a role model for all Muslim people, and he never treated his wives badly or abused them. On the contrary, they noted that he treated his wives with love and affection, respecting them, assisting them with housework, being kind to them, and being keen on their happiness. One participant mentioned: "Originally, the issue of beating the wife was completely rejected. It is not accepted in Islam. The prophet Mohammed is our example. He did not beat his wives; this is my point of view" (AF 18/6).

Even though many participants believed that Islam rejects IPV, a few stated that a particular verse gives the husband permission to hit his wife slightly if he observes her engaging in inappropriate behavior or disobeying him (An-Nisa: Verse 34). Although most participants indicated that they were not certain that their interpretation of this verse was clear and correct, they believed that it would not be likely to encourage the husband to harm his wife physically or to engage in severe physical violence. A few participants stated that they had knowledge of a correct interpretation of this verse and explained it in detail. For example, they indicated that hitting should not be severe and that there is agreement among Islamic scholars that it should not be harmful. They also believed that even small red marks can be a form of IPV, and Sharia (Islam) rejects severe hitting that can harm the wife. One of the participants elaborated on the interpretation of the correct meaning of "hit" in the verse:

> The first thing is that the blow should not be severe. This is by agreement of the scholars that it should not be severe. What does "not be severe" mean? Ibn Abbas says it means "with the toothpicks," meaning it does not harm the wife. He said, "that he does not break a limb or affect anything in this way." It was also mentioned in the interpretation of al-Tabari with the following comment: he said, "It does not affect anything," and anything here means nothing. Among its linguistic significance in the Arabic language is that if anything comes in the context of prohibition or denial, then it is general. He said, "it does not affect anything," and that means nothing. Even small red marks on the body can be an indication of violence. So, the hitting does not affect the body, and it should not have bruises or blood clots. This does not come from Sharia [Islam], and Sharia from this act is innocent. This is about the interpretation of the blow in the verse. (ABRA 5/6)

The Notion of Understanding and its Relationship with the Categories

Throughout the data analysis process, as we progressed from open codes to categories, we recognized the critical significance of the *notion of understanding* in the marital relationship. Wittgenstein (as cited in Ylikoski, 2011) said that the *notion of understanding* "Should not be understood as a sensation, an experience, or a state of mind. Understanding is not a special moment or phase, but a more permanent attribute. It is an ability" (p. 156). When one fully understands something, one can take certain actions. In other words, when something is well understood, one may draw several correct inferences about it (Ylikoski, 2011). In the context of this study, the three core categories—*marital dynamics, role of family,* and *role of culture and religion—*contribute to understanding of the emergence or prevention of IPV from the perspective of Saudi men (see Supplemental Figure 1). The *notion of understanding* serves as an interconnecting thread between these three categories. In the marital relationship, the *notion of understanding* significantly reduces the likelihood of conflict and IPV, and its absence can considerably enhance the chances of conflict and IPV. The following illustrates the intersections between IPV and the *notion of understanding* within the three core categories:

1. The *notion of understanding* and marital dynamics:

- failure to develop a deeper understanding of each other by learning about one another's characteristics before marriage

- failure to understand the expected responsibilities of each spouse, as well as their mutual responsibilities, whether these are traditional cultural responsibilities (breadwinner and housewife) or shared responsibilities

2. The *notion of understanding* and the role of the family:

- failure to teach young men and women about their expected responsibilities after marriage, whether these are the traditional cultural responsibilities (breadwinner and housewife) or shared responsibilities

3. The *notion of understanding* and the role of culture and religion:

- failure to understand the true meaning of *wilayah*

- failure to understand the true meaning of Quranic verses

First, the *notion of understanding* and marital dynamics appear to be very important matters. As discussed above, couples may not have the opportunity to get to know one another's characteristics and develop a mutual understanding during their engagement period. However, participants identified understanding as a critical aspect of the marital relationship and acknowledged that mutual understanding is an important characteristic of a successful relationship. Between spouses, understanding may either promote or impede various characteristics, including respect, appreciation, honesty, devotion, and intellectual and religious compatibility. Second, the role of family has a significant impact on a couple's marital life and may lead to marital issues and IPV. As discussed above, the family plays several roles that can positively or negatively impact a couple's marital life. One of these is to teach young men and women to understand each spouse's marital responsibilities. Therefore, failure to sufficiently prepare and teach an engaged couple to ensure that they understand and fulfill their expected responsibilities, whether these are the traditional cultural responsibilities (breadwinner and housewife) or shared responsibilities, may result in marital conflict and IPV. Conversely, such preparation and can minimize IPV and conflict, positively influencing marital life and resulting in a successful relationship. Thus, the *notion of understanding* might help couples avoid IPV and marital conflict by increasing their awareness of their expected responsibilities via their families. Third, culture and religion may play an important role in marital life and may impact spouses' lives either positively or negatively. For example, some husbands may dominate and control their wives as a result of misunderstanding the true meaning of *wilayah* responsibilities. This may cause some husbands to treat their wives unfairly or abuse them. In terms of the role of religion, the *notion of understanding* is also essential with respect to the Quranic verses. It is evident that understanding the full meaning of this verse and adopting it in marital life helps to minimize marital conflict and IPV. Thus, the findings suggest that a failure to understand the verses can lead to major conflict and IPV. The correct interpretation of this verse is that if a husband hitting his wife lightly causes marital issues, conflict between them, or separation, he should not hit his wife, as Islam will not accept this act.

According to the theory described here, IPV occurs in Saudi society as a consequence of the continual and complex interaction among several factors and processes that impact the *notion of understanding*, which either inhibits or promotes IPV in the marital relationship. These factors can be classified into four levels: personal, couple, family and society.

Personal Level

The theory indicates that the personal level comprises the characteristics of a husband and his wife and the personal actions they take in dealing with major conflict. Personal characteristics refer to those that are a part of an individual's personality and that both spouses bring to their marital relationship. It is important to note that these characteristics may be either positive or negative, and they can influence the *notion of understanding* in the relationship. For example, many participants stressed the importance of learning these characteristics during the engagement period:

> Before any man or woman gets married, everyone must try to get to know the other partner during the engagement period. I mean, each one has to get to know the characteristics of the other partner. If one of them notices, for example, some personal aspects of the other partner that may lead to IPV, it is better not to continue this relationship. For example, behaviors such as cursing, insulting, controlling, or acting aggressively. . . . These are not good indicators. (ABA 23/6)

Thus, the theory emphasizes the importance of gaining an understanding of each spouse's personal characteristics, whether these are positive or negative, during the engagement period. The theory also suggests that the process of understanding each other does not stop when the engagement period ends; rather, it continues after a couple gets married. The presence or absence of various characteristics is contingent upon a couple's mutual understanding, given that understanding serves to facilitate these characteristics. For example, one spouse must understand the other to discover his or her thoughts, and as a result, establish whether or not they are compatible on an intellectual level. It is important to mention that not every conflict between spouses leads to IPV; however, major or unresolved marital conflict between spouses may lead to it. Failure to understand how to deal with major and unresolved conflicts impacts the mutual understanding in a marital relationship, which may increase the likelihood of IPV. Moreover, there are several behaviors in marital life that may be acceptable such as hitting or insulting with jokes:

> A simple hitting while joking is not considered violence [IPV]. But in some matters, if the spouses argue about a particular topic, for example, simple beatings during this disagreement can become a big issue. This is violence in my opinion. (ABZY 24/5)

However, the majority of participants reported that any behavior (physical, psychological, or verbal) that has an impact on either spouse is defined as IPV. Thus, a lack of understanding of acceptable and unacceptable behavior can impact the mutual understanding in a marital relationship and lead to IPV.

Couple Level

According to the theory employed in this study, role fulfilment and marital actions are significant factors on the couple level. As highlighted in the "Marital dynamics" category, the concept of role fulfillment refers to any individual or mutual roles that a husband and wife anticipate fulfilling in their marital relationship. Fulfilling one's responsibilities in the marital relationship has a beneficial impact on it, whereas failing to fulfill them may contribute to conflict and IPV. For example, a husband is supposed to be the head of the household and have responsibility for his wife and children. A wife is supposed to be a housewife, caring for her husband and children and performing household chores. However, as discussed above, some responsibilities may be changing in light of recent developments in women's empowerment in SA, and couples may now share responsibilities. Failure to understand the responsibilities of each spouse, as well as their mutual responsibilities (e.g., as showing respect, being patient with each other, and maintaining marital privacy), can impact the *notion of understanding* and lead to IPV. It is important to note that personal actions, as discussed above, may not be sufficient to solve conflict between spouses. Marital actions mean that the couples must thus take several actions in their relationship to resolve major issues and avoid recurrence. Participants believed that the first action spouses should take at the marital level would be to sit down together and discuss the major conflict or the issue of the IPV. They stated that to find a mutually acceptable solution for both parties, each spouse must hear and listen to the other's point of view. As one participant mentioned:

> After the situation has calmed down, there must be a discussion and understanding between the spouses, and this is an important step. I mean that it is necessary to discuss the cause of the IPV problem or any big problem so that it does not recur. Each spouse must hear the other spouse's point of view until they reach a mutual solution. (ALCD 28/3)

The theory suggests that each spouse must listen to the other's point of view and then discuss the issue to understand each other and find a mutually acceptable solution. A lack of understanding regarding how to deal with major conflict by taking appropriate actions within the marriage can impact the *notion of understanding* in a marital relationship, increasing the possibility of IPV in the relationship.

Family Level

The theory employed in this study proposes that spouses' families play a significant role on the family level that can be positive or a negative in the context of a marital relationship A positive family role facilitates the success of a marital relationship and prevents major issues, including IPV, whereas a negative family role may contribute to problems, conflicts, and/or IPV. One of the important positive roles of the family, as discussed in the category "The Role of Family," is to teach the young man and woman their expected marital roles before the wedding. The theory suggests that failure to sufficiently prepare and teach an engaged couple to ensure that they understand and fulfill their expected individual and mutual marital responsibilities—whether these are the traditional cultural responsibilities (breadwinner and housewife) or shared responsibilities—can result in major conflict and IPV. In contrast, couples may seek assistance from family members to resolve their issues if they are not able to do so on the

personal or marital levels. In this regard, it is important for couples to carefully consider the most appropriate course of action, as involving family members in marital conflict can negatively impact the relationship and make the situation worse. The theory suggests that through the *notion of understanding,* a couple can prevent unnecessary family intervention that might lead to major marital conflict and IPV. Participants also expressed that the husband's family may refuse the husband's request to divorce or marry a second wife, especially if the wife is a relative of the husband. Marrying a second wife or divorcing one's current wife may generate problems between the husband's family and the wife's family because they may not be able to preserve kinship connections if they are relatives.

> I discussed the idea of marrying a second woman with my family. However, this is a sensitive issue, especially in my area, and the people [family] refused to accept the idea of a second wife. We were taught since childhood that a husband should not marry a second wife. The husband is also supposed to live with the wife forever and sacrifice for her, not separate from her or marry another woman. But this is not the right thing to do, especially if there is no agreement with your wife. So, how can you succeed in your marriage? (ABA 23/6)

Thus, choosing a wife, refusing to marry a second wife, and refusing to divorce a wife are also important factors that can affect the *notion of understanding* and lead to IPV in the marital relationship.

Societal Level

The theory that underpins this study proposes that, on the societal level, culture and religion may have a significant influence on the *notion of understanding*; this influence is linked to IPV. For example, in Saudi society, parents may insist that their sons and daughters honor the cultural expectation of being married by age 30–35. Parents who strongly encourage marriage, or even insist that couples get married at a certain age without due consideration of the idea and aim of marriage, can affect the *notion of understanding* in a marital relationship and lead to IPV. The theory suggests that deeming behaviors that one has gleaned from family, culture, or television to be either acceptable or unacceptable in the marital relationship is based on the *notion of understanding* within the marriage. Couples who understand each other are more likely to be unaccepting of negative behavior in their relationship, thus avoiding major conflict and IPV. For example, dominating and controlling the wife were seen as important cultural aspects that may lead to IPV. These behaviors were clearly associated with misunderstanding the true meaning of *wilayah* responsibilities, which can impact the *notion of understanding* in a marital relationship and lead to IPV. In term of addressing marital issues, many participants indicated that reaching out to the spouses' families would not always be the most appropriate course of action, and that they would rather seek assistance from social workers or specialized centers that deal with family issues.

> Let's say that they are unable to solve it, but they may not want to turn to one or both of their families because they know that they cannot help them solve it. I mean that, if they are concerned that their families will not resolve the issue and that

they will exacerbate it by requesting separation from them, I believe it is preferable for them to go to a specialized center that deals with family issues. (ADN 5/3)

Thus, via the *notion of understanding*, spouses can determine whether disclosing their marital issues to third parties will have a positive or negative impact, as maintaining privacy is an important cultural responsibility that both spouses bear. In terms of the role of religion, participants noted that adopting numerous Islamic guidelines from the Quran and the Hadith in the marital relationship can help couples succeed and be happy in their marital life. Through the *notion of understanding*, couples are more likely to adopt these guidelines and thus avoid conflict and IPV. In contrast, misunderstanding the genuine meaning of Quranic verses can clearly impact the notion of understanding and result in IPV in the marital relationship.

The grounded theory of the importance of the *notion of understanding* generated from this study suggests that in Saudi society, IPV develops as a result of failure of this *notion of understanding* between a husband and a wife. A couple's success in their marital relationship primarily depends on their ability to understand each other and minimize the occurrence of IPV. The GT employed here proposes that IPV in the Saudi context is a complicated phenomenon that develops as a result of the interactions among different factors. These factors are addressed above and can be classified into four levels. It was apparent that various factors on each of the four levels influence the *notion of understanding* and increase the possibility of IPV between marital relationships. Some of these factors are:

- understanding of spouses' positive and negative characteristics during the engagement period and after the wedding;

- understanding of personal, marital, family, and societal actions to deal with major marital conflict;

- understanding of acceptable and unacceptable behavior in a marital relationship;

- understanding of the expected individual and mutual responsibilities of each spouse, as developed through education by family prior to marriage;

- understanding of the true meaning of *wilayah* responsibilities;

- choosing a wife, refusing to marry a second wife, and refusing to divorce a wife; and

- parents encouraging marriage or even insisting on marriage when couples reach a certain age without conviction about the specific marriage.

Thus, the *notion of understanding* in marital life enables spouses to understand their expected individual and mutual roles, their positive and negative characteristics, the relationship characteristics that they need to maintain, acceptable and unacceptable behavior, and how to deal with conflict and other important matters that relate to the spouse's parents, culture, and religion.

Discussion

This study aims to develop a grounded theory of IPV from the perspective of male participants in SA. Thus, the grounded theory of the importance of the *notion of understanding* generated from this study suggests that IPV in the Saudi context is a complicated phenomenon that develops as a result of the interaction of different factors, as addressed above. This study's results suggest that in the context of the Saudi population, IPV can only occur in marital relationships for the reasons discussed previously. According to the participants in this research, IPV is often perpetrated by a husband against his wife. Participants agreed that women may perpetrate IPV, although only a few indicated that they had experienced this, and a few stated that they had witnessed or were aware of incidents of such behavior against the husband. Worldwide, IPV can be perpetrated by either men or women; however, the existing empirical research, which employs quantitative approaches and includes female participants, indicates that in Saudi culture it is primarily committed by men. This study's findings also are in direct opposition to the findings of prior SA research, which has failed to discover any evidence of female aggression towards male partners (Halawi et al., 2017; Barnawi, 2017; Shiraz, 2016; Al Dosary, 2016; Alzahrani et al., 2016; Almosaed & Alazab, 2015; Bohlaiga et al., 2014; Alhalal, 2018; Alhalal et al., 2018; Eldoseri & Sharps, 2017; Alquaiz et al. 2017; Alhalal et al., 2017; Eldoseri et al., 2014; Afifi et al., 2011; Tashkandi & Rasheed, 2009; Jradi & Abouabbas, 2017). However, Saudi men may not have reported that they were victims of IPV due to fear of shame and cultural stigma, as discussed above in the category "Role of culture and religion." This cultural barrier to male victims reporting IPV stems from the husband's authority and control in SA. The family, consequently, might consider this husband to be unable to take responsibility. The lack of research on this topic is a concern, and therefore there is an urgent need to investigate the issue of female perpetrators of IPV in SA.

This study's findings suggest that the frequency of IPV in any marital relationship varies depending on the spousal relationship, the surrounding circumstances, and the situations in which they live. For example, the present study suggests that the absence of marital characteristics such as respect, appreciation, intellectual compatibility, and honesty between a husband and wife affects their marital relationship and may lead to IPV. Similarly, one study in Africa (Alao, 2006) emphasized the importance of respect in a relationship to improve marital life between couples and reduce IPV. Another study in Turkey (Erol, 2016) indicated that respect is an important aspect in every marriage, and a higher degree of respect between spouses may be associated with a higher degree of happiness in their marriage. Appreciation is another essential characteristic of marriage; one study in the US (Algoe et al., 2010) mentioned that the expression of appreciation between spouses is an important factor for developing and maintaining high-quality relationships, a result in accord with the current findings. In terms of intellectual compatibility, one study in the US suggested that higher levels of intellectual compatibility may be associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction (Gignac & Zajenkowski, 2019). These researchers also anticipated that intellectual compatibility would play a significant role in resolving problems that arise throughout the course of a marital relationship . As discussed above, understanding can help couples

embody the marital characteristics discussed in the findings. Several studies in the US and Pakistan have emphasized the importance of understanding between spouses. For example, a lack of understanding between spouses has been highlighted as a cause of divorce (Chaudhry, 2004; Lavner & Bradbury, 2012). In addition, conflicts and IPV are less likely to occur among spouses who maintain an effective understanding of the relationship (Ali et al., 2020; Kazi et al., 2006). Previous studies have likewise demonstrated the significance of the spouses' roles and responsibilities. For example, researchers have discovered that role expectations in married life have an influence on the level of marital satisfaction among the Latino and American samples that have been studied (Falconier, 2013; Loscocco & Walzer, 2013). This finding also is consistent with previous studies indicating that marital conflict may be exacerbated by spousal role expectations, which may therefore result in IPV (Vives-Cases et al., 2009; Ali et al., 2020).

This study's findings underscore the importance of the families of both spouses in marital life, particularly in the areas of marital conflicts and IPV, indicating that both families may have a positive or negative effect on the spousal relationship. In a similar vein, several studies among Chinese and Afghan populations have emphasized the role of the family as conflict instigators in couples' relationships or as a direct cause of conflict with the wife, raising the likelihood of IPV (Chan et al., 2009; Hyder et al., 2007; Chan et al., 2008). In addition, in line with this study, previous research indicated that family intervention in Jordan was strongly associated with IPV, but only when couples perceived it as potentially negative for marital life (Clark et al., 2010). Similar to the findings of this study, research in Pakistan underscored the importance of the family's role in preparing a woman to fulfill her responsibilities as a positive factor in decreasing marriage conflicts and IPV (Ali, 2012). The current study indicated that both the husband's and wife's families play essential roles in either promoting or reducing both conflicts between husbands and wives and IPV. However, in this regard, it is important for couples to carefully consider the most appropriate course of action, as involving family members in marital conflict can negatively impact the relationship and make the situation worse. Thus, the first step is to address major issues, including IPV, within their married life. If spouses are unable to address the issue or if there is harmful and severe abuse against either spouse, the couple should consider resolving the matter with their family. However, if the spouses believe that involving the family would negatively impact the situation, they should instead seek assistance from social workers or family counselors. Thus, via the *notion of understanding*, spouses can determine whether disclosing their marital issues to third parties will have a positive or negative impact, as maintaining privacy is an important cultural responsibility of both.

In Saudi society, culture and religion may play an important role in married life, impacting spouses' lives either positively or negatively, and thus potentially contributing to or preventing IPV. This study found that parents may require their sons and daughters to adhere to the cultural expectation of marrying by the age of 30–35. As a consequence, parents strongly encourage couples to marry at a certain age—or even insist that they do, sometimes without adequate acceptance and understanding of the concept and goals of marriage, thus having a negative impact on marital life and thereby increasing the likelihood of IPV. This

cultural expectation regarding the proper age for marriage was likewise discovered in previous studies. For instance, Chen and Tong (2021) described how some parents in China may face social stigma because their children remain unmarried beyond the socially expected age. Witnessing women being abused or mistreated in their families or communities may lead to cultural acceptance of such behavior, increasing the likelihood of IPV in marriage. This finding corroborates earlier studies in North America, Indonesia, India, and Tanzania, highlighting the fact that witnessing IPV in the family is significantly correlated with an increased likelihood of violent behavior in marital life and/or promotion of the idea that such behavior is normal (Heise, 1998; Hayati et al., 2011; Mallory et al., 2016; Koenig et al., 2006; Ibragimova, 2010).

In addition to culture, we must consider religion, and it is clear that Islam has a tremendous influence on Saudi culture. This study's findings indicated that incorrect understanding of Quranic verses relating to marriage (e.g., Al-Baqarah: Verse 229; An-Nisa: Verse 34) may lead to husbands treating their wives unfairly or abusing them. Various studies have similarly shown that some practices are misused in the name of Islam, usually due to ignorance and misunderstanding of Quranic teaching. Misinterpretation and misunderstanding of verses in the Quran, for example, were the primary causes of injustices and the decline of Islamic women's position (Kamaruddin et al., 2018; Ahmad et al., 2019; Ali et al., 2019).

Despite the similarities between our findings and those of earlier research, this study provides significant contributions in the form of novel insights into the issue of IPV in SA. In particular, this study has highlighted a research gap in the area of IPV from Saudi men's perspectives. All of the studies undertaken in SA up to this point have been quantitative, and no effort has been made to understand the Saudi public's own perceptions of IPV, or the processes that lead to its occurrence. As a result, the current research was carried out to discover how Saudi men understand the issue of IPV. It sought first to identify IPV, and then to construct a grounded theory of the phenomenon that could be used to explain it from the standpoint of Saudi men, independent of their personal experiences with IPV. Because some Islamic and Arabic cultures may share similar aspects that relate to marriage and family in SA, the present theory may be applicable to similar cultures. Beyond the Saudi and Arabic cultural context, this study also contributes to the body of knowledge in the context of traditional patriarchal communities by offering new perspectives on the manner in which men in these societies understand IPV, particularly in light of the fact that family is typically valued. This theory is especially associated with cultures that are currently in the process of cultural change and modernizing, as this process generates tension and transformation opportunities for changing the cultural traditions and spousal role. In such contexts, this study has highlighted that men have to address such shifting roles and deal with opposing traditions of modernity and tradition. These shifts demonstrate how patriarchal structures perpetuate IPV and provide channels for the progressive discussion of the issue. This study also contributes to the field of masculinity studies by exploring men's perceptions of IPV and their responsibilities in partnerships. Discovering different domains of men's IPV-related behaviors and attitudes can provide a deeper understanding of gender roles, power dynamics, and changing definitions of masculinity, which helps masculinity studies when considering how masculinity

scripts regulate men's involvement in IPV. Although the methods employed in this research were adequate for the identification of a grounded theory in SA, more testing is required to determine whether the theory is applicable beyond the sample and culture used in this study.

Limitations of the Study

It is important to consider limitations to the current study. First, all interviews were conducted in Arabic and were thereafter translated and transcribed into English by the first author; it is likely that he may have missed cultural nuances or other information in the course of the translation, despite the fact that he made efforts, as described above, to check its accuracy by having sections of certain interviews translated by two people. In addition, data for this research were obtained only via Zoom. We initially anticipated that the vast majority of participants would prefer face-to-face interviews. Instead, many participants indicated that they would have refused to participate in the study if it had been conducted in person. Videoconferencing tools may create a sense of anonymity, which in turn, may allow participants to speak more freely about sensitive issues such as IPV. However, it is possible that as a result of using videoconferencing tools, the study sample unintentionally excluded very poor and uneducated men; however, as noted above, the socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels of the study participants varied. Furthermore, the findings of this study are not applicable to Saudi women, as recruiting them was not within the scope of the research. Therefore, further studies may be carried out to determine if the theory employed here is applicable to samples that include women.

Implications and Recommendations for Research and Practice

The theory resulting from this study highlights implications for practice and raises suggestions for future research. For example, IPV awareness must begin at an early age, via the educational system. The issue of IPV must be incorporated into all levels of education, from elementary to secondary education. Initially, schools could organize day-, week-, or month-long programs that focus on concepts of marital dynamics, the role of family, and the roles of culture and religion, as well as how these concepts impact *the notion of understanding*, which can either inhibit or lead to IPV in the marital relationship. This might involve inviting speakers from relevant professions, such as social workers, sociologists, psychologists, lawyers, and police officers, to explain the subject in more depth and plan activities related to it. Students will be better prepared to deal with IPV situations in the future if these strategies are used to educate them from an early age and up through the secondary education level. Moreover, IPV and the associated concepts just mentioned might be offered as a required course in higher education for a number of fields that are involved in marital issues and IPV, including social work, sociology, psychology, nursing, medicine, law, and Islamic studies. In addition to the curriculum, such secondary education programs might require a work experience and/or internship aspect, whereby students would be required to work in the field of IPV to gain a more comprehensive understanding and practical knowledge of the issue. Professors and lecturers from the professions listed above can explain the critical significance of *the notion of understanding*

in the marital relationship to provide students with comprehensive training and teach them how to deal with issues of IPV. Furthermore, stakeholders such as the Family Affairs Council and the National Family Safety Program may develop and conduct educational and awareness campaigns to teach people how to prevent and reduce the prevalence of IPV and to highlight IPV as a public issue. Such strategies may assist in eliminating the stigma attached to victims of violence, which inhibits them from recognizing and revealing their experiences. In terms of marital dynamics, by implementing strategies and programs that create awareness of the importance of the *notion of understanding*, stakeholders may encourage people to speak honestly about their expectations for one another, not just as spouses but in other roles as well. Another effort may be made to destigmatize IPV among victims, encouraging spouses to speak out without fearing privacy-related repercussions. Part of this effort should promote awareness of the suffering IPV causes, educating people on how to prevent nascent IPV by teaching spouses, family members, and community members. In addition, it is essential for stakeholders to raise awareness about IPV from the standpoint of religious leaders. This includes presenting correct understandings of Islam's stance on the issue of IPV and clarifying the correct interpretation of Quranic verses relating to married life. A correct interpretation of Quranic verses may also help transform negative attitudes towards women in SA.

In terms of future research, more qualitative and quantitative research are necessary to examine and evaluate the definitions that the present study has generated. Furthermore, researchers who are working in SA to design tools to evaluate IPV might utilize this study's results as a guideline. Additional research should be performed to identify Saudi women's perspectives and experiences related to the issue of IPV and compare the results to those of the present study. The *notion of understanding* should be investigated further, and its impact on married life should be explored. It is necessary to conduct research to identify the significance of role and responsibility fulfillment in married life, as well as the anticipated individual and mutual duties and responsibilities for both spouses. In light of the most recent developments in women's empowerment in SA, certain couples may now be expected to share responsibilities. Therefore, future research should investigate the influence of shared responsibilities and roles on marital life. Family perspectives on IPV should also be explored in more detail in future studies. Further study is required to determine the role of culture and religion in Saudi society, as well as the ways in which they impact married life. For example, particular attention should be paid to the association between witnessing women being mistreated in their families or communities and the probability of IPV, as well as to the association between misinterpreting Quranic verses and the likelihood of IPV.

In conclusion, the GT method employed here helped to identify Saudi men's perspectives in their cultural and social contexts, subsequently generating a theory grounded in data that led to an understanding of how Saudi men define IPV. Through the *notion of understanding*, couples are able to discuss important matters in their marital life to solve marital conflict. It then follows that the absence of the *notion of understanding* can cause spouses to fail to address this complex concatenation of issues, which can then increase the chance of IPV in the relationship. Based on the findings of this study, a fully elaborated theory of the

notion of understanding was developed to explain male Saudi participants' perception of IPV. The ensuing discussion indicated

that the theory of the importance of the *notion of understanding* is supported by the body of information on IPV, goes beyond

current data, extends and transcends existing theories, and contributes to our understanding of IPV in a country like SA. Finally,

although the methods utilized in this research were adequate for the identification of a grounded theory, more testing is required to

determine if the theory is applicable beyond the sample used in this study.

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Supplementary Appendix 1 Vignettes

**(Female toward male scenario):**

Ibrahim and Sarah have been married for two years. Ibrahim usually gets home from work around 3 p.m., but one day he did not arrive home until 11 p.m. Sarah is furious that Ibrahim did not call to say that he would be home late and has been wondering where he is. She called his cellphone, but he did not answer. When Ibrahim walked in the door at home, Sarah told him how upset she was. Ibrahim said that he had been in a meeting that ran late, and he could not answer the call. Sarah smelled another woman's perfume on his clothes, and she *suspected* her husband was cheating. Sarah asked Ibrahim if he was cheating. Ibrahim yelled at her and said, "shut up and just prepare the diner." Sarah lost her temper and then she picked up the dinner that she kept warm and thrown it at Ibrahim, which caused burns to his face.

(Male toward female scenario):

Ahmed and Fatimah have been married for three years. Usually, Fatimah takes permission from her husband to hang out with her friends. However, one day, they had an argument over Fatimah hanging-out with her friends last night. Ahmed asked Fatimah why she left home without permission from him. Fatimah said that she called his cellphone, but he did not answer. Ahmed said that he has been in a meeting and he could not answer her call, and she should have waited for his permission. Fatimah said this is not her fault; it is his fault, and she does not need any permission from him anymore and she can leave home whenever she wants. Ahmed wanted to teach her a lesson about respect, so he pushed Fatimah against a wall and slapped her causing a swollen eye and redness on the left side of her face.

Figure 1

Supplementary Figure 1 Core Category
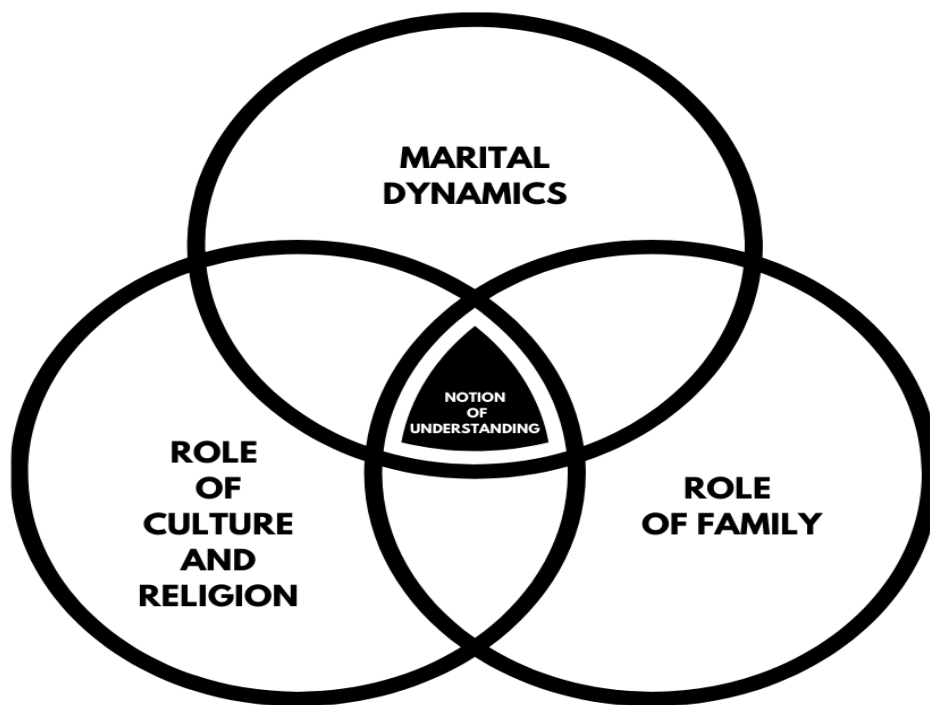
Supplementary Figure 2 The Interplay between Factors and the Notion of Understanding, Resulting in IPV
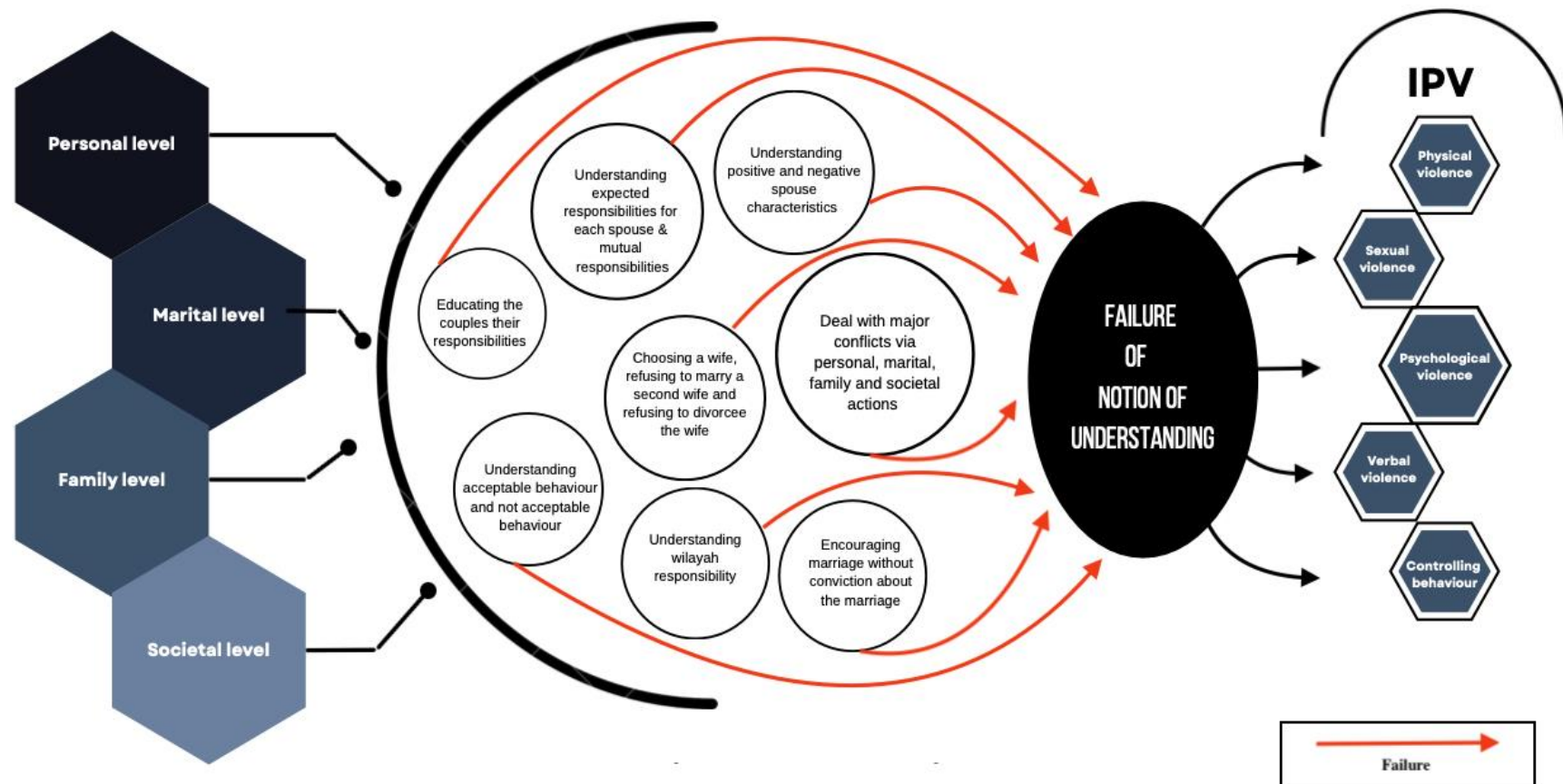
Supplementary Table 1 Demographic Information Concerning Individual Participants

Participant's pseudonym	Age	Marital status	Education level	Occupational status	Number of wives	*Duration* **Of** *marriage*	Number of children	Education level of spouse	Occupational status spouse wife	Living in extended family	How husband met the wife
AN 16/6	36 - 40	Married	Master's degree	Employed	One	15-20 years	6 children	Master's degree	Employed	No	Arranged marriage (via colleague)
AAW 17/6	31 - 35	Married	Master's degree	Employed	One	5–10 years	2 children	Bachelors' degree	Housewife and master student	No	Arranged marriage (via friend and get married his sister)
AM 18/6	31 - 35	Married	Bachelors' degree	Employed	One	2-5 years	Zero	Master's degree	Housewife and PhD student	No	Non- arranged marriages (contacted his wife before the engagement)
AF 18/6	41 - 45 years old	Married	Bachelors' degree	Employed	One	15-20 years	4 children	Bachelors' degree	Employed	No	Arranged marriage (cousin marriage)
AAB 19/6	31 - 35 years old	Married	Master's degree	Employed	One	5-10 years	Zero	Bachelors' degree	Housewife and master student	No	Arranged marriage (cousin marriage)
AA 22/6	31-35 years old	Divorced	Master's degree	Employed	One	5-10 years	Zero	Secondary school diploma	Housewife	No	Arranged marriage (cousin marriage)
AAJ 22/6	31 - 35 years old	Married	Master's degree	Employed	One	5-10 years	3 children	Bachelors' degree	Housewife	No	Arranged marriage (married from same tribe)
ABA 23/6	18-30 years old	Married	Master's degree	Employed	One	2-5 years	Zero	Master's degree	Housewife	No	Arranged marriage (cousin marriage)

ABF 24/6	36 - 40	Married	PhD's degree	Employed	One	15-20 years	2 children	Master's degree	Housewife and student	Yes/ previously with his parents and sisters	Arranged marriage (married from same tribe)
ABM 24/6	51 year or older	Married	Secondary (higher) school diploma	Retired	One	More than 30 years	6 children	Secondary (higher) school diploma	Housewife	No	Arranged marriage (cousin marriage)
AD 25/6	18-30 years old	Married	Master's degree	Employed	One	5-10 years	1 child	Master's degree	Housewife	Yes/ temporary with his parents	Arranged marriage (his mother saw the wife in a wedding)
AB 3/6 (Pilot)	36 - 40	Married	Bachelors' degree	Employed	One	10-15 years	3 children	Secondary (higher) school diploma	Housewife	No	Arranged marriage (Married from neighbour)
ABMH 15/2	46 - 50 years old	Married	Secondary (higher) school diploma	Employed	One	20-25 years	4 children	Bachelors' degree	Employed	No	Traditional marriage (cousin marriage)
ABS 16/2	51 year or older	Married	Bachelors' degree	Employed	Two	**1st marriage** 25-30 years **2nd marriage** 2-5 years	7 children	**1st wife** Less than secondary (higher) school diploma **2nd wife** Bachelors' degree	**1st wife** Housewife **2nd wife** Employed	No	Arranged marriage (married from same tribe for both wives)
ADN 5/3	31 - 35 years old	Single	Bachelors' degree	Employed	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
AHF 8/3	18-30 years old	Married	Master's degree	Employed	One	7 years	2 children	Bachelors' degree	Housewife	No	Arranged marriage (via his family)
ABD12/3	18-30 years old	Married	PhD's degree	Employed	One	4 years	1 child	Bachelors' degree	Housewife	Yes	Arranged marriage (via his sister)
ASDW 13/3	31 - 35	Married	Master's degree	Unemployed/ PhD student	One	2 years	Zero	Master's degree	PhD student	No	Non- arranged marriages (contacted his

	years old										wife before the engagement)
AXL14/3	46 - 50 years old	Married	Bachelors' degree	Employed	One	11 years	2 children	Bachelors' degree	Housewife	No	Arranged marriage (via friend)
AZFAD 20/3	18-30 years old	single	Bachelors' degree	Unemployed	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
APFT 26/3	31 - 35 years old	Married	Bachelors' degree	Unemployed	One	6 years	3 children	Secondary (higher) school diploma	Housewife and undergraduate student	No	Arranged marriage (via his family)
ALCD 28/3	41 - 45 years old	Married	Bachelors' degree	Employed	One	9 years	3 children	Bachelors' degree	Housewife	No	Arranged marriage (via friend)
ABSF 24/5	46 - 50 years old	Married	Less than Secondary (higher) school diploma	Unemployed/ business	One	19 years	5 children	Less than Secondary (higher) school diploma	Housewife	No	Arranged marriage (via friend)
ABZY 24/5	46 - 50 years old	Married	Less than Secondary (higher) school diploma	Employed	One	22 years	4 children	Less than Secondary (higher) school diploma	Housewife	No	Arranged marriage (via friend)
ABRA 5/6	31 - 35 years old	Married	PhD's degree	Employed	One	6 years	3 children	Bachelors' degree	Housewife	No	Arranged marriage (via friend)
FSLA 1/7	51 year or older	Married	PhD's degree	Employed	One	17 years	5 children	Bachelors' degree	Housewife	No	Arranged marriage (via friend)

Supplementary Table 2 A summary of the categories discovered in the study.

Categories	Description
Marital Dynamics	This category explains the characteristics of the intimate relationship between the spouses as well as the roles and responsibilities of each spouse within the marriage that may contribute to IPV.
Role of Family	This category describes the roles and characteristics of both the husband's and wife's families before and after marriage, which can either positively or negatively influence marital life.
Role of Culture and Religion	This category represents participants' perspectives on the role of culture and religion in contributing to or preventing IPV in Saudi society.
Definitions and Perception toward IPV	This category describes participants' perceptions about the forms of IPV and describes acceptable and unacceptable IPV. IPV in Saudi culture can take four forms, including physical violence, verbal and psychological violence, sexual violence, and controlling behaviour.
Causes of IPV and Contributing Factors	This category represents several factors associated with IPV in Saudi culture. These factors were identified as being varied and having developed on several levels, including individual, relationship, community and societal levels.
Addressing and Preventing IPV	This category describes the activities that spouses may undertake to address and prevent IPV. Three levels of action-taking emerged as strategies for addressing and preventing IPV, which comprise the individual level, the marital level, and the family and community level.