

Contexts of Gender Violence in Iranian Kurdistan; Analysis of the Lived Experience Narrative of Sanandji Women

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Abstract

One of the main social problem in Iranian Kurdistan is the spread of gender violence in the family, public spaces and official and institutional arenas. The pervasiveness and frequency of violence in the aforementioned fields has made violence a normal frequency in public opinion and the social sensitivity towards it has become sectional in nature.

The present study aims to analyze the contexts of gender violence in Iranian Kurdistan through women's experience and understanding of violence. The current study intends to analyze the contexts of gender violence among a sample of Sanandji women in Iranian Kurdistan through women's experience and understanding of violence. In the current research, the narrative analysis method has been used, and interviews were conducted with 35 samples of women who had experienced violence in their lives, as well as with female clients to courts and counseling centers. Based on the findings, women have experienced violence in objective, psychological, symbolic, and institutional/structural forms in private (domestic), public, and official arenas. From the point of view of the studied women, institutional discrimination, gender socialization and deprivation of power sources have shaped the contexts and bases of gender violence against women. based on the findings, it is not possible to reduce gender violence to an individual and psychological issue and neglect the change and reform of the institutional and structural foundations of violence.

Key Words: Gender Violence, Social Exclusion, Institutional Violence, Symbolic Violence.

Introduction

The current research is focused on gender violence. Violence against women is a global human rights and public health issue. Gender-based violence – including rape, intimate partner violence, domestic violence, sex trafficking, and honor killings is part of a global pattern of violence against women; A pattern supported by educational, economic and occupational discrimination. Partner, family and sexual violence is the leading cause of death and disability for women aged 16 to 44 worldwide (Roze, 2013: 61).

In Iranian society, violence against women is considered a personal and family matter, and many officials refuse to deal with it. But the similar patterns that exist in the experiences of assaulting women reveal that violence against women is something beyond a special issue and has its roots in cultural and social practices (Sadeghi Fasaei, 2010: 109).

A review of research records shows that only in the last two decades, the attention of scientific communities has been drawn to the issue of gender violence, which is not long compared to its history in the West (since the 1970s). The delay in scientific attention can have an implicit meaning that in Iran society there has been a normative approach to this issue (ignorance, denial, acceptance and tolerance of violence) that this norm has found its way into the lower layers of the culture of Iran society.

One of the main social problems in Iranian Kurdistan is the spread of family violence. Violence against women is the most serious type of violence in the family structure and one of the most common aspects of which is the phenomenon of honor killings (Riahi & Esmaili, 2019).

The results of the national project "Survey of domestic violence against women in 28 provinces of Iran" show that in the year leading up to the research, women have experienced at least one type of violence and the city of Sanandaj is one of the provincial centers with statistics. There has been a high level of domestic violence (Ghazi Tabatabai, 2013). The results of Mohammadi and Mirzaei's research (2012) show that mental and sexual violence is the most common type of violence in Ravansar city. Based on the study of Khani et al. (2009) the factor of weak family and social support for women has played the biggest role in explaining violence against women in Dehgolan.

Gender-based violence is not limited to a certain age and occurs among women with different social positions, and also because violence is not limited to the family and its existence in Public and official arenas, gender violence has become a social problem. The most common reason for denying women's human rights is to preserve family and culture. While gender violence is one of the important causes of illness and death in women and has long been known as a problem and challenge to human rights, which has serious consequences for the health of the society and an obstacle to economic development (Roze, 2013: 61).

The present article intends to examine the conditions and contexts of violence in the family, public and official arenas by referring to women's lived experience of gender violence, and through that, provide strategies to deal with gender violence.

Literature

A review of theoretical and empirical literature shows that there is diversity and inclusiveness in violence against women; Violence is related to "gender classification" as a social construct. Gender classification is a system of meaning and social actions focused on gender, based on which social relations mixed with social inequalities are formed.

Wharton (2012) in Sociology of Gender believes that "gender is a system of social actions. This system creates and maintains gender distinctions and organizes unequal relations based on these distinctions. From this point of view, gender includes differences and inequalities" (Wharton, 2012:8). Based on the interactionist approach, the asymmetry of social relations between men and women and the dominant position of men in interaction is less related to male personality or socialization and more related to social situations. This theory, like ethnomethodology, shows that gender differences emerge from more general processes that shape interaction (Ibid: 51).

Acker (1992), in the framework of the "gender institutions" approach, believes that the production and reproduction of gender inequality takes place through the mediation of "gender institutions." According to Acker, gender exists in processes, actions, images, and ideologies, and it creates power distribution in different parts and social exclusion. Institutional structures are organized along gender lines which dominated by men and interpreted from a male perspective. Work and family are among

gender institutions that distribute power sources unequally and perpetuate gender violence (Acker, 1992: 576).

The institutional approach to gender inequality and gender violence in Acker's view is similar to the concepts of "symbolic violence" and "systemic violence" in Žižek's view. "Symbolic violence" crystallizes in language and its forms and comes back to the imposition of a certain world of meanings by language, and "systemic violence" refers to the often disastrous consequences of the functioning of economic and political systems. (Žižek, 2008: 10).

While emphasizing the invisible aspects of gender violence, feminists emphasize the necessity of deconstructing the rulings and myths that promote gender violence. Myths like "violence is for the poor"; "Violence is a product of social pressures"; Women are the trigger of men's violence" or "women's enjoyment of aggression and violence" (Mertus, 1999: 230).

Feminists believe that violence against women is a reflection of unequal power relations in a patriarchal society, and gender violence acts as a channel for the maintenance and survival of unequal power relations, and as a result, it is a guarantee of men's power over women in society in general (Ezazi, 2005: 56).

Methodology

In the current research, qualitative methodology and narrative analysis method were used to study the contexts of gender violence. "narrative as a method implies an approach that sees people as active in giving meaning to the objects of the world, including others and themselves" (Bamberg, 2012: 80).

Narrative analysis is a valuable source for gaining undiscovered social knowledge. The narrative of the abused women contains daily experiences, details of events, relationships and encounters in the network of social relations, emotions and feelings and the meaning they give to the phenomena and events of their life. In fact, women, through narration, narrate their own story of life and give things a special nature and status. "These stories tell about individual experiences that often expose the researcher to the individual's identity and social conditions" (Butina, 2015: 190).

For this reason, when the experience of gender violence is mentioned, women's narratives should be one of the important sources of data collection about how and the contexts involved in the experience of violence.

The participants in the current research are Sanandji women who have experienced violence in family life and public and official arenas and referred to courts and counseling centers.

The participants were selected using purposive sampling and the maximum variation strategy. Considering the principle of theoretical saturation in determining the number of sample people, a semi-structured interview was conducted with a total of 35 women who experienced violence.

Out of 35 selected participants, 17 were single and 16 were married and 2 were divorced. The lowest and highest age of the participants were 18 and 50 years, respectively. In terms of education, 7 had a bachelor's degree, 7 had a diploma, 13 had a bachelor's degree, 5 had a master's degree, and 3 had a doctorate.

Contexts of gender violence: Field findings

To answer the research question, what are the grounds of gender violence from the perspective of women in private, public and official fields? Women were interviewed and data was extracted and the information obtained was extracted during the coding process and concepts were obtained that were related to each other and categories were extracted from these concepts.

From the obtained texts, more than 458 concepts were obtained, and finally, the concepts that were related to each other were combined with each other and categories were extracted as follows:

Institutional discrimination

As a multifaceted phenomenon, violence against women has visible and invisible dimensions, and it indicates the asymmetry of social relations between the two sexes and gender inequality, which is reproduced through the mediation of "gender institutions."

Themes such as " Gendered laws, difficulty of proving the crime of assault against women, Exclusive rules and exclusion from the rules, inequality of opportunities, limitation of organizational promotion, lack of transparency of law, unfairness of punishment, anti-women laws, and weak institutional/organizational support" in the women's narrative shows that the institutional structures of the society do not have a trans-gender nature and gender discrimination and inequality is institutionalized.

Institutional discrimination refers to the institutionalized and structural inequalities in social institutions, and based on the narrative of the interviewees, discrimination in the home and work environment is prominent. According to the women, the work of housewives is underestimated and ignored, and the work of women working outside the home is interpreted as outings and entertainment. Therefore, leisure, sports, pursuit of personal interests and other activities that help to renew the energy and spirit of women are considered unnecessary and they face opposition and resistance from men to do it.

One of the interviewees (A 38 years old, married, with a master's degree) narrates her experience as employees:

I work 7 hours a day and if I want to go to the sport club once or twice during the week, my husband and his family's argument is that you are out of the house 7 hours a day and there is no need to be out again during the week. They consider the hours related to work as a kind of fun.

Another interviewee (A 50 years old, married with 3 children and bachelor's degree) narrates her experience as housewife:

My biggest wish is to have two hours to myself. To sit in a secluded place without worrying that I have to go back and prepare food, clean the house, reach the family members.

For one of the interviewees (A 31 years old, single, with a bachelor's degree), spending time with friends has become a dream:

At night, I wish I could go out with my friend. My brother goes out and has fun with his friend until midnight. Neither the family has a problem with this case, nor does the society have a problem for them. It seems that everything is in their favor.

One of the dimensions of institutional discrimination is unequal conditions in the work environment and obstruction of organizational promotion for working women. gender stereotypes have limited the field of activity for women in the workplace.

One of the working women narrates her experience of the work environment as follows:

In my opinion, the most violence that is applied to women in government offices is that women have a very difficult way to reach high positions. As long as there are men, usually women are not preferred. I am a simple employee. Maybe with a lot of effort, I can get a higher position, but I don't think much about very high positions because I know that it is not possible.

The dominant approach in dealing with gender violence, which somehow shows the weakness of institutional support and the suspension of laws, is to reduce violence and gender abuse to personal

matters. One of the women interviewed in response to the question that "to what extent do you think violence against women is dealt with" said:

I myself witnessed that many of the violence that men inflict on women, men have made it look like a personal, family and honor issue, and somehow the matter is easily ignored and the police did not intervene.

Another interviewee (A 35 years old, single and psychologist) makes the following comments regarding honor and family killings:

Why do you think family and honor killings happen a lot in Kurdistan? One of the reasons is that, by the way, everyone considers it a family matter, which practically closes the possibility of mediation and intervention by others.

Gender Socialization

Gender socialization refers to the transfer of norms, behaviors, values and skills necessary for people to become women or men accepted by society (Lawson et al. 2015: 27). Gender socialization forms gender stereotypes and reinforces gender discrimination because it produces and reproduces gender roles as social realities and considers gender discrimination a natural issue .

Acknowledgment of the interviewees to categories such as "women as a weak and emotional being, disruption in gender education and training, underestimating women's capabilities, doubting women's intelligence, women as a man's property, defining women in the form of stereotypes (seclusion and not talking), the need to take care, avoiding staying in the dark, male zeal, women as an additional burden, stereotypical definitions of beauty, considering violence as a personal, honorable and family matter, and honor worship" shows the dominance of gender stereotypes and genderization of socialization in the studied field.

What was repeatedly mentioned in the narratives of the interviewees was the subordination of women's identity and the handing over of women's decisions to men by resorting to stereotypes such as the fear of notoriety and the weakness of women and the need to protect girls and women.

One of the interviewees (A 25 years old and single), who is a Seller, mentions the reminder of the family to return home before dark:

Because of my job, I sometimes have to return home at night when it's dark, and because of this, my family warns me every time. The reason for their warning is that by doing this, the neighbors will think badly about me.

Another interviewee (A34 years old, bachelor's degree and unemployed) narrates his family's disapproval of continuing her studies in other cities as follows:

The most important problem in my life is that my brother made all the important decisions in my life. I passed the exam with a good grade, but my brother didn't let me go to Tehran to study because he thought it was unsafe there, and my father agreed.

One of the interviewees (A 23 years old, single and bachelor) narrates her regret as follows:

Some things may seem unimportant, but for me and my friend, the biggest regret is why we can't go on a girls' trip together. Neither the family allows us, nor do we consider the society safe.

One of the gender stereotypes is the association of women with honor. This issue is associated with constant fear for women and has caused them to become passive. The statements of one of the interviewees in response to the question "what are you afraid of as a girl" are worthy of consideration:

One of the biggest phobias in my life is that one day my dignity will be lost.

Another interviewee (A 27 years old, married and employed) commented as follows:

It was just a few days ago that a man came to me on the street and touched my body. My mind was not working at all and I didn't know what to do. Like many girls, I didn't react because I was afraid of my honor. However, this silence bothered me a lot.

Another dimension of gender socialization is the association of women with veiling and modesty; The fact that women should not talk about their physiological and natural needs and even asking for it in privacy by married women is considered unnatural. This understanding is related to the perception of women as a sexual object and a source of men's pleasure:

Most of the times, my husband and I fight because of sex. My wife considers it permissible to ask for sex only from men. I applied several times, my wife felt bad and uncomfortable and I feel that she is cold towards me (A 37 years old, married. Bachelor).

Early marriage and the preference of a male child in the framework of gender socialization in the field under study is considered as obvious and natural. One of the female doctors expresses her experiences and observations of violence against women as follows:

I have been dealing with women for years. I have seen all kinds of violence against women and I see them every day. For example, a girl who is not yet of marriageable age and whose body is not yet perfect is married off, she should get pregnant immediately while her body is not yet strong enough to do so. This is a clear example of violence. Many women are past their childbearing age, but they insist on getting pregnant because their husbands want a boy. Of course, in this case, legal and legal reasons are not ineffective. When they have a daughter, they don't feel supported, they think that the daughter is a creature that needs to be taken care of more than she can be a point of support for the family. I have seen many times in the maternity ward that a mother who gave birth to a girl child was not followed by her husband and family, that is, she did not have even a simple and basic care and support from her husband and family. Despite the fact that families with a high social position tend to maintain appearances and want to keep their desire to have a son a secret, but as a doctor, I can recognize this desire to have a son even among these high-level families.

Deprivation of power sources

Benefiting from power sources is a precursor to women's activism and effectiveness in society. The field data shows that where there is power, women are absent in those areas and economic, social and institutional powerlessness is the common experience and characteristic of women in the studied field.

First of all, women experience powerlessness in the family field. Most of the girls and women interviewed mentioned the absence of support and social support as one of the reasons for vulnerability and experiencing violence in the family and society. One of the interviewees (A 33 years old, married, bachelor) narrates the experience of lack of social support in the family as follows:

I will never forget the day when my sister was only 14 years old, she was crying and begging, and my father forcibly pulled my sister's hand to sign the marriage certificate. After marriage, every time my sister got angry and returned, my brothers returned to her husband's house with a beating. They beat me as long as I was single. Even once, my brother kicked me out of the house and got a hostel for a month and I swore that if you beat me one more time, I will go to the forensic doctor and throw you in jail. I will never forgive my brothers

One of the interviewed women, whose husband has taken a second wife, narrates her helplessness as follows:

When I got angry and went back to my father's house, I didn't see any support from them, and a few days later I went back to my husband and the first thing he said was that you poor thing who has no place, you have to come back here in the end. God knows how liberating this word was for me. He was right, I have no place. I never left the house and tolerated everything that happened to me

One of the aspects of powerlessness is the lack of access to economic resources. The lack of benefit from economic resources is not exclusive to girls, and married women do not benefit much from economic resources.

I have a master's degree, I studied a lot and tried hard, but I am unemployed and I get allowance from my father, but most of the boys in my class are running shops and working. Usually, fathers provide conditions for their sons, but not for daughters. When my father retired, I and my brother were unemployed, but my father replaced my brother. My brother has been working for 10 years, but I still receive allowance from my father, because in my father's opinion, my brother's work is a priority for me (A 34 years old, single, master's degree and unemployed).

Housework means that there is a possibility that you will be on the floor of the street. Why shouldn't housework be considered a job? A mother who has several children is like the head of a company that has several employees. This boss should be paid to take care of his company and should have a pension. when a woman has a child, her whole-body declines and the same goes for her soul. This woman produces labor and delivers to the society, but does not receive any benefits in return. A woman gives life to her from her body and soul, and as this body wears out over time, the man becomes cold towards her and rejects her (A38 years old, married, master's degree).

Proxy decision-making and the absence of women in decision-making arenas are sources of women's powerlessness According to women's narration, they are not consulted even in the fields and issues that are related to their interests and destiny:

My father's biggest problem is that he allows my brother to make decisions for me and my sisters. This is more annoying than beating me (A 31 years old, single and bachelor).

I have been interested in martial arts since I was a child and every time I have faced my family's opposition with false reasons. Now that I have grown up, my family is strongly against it. They consider martial arts as masculine (A 23 years old, single and bachelor).

The independence of action of married women and housewives is limited. In general, women are absent or not considered the main decision maker in decisions related to economic activities, choosing a place to live, spending leisure time, continuing education, work, civil and social activities.

Even in my shopping, my wife decides what to wear, who to go out with, and who to hang out with, and he shows a lot of sensitivity (A 40 years old, married and bachelor)

Another dimension of deprivation of power resources is the small share of women in the labor market and executive and managerial positions, especially at the middle and macro levels. Although 60% of the women interviewed had a bachelor's degree or higher, their share of working in the public sector was 13%. None of the mentioned positions had a managerial aspect, and as it was evident from the statements of the interviewees, in working environments, due to obstacles such as the glass ceiling, the possibility of women's career advancement has been limited, and the women who were able to pass through the glass ceiling ,they have faced greatness like a glass rock and experienced shaky and unstable management.

I have only a few years left to retire, according to my experience, women in management positions are more disciplined and legal, but they employ women less. They have their own reasons for doing this, such as the fact that women act more emotionally than rationally, or that managing is a responsibility, and women also have of housework and child-rearing duties, so they cannot cope with all these responsibilities. (A 44 years old, married and employee).

As long as there are men, women are usually not preferred. I myself am a simple employee, but I don't think about high positions because I know that it is not possible (A 39 years old, single, graduate and employee).

Conclusion

The current research was aimed at analyzing women's understanding and experience of violence in the city of Sanandaj in order to identify the contexts of gender-based violence. The above-mentioned identification is considered as an advance for providing scientific and practical solutions to moderate and reduce violence with the aim of improving the social life of women .

The data obtained from the interview shows the prevalence of violence in private, public and official fields.

Women's lack of benefit from power sources, inequality of opportunities, lack of access to supportive social networks, institutional discrimination, obstruction of organizational promotion, shows the fragility and vulnerability of women in various fields and women's vulnerability to violence, and with the prevalence of violence, Women have also experienced double social exclusion. The interviewed women have experienced gender exclusion through social institutions

In Kurdistan, institutional structures are organized based on gender, and the aforementioned institutions are dominated by men. Work and family are among the gender institutions that unequally distribute power sources and establish gender violence (Acker, 1992: 576). The institutional approach to gender inequality and violence is a reflection of the concepts of "symbolic violence" and "systemic violence" in Žižek's view and Bourdieu's view .In other words, gender violence is a reflection of unequal power relations in a patriarchal society and acts as a conduit for the preservation and survival of unequal power relations (Ezazi, 2004: 56).

The spread of violence shows the institutional and structural aspects of violence; Therefore, it is not possible to reduce gender violence to an individual issue and to a mere psychological issue and neglect the change and reform of the institutional and structural foundations of violence.

In the last three decades, Kurdistan has experienced many changes under the influence of educational modernization, new communication and information technologies, the formation of new social strata, and changes in the labor market. These changes necessitate the reconstruction of the social division of labor in various fields from family to work and employment, and accordingly, it is necessary to redefine social expectations from men and women.

The social division of labor in the family is unequal in nature and the contribution and participation of men in the home is insignificant, superficial and stereotyped. Therefore, in order to deepen emotional democracy, communication rationality and horizontalization of power relations in the family, it is necessary to redefine the role of femininity and masculinity by emphasizing the appropriateness of rights and role duties.

Talking about the reconstruction of role relationships in the family without redefining and reconstructing the role and position of women in society is incomplete. The experience of women's

insecurity and violence in various fields is more than anything else, it shows that the laws are not inclusive. The presence of women in different fields should not be reduced to quantitative and physical presence, but women should actively participate in establishing the rules that govern and supervise different fields.

For example, in the province of Kurdistan, the presence of women in executive positions, especially in the middle and upper levels of management, is weak, and mainly women are present in positions that are consistent with the continuation of traditional roles and gender stereotypes.

One of the areas where women experience violence is the organizational and administrative environment. Organizational culture is based on asymmetric and unequal relations between the two sexes, and this is the source of gender violence in organizational and administrative environments. The findings of the present research also indicate that women have experienced violence in different ways in organizational environments. The main obstacles for women to advance in organizational environments are the glass ceiling and the glass cliff, which, along with verbal, psychological and economic violence in the workplace, has hindered and blocked women's organizational advancement.

Setting up Social Work units, creating a comprehensive social security system for women, strengthening and developing intervention centers in social crises, creating facilities for skill training and vocational training for women vulnerable to violence, Creation of crisis telephone lines and awareness in mass media, the creation and expansion of counseling centers and associations in order to support abused women in the workplace, training the workforce in order to identify and condemn violence against others, especially working women, training lawyers and judicial staff about the issue and its consequences, correction of beliefs and attitudes, among the solutions that should be put on the agenda (Mazhari, 9 118).

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