

Beyond Household Management: A Qualitative Exploration of Men's Perspectives on Spousal Expectations and the Path to Marital Conflict in Rural India

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Abstract:

Background: While Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is widely studied, men's perspectives remain under-researched. Understanding how men construct the "ideal" wife is critical to deconstructing the nuances of marital conflict and the root causes of IPV.

Purpose: This qualitative study explored the link between men's expectations of their wives and the subsequent potential for conflict and violence in a rural Indian setting.

Methods: Adopting an exploratory qualitative design, in-depth interviews were conducted with 21 purposively selected married men. Data were analysed using a hybrid thematic analysis involving both inductive and deductive coding approaches.

Findings: The narratives revealed a pronounced idealization of the spousal role. Men expected wives to embody a "utopian" set of attributes, including household management, service to elderly parents, and emotional support during crises. Crucially, these expectations extended beyond functional tasks to include normative ideals of obedience and conformity to traditional patriarchal prescriptions. When these "non-negotiable" expectations were not met, respondents described a spectrum of conflict resolution strategies. While many preferred dialogue or involving extended family, findings revealed that unmet expectations often became the "seed" for marital discord. This discord frequently escalated into coercive tactics—such as the threat of separation or the revocation of status by sending the wife back to her natal home—creating an environment conducive to IPV.

Conclusion: Although most respondents explicitly rejected physical violence, the rigid idealization of the wife's role creates a high-stakes environment where a "mismatch" in expectations leads to severe outcomes, including marital dissolution and psychological distress. These findings suggest that addressing IPV requires challenging the underlying normative expectations men hold regarding spousal roles.

Keywords:

Intimate partner Violence, Marriage and Expectations, Patriarchal Prescriptions, Un-met Expectations.