

# Personal Experience Among Women Who Had Experienced Violence in Premarital Relationships

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**Abstract:** *This study aims to explore the experiences and reasons behind the survival of women who experienced violence in premarital relationships. Four female subjects were ranging in age from 20-25 years who experienced violence in premarital relationships and still survived until the time the data was collected. The research analysis used was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) on the verbatim counseling process carried out. The results showed that the reasons for choosing partners expressed by the participants differ and follow the needs of each participant in which the assessment and decision making of the participants in choosing are closely related to why the participants still choose to stay and preserve.*

**Keywords:** *violence in premarital relationships, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), personal experience*

## Introduction

Violence in an intimate relationship is a problem that often occurs throughout the world, and this problem exceeds the problems of age, gender, race, culture, and socioeconomic status (Karakurt & Silver, 2013). Sexual harassment violence is a major public health problem. It is one of the most widespread violations of human rights in that the level of physical violence occurs is higher and more severe in premarital relationships. This violence is increasing with the style of pre-marital relations. Today, the high level of violence in premarital relationships has been linked to specific dynamics about having feelings of insecurity, conflict and interpersonal stress, in which simultaneously power and control are also associated with violence in premarital relationships (Rakovec-Felser et al., 2015).

Ideally, a premarital relationship is a means to express love, support, and security, in which there are two people with no biological relationship. However, in reality, some people have a partner who behaves rudely, where the abusive behavior given by his partner results in physical and psychological harm. In large cases, this even results in the death of one or both partners and some even involve other related people (Campbell, Glass, Sharps, Laughon, & Bloom, 2007). World Health Organization (2012) defines violence in intimate relationships as many behaviors that arise in relationships such as physical, emotional, and sexual violence and are perpetrated by the current partner or can also be committed by a former partner and can be in a relationship that the partner lives together or not. According to the World Health Organization (2012), the number of violence committed by couples in intimate relationships is quite high. According to the Indonesian

National Commission on Violence Against Women survey, violence against women in premarital relations is increasing every year and not a few of them lead to death. There are many cases of violence experienced in premarital relationships, and most victims of pre-marital relationship violence are women. Women are more prone to become victims because women play subordinate roles in relationships and men play regulating roles in relationships. Men feel more powerful and have better control in a relationship which is not only influenced by patriarchal culture but because of the religious belief that men are tasked with carrying out, regulating and dominating in a relationship (Goldsmith, Freyd, Goldsmith, & Freyd, 2017; Jatmiko, 2016).

As discussed by Jatmiko (2016) and Rakovec-Felser et al. (2015), masculinity is often regarded as an authoritarian nature to control their female partners; the feminist approach emphasizes the importance of gender equality. It states that gender is the main factor of men committing violence. Violence and harassment are seen as an expression of social power used to dominate and control female partners. Men feel that they have more power than women is a perception of themselves related to gender bias stereotypes which allow men to be more likely to commit violence and women as victims (Goldsmith et al., 2017). Gender biases and cultural biases create their perceptions, which lead to behavioral errors in relationships and disadvantage women as victims.

Leaving relationships that have already been filled with violence will be very difficult and not easy to talk to or report to others about what has been experienced by women as victims; some even claim that they as victims

are not yet ready to receive assistance or take advantage of sources of assistance (Dardis, Edwards, Kelley, & Gidycz, 2017). Leaving relationships filled with violence requires strong determination and courage because not a few cases of violence still occur even though they have separated and this makes the perpetrators of violence are former spouses in previous relationships. There are several types of violence and harassment in relationships, and they do not rule out the possibility of violence and harassment happens without being accompanied by others; for example, emotional violence can occur without being followed by other violence. Experiences about violence and abuse can be divided into several types conceptually, and the experience of violence and abuse in relationships is divided into emotional violence, economic violence, isolation, sexual violence and stalking (Campbell et al., 2007).

In public services, most still ignored psychological violence. Psychological violence is, no doubt, a complex multi-factor construction in which there are psychological abuse and violence, verbal, mental and emotional abuse. Aside from looking at the issue conceptually, classification should also be made from the perspective of people who present themselves as victims of violence. The effects of violence experienced will have a more specific impact on the quality of life of the victims, such as self-esteem and physical and mental health. Victims who experience violent behavior in relationships are usually difficult to recognize the partner's abusive behavior, which makes the victim unable to express it properly. In such cases, assistance from professionals will be very helpful (Rakovec-Felser, 2015).

### **Method**

This research uses a qualitative approach, using the method of phenomenology for women who experienced and survived pre-marital violence. The phenomenon of concern in the current research is the reason behind women who chose to stay afloat and even maintain the relationships despite being physically, verbally, emotionally, and socially isolated.

### **Subject**

The selected participants in this study were women who experienced both physical and psychological violence and had a pre-marital relationship for at least one year. The number of participants was four women aged 23 and 24 years who experienced violence in premarital relationships.

### **Procedure**

The procedure used in this study was a semi and unstructured interview. Interviews were conducted for approximately 30-60 minutes to explore the personal

experiences of participants who experienced pre-marital relationship violence.

### **Analysis**

The research analysis used is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which is a way to find out how individuals understand their experiences and qualitative approaches that aim to get the results of a more detailed examination based on personal experience (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

### **Research Results**

#### **Reasons for choosing partners**

Each individual has their criteria for interest in the opposite sex; when those criteria are met, then the next need is to have a premarital relationship. The need for love and affection sought outside of love and affection in the home makes individuals want a partner who has the same needs. Interest with the opposite sex can be found in various places and adapted to the comfort and needs of each individual. The reason for each individual in determining their partner may be different from the other individuals.

*"At first, I knew my current partner (Z) from my friend. I have been interested in Z right from the beginning. Z is a very kind person, although he is not very romantic, he is very sensitive, and he can position himself. Who knows that I am lucky."* (Participant A)

Based on several participants' statements, the reasons for choosing their partners were based on individual suitability, and how individuals adjust or adapt to the participants. However, other participants stated that they choose and determine partners based on what the individual has and what can benefit him.

*"He was also very friendly and not stingy at all. He was the one who paid for clubbing at the time and he returned to buy whatever food I wanted to eat, just as long as I ate he said."* (Participant B)

#### **The beginning of violence**

In every relationship, it is normal when there is a debate or disagreement between partners. At the time of debate or disagreement between partners, each partner has to face and find ways to solve the problem. But in some cases of violence in existing relationships, disputes are the beginning of the occurrence of violence both psychologically or physically. Triggers for violence can vary, as expressed by participants, who stated that jealousy from perpetrators of violence is the most important thing that can provoke violence:

*"I was caught chatting with another guy, Z immediately hit me while calling the guy and inviting him to fight."* (Participant A)

*"Previously, Y was not as harsh as now. He liked to put his hand on me while hitting a little, it's just like*

*punishing me. Because in the past, I was still chatting with guys.”(Participant B)*

Still in jealousy, but the jealousy felt by victims of violence was used by perpetrators as an excuse to use violence:

*“I’m the one who was upset because the one who called him was his girlfriend, and finally I followed him up and asked who was calling this early in the morning, and Z, who was shocked to find that I was following him, immediately turned off the phone and kicked me angrily because he considered that I disturbed and suspected him”(participant A).*

Another participant stated that violence began when they started using violence physically and emotionally:  
*“In the beginning, if we fought or debated, he never hit me. If I was angry, I like to hit and throw things”(Participant C).*

Different from other participants, the emergence of violence could also start with participants who ignore their partners when debates or disputes occur:

*“Every time we debate, it’s hard for him to lose. He must defend his argument, and I also didn’t want to give up because some debates were his fault but he didn’t understand and in the end, we would have fought, and there I would have wanted to go and not listen to him. Well, if I do that, he will immediately arrest me and throw me, he pushed and once he hit my head on the floor”(Participant D).*

### **Pattern of violence**

Patterns of violence can vary but can be distinguished conceptually based on the personal experience from participants. Patterns of violence or physical abuse can also be in the form of physical violence, such as hitting, pinching, pushing, and kicking. Normal physical violence is also followed by other patterns of violence, such as emotional violence like shouting, demeaning the partner, and saying rude/dirty words.

*“He beat me in my boarding room until my belongings fell, and I cried as hard as I could.”(Participant B)*

*“Eventually, he finally hit me if we fought, and if I rebelled or fought back against him, he could be even harsher. Snapping, hitting my face, hands, and body and even kicking, and worse, he did it in front of my friends.”(Participant C)*

*“If he is already furious, he will surely hit my arm and face, even grabbing me.”(Participant D)*

Patterns of violence can also be by limiting the movement of participants’ social environments such as by controlling with whom participants may mingle:

*“He limits my social life now. I rarely post now on social media; it feels like I’m lost from the earth. I’m just friends with the boarding kids who are allowed by him, sometimes I feel sad but if I don’t limit my social life, he*

*will be angry and in the end, he uses his hands on me.”(Participant B)*

*“I don’t have any friends now, so I want to tell you that I’m confused, I’m with him every day.”(Participant C)*

### **An attempt to end the relationship**

When experiencing violence in relationships, the perpetrators themselves are people who have close intimacy with individuals who will definitely feel disappointment and have the decision to end a relationship that is colored with violence. Based on the experiences of the participants, deciding to end the relationship after experiencing physical or psychological violence was the first thing that occurred and was done by the participants:

*“I’m the one who was shocked, and I asked to break up and he didn’t accept it because, according to him, he acted like this because I was flirting with another guy. I realized it was my fault, so finally, I apologized to him and calmed him down. But it happened again and this time I was really embarrassed to find out that my boyfriend was like this. I asked to break up and blocked all of his accounts”(Participant A)*

*“Every time I asked for a breakup, he will swear at me and bring up the problem of him who has chosen me over his ex for four years and bring about how he helped me with my study, so I feel indebted to him even though I didn’t ask.”(Participant C)*

*“Once he was going to cut his artery with scissors because he didn’t want to break up. Finally, I went away because I was afraid that he would commit suicide”(participant D)*

Based on the participants’ statement, the participants try to end the relationship right after experiencing violence both physically and psychologically. Still, every time the participants try to end the relationship, the perpetrators of violence will blame them and even threaten to hurt themselves.

### **Reasons to survive and maintain relationships**

Committing to an intimate relationship includes a strong sense of a need for love and being loved. But being in a relationship in which you have felt physical and psychological violence may eliminate feelings of love no matter how much love you have. But not for the participants in the study, the participants chose to survive, and some even maintained relationships even though they had experienced psychological and physical violence.

Some participants stated that they did not know why they persisted. However, they consciously felt the feelings so desired by the perpetrators of violence that made them feel sorry for but the needs to be desired by others were met when they became victims. As stated by the participants:

*“He must have begged right away and cried out loudly. Once, he even wanted to cut his pulse with scissors because he did not want to break up. If he begged like that, I would definitely not have the heart and end up getting back with him. I think I never felt to be wanted by someone. Then he can make me feel wanted.” (Participant D)*

*“He turned out to be waiting for me in front of my lodging house in the rain and calling me using a new phone number. He begged to meet and back with me. I finally met him to end this relationship well. Apparently, when we met, he begged to kiss my feet. Honestly, I felt sorry and touched by him who regretted and my ex, who also used to be violence but never felt sorry like him and struggle like him.” (Participant A)*

Blaming themselves as the reason why participants choose to stay in the relationship, participants believe that he was the one who brought violence in the relationship. As stated by participants:

*“But one side I realized that he was like that because of me too, I realized his attitude right now because I was the one who formed him and I made him like now. And he also thinks that I like to flirt with other guys.” (Participant C)*

Another reason to maintain a relationship despite having experienced physical violence and social isolation for the benefit of the perpetrators of violence has become the main needs of participants:

*“He also funds my life in Malang. He fulfilled what I want right away. In fact, he helped me with my college problems, he was kind, but yes, I had to obey him. I love him, because if it’s not him who else can fulfill my needs. I can’t bear to ask my mom, and I also feel secure with him. If I want to go anywhere with him, I feel safe.” (Participant B)*

### **In general about the themes of the results**

The reason why the participants chose to stay afloat and even chose to maintain this premarital relationship despite physical, psychological violence and social isolation was the main theme. However, there are other themes too, such as the reasons for choosing a partner, the onset of violence, patterns of violence experienced, and attempts to end relationships.

The themes were obtained from the results of semi or unstructured interviews delivered by the participants. The reasons for choosing partners expressed by the participants differ and follow the needs of each participant in which the assessment and decision making of the participants in choosing are closely related to why the participants still choose to stay and hold up. Followed by other themes, the theme of attempting to end the relationship connects the decision-making that was made but received an unexpected response that caused the participants to choose to maintain the relationships finally.

### **Discussion**

As discussed by Rakovec-Felser (2015) that the attitude of violence is not permanent and can change depending on the situation and condition of each perpetrator of violence. There are four stages, namely the first stage of tension arising between partners where the growing tension will increase the anger of the perpetrator and then the victim will feel worried and try to calm down. The second stage is the emergence of violence both physically and psychologically. The third stage is the stage of apology from the perpetrators of the violence that has been done, which can be in the form of promises or requests and blame the victims who are considered having provoked violence. The fourth stage is the stage where the relationship is in a calm period where the promises given earlier are fulfilled and the victims try to believe that their partner will change or the violence will end.

Enduring or maintaining a relationship that has violence in it is through many processes of how individuals decide to stay. Apart from the involvement of strong feelings for the partner, other causes were found based on the results of interviews conducted by the participants. Some participants realized the need for others to be fulfilled when their partners regretted the acts of violence committed, the participants trusted the promises of the perpetrators of violence and even felt sorry for how the perpetrators requested. Some try to blame themselves after getting rejected by the perpetrators of violence, and other participants stated that they were not able to give up the benefits in the form of material partners.

Having the opportunity to leave a relationship is crucial for some women who want it. Most women who experience violence in relationships feel trapped, and many threats are received from their partners, making the victims feel very difficult to leave (Baholo, Christofides, Wright, Sikweyiya, & Shai, 2015). Women who are victims of violence show psychological disturbances such as depression, anxiety and phobias, and emotional and mental instability more vulnerable than women who do not experience violence or abuse (Campbell et al., 2007; Rakovec-Felser et al., 2015).

The many perpetual habits perpetrated by the perpetrators make it difficult for victims to renounce violence in premarital relations. An attitude of begging, apologizing, and even kissing the feet of the victims asking for mercy results in women believing that their partners are really sorry and will change with promises made. Data shows that leaving the relationship with the partner who gave the violence will not stop the violence. Many perpetrators continue the violence after the end of the relationship (Rakovec-Felser, 2015).

Women who have a partner whose main problem is jealousy, it will be more difficult to ask for help from others, because to spend time with friends will be

difficult with their partners because their partners will think she is meeting someone else (Baholo et al., 2015). Based on the data obtained from the participant, the main problem that triggers violence is jealousy that ends with physical and psychological violence. Social isolation is a form of psychological violence perpetrated by perpetrators of violence to avoid victims seeking help from friends or others.

### Conclusion

Violence in pre-marital relations has actually happened a lot, yet most previous studies suggested that victims find it difficult to leave the relationship because of the limited support and courage of the victims. This study found that victims of violence in relationships have survived or even maintained the relationships because of a feeling of bias that is more in control of the way of thinking which results in distorted decision making. The involvement of feelings of need will be satisfied when confronted with the situation of the perpetrators begging the victims of violence to think rationally and finally choosing to believe that their partners will change and the violence will end.

The phenomenon of reported violence is quite a lot in Indonesia, so it would be even better if there were special measures to help victims of pre-marital relations violence and not just focus on domestic violence. The stigma and bias that exists in Indonesian culture (Munir, 2005) about dating makes a lack of help and forms of empathy for victims of violence in pre-marital relations. Victims are confused and ashamed to be known by the public, and the fear and shame possessed by the victim makes the victim more isolated and cannot solve the problem.

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