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"What's Love Got to Do": Tracing Violence Against Post-Soviet Women in Cross-Border Marriages

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ABSTRACT

Women in cross-border marriages are at a heightened risk of experiencing domestic violence, as they are particularly traumatised by the experience of migration, which undermines their capacity for independent action, and they are more vulnerable at the intersections of status, ethnicity, employment, and income. Using the theoretical framework of narrative victimology, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with five women from post-Soviet countries (Ukraine and Belarus) who were married to Israeli Arab Muslims. This study examines the experience of victimisation and spousal abuse among Slavic Christian women from the FSU married to Arab Muslims in Israel. The narratives of the women confirmed that cross-border spouses are susceptible to domestic abuse and intimate partner violence. The constellation of a cross-border family combines the external risk factors, such as the trauma of migration and the loss of socio-economic stability, the cultural factors associated with the patriarchal nature of Arab society and the tolerance of wife-beating, and the individual man's need to maintain control through the use of coercion and violence. Isolation, as a natural consequence of immigration and as a coercive technique used by an abuser, operates together, intensifying the experience of abuse and preventing the woman from reaching out for help. Pregnancy and childbearing constituted a particular risk factor for perpetrating abuse against cross-border wives by debilitating the woman and further preventing her from leaving the abusive marriage.

Keywords: Cross-border marriages, Intersectionality, Narrative victimology, and Violence against women.

INTRODUCTION:

Intimate partner violence, also referred to as domestic violence, encompasses the prevalent occurrence of violence against women by their husbands or intimate male partners. Violence against women can manifest in diverse forms, encompassing physical aggression that spans from minor acts like slapping and kicking to more severe instances involving weapon usage and even homicide. Additionally, it encompasses sexual violence, which entails coerced sexual acts or participation in degrading sexual activities. Economic violence is another facet characterised by controlling behaviours such as obstructing a woman's employment or confiscating her earnings. Furthermore, violence against women may

manifest through other abusive behaviours, including isolation, which involves prohibiting a woman from interacting with her friends and family, persistent humiliation, verbal abuse, degradation, threats, and intimidation (Watts and Zimmerman, 2002). The recognition of desertion in transnational marriages as a manifestation of domestic abuse by family courts in England and Wales has recently emerged as a significant topic of discussion within the article. Cross-border desertion of spouses may be seen as a manifestation of coercive control, hence constituting a recurring pattern of violence against women. The phenomenon of abandonment is rooted in the degradation of women, perpetuated by global legal structures that classify abandoned women as a

subordinate subset of women who may be subjected to violence without facing the consequences (Anitha *et al.*, 2021).

Gender inequality manifests itself in violence against women, which is utilised to maintain an unequal balance of power. As a result, women's uneven standing in comparison to males makes them more susceptible to violence (Watts & Zimmerman, 2002; Sharif *et al.*, 2023). Many abusers actively use violence as a tool to coerce a lady into obedience. Male intimate partners may also attack if their dominance is challenged. In this case, sexual violence against women is acceptable and even normal for men. Therefore, raping a woman for being sexually aggressive is a fair punishment for breaking set rules about how women should behave. According to the "status incompatibility" or "relative resources theory" of domestic violence, violence is a form of patriarchy that seeks to reestablish male control over female money, prestige, vocational, and the educational accomplishments (Atkinson *et al.*, 2005; Kaukinen, 2004). Men use violence against women to subjugate, dominate, and coerce them. When intimate female partners are more vulnerable due to work, wealth, ethnicity, or position, males will use dominance, coercion, and violence (Crenshaw, 1994). In contrast, relative resource theory advocates that husband - wife status discrepancy or incompatibility might increase abuse risk (Hornung & Garey, 1981). Kaukinen, (2004) analyses national data from the US and observes that status incompatibility, which favoured women, led to an increase in emotional abuse. This may be the case when women with unemployed partners take up work (Macmillan & Gartner, 1999) or if there is an income disparity between the partners in favour of the woman (McCloskey, 1996). These findings were complicated by Atkinson *et al.* (2005) observation that IPV only rises in response to a growing income share for women in cases where the husband is known to hold traditional gender views.

The intersectionality approach to violence against women addresses a discouraging universality of this phenomenon, cutting across and permeating into race, ethnicity, social class, religion, and geographical borders. In addition, the approach explores how hierarchies of power, structural inequalities, and societal forms of subjugation and privilege manifest themselves in the intertwining of race,

ethnicity, gender, social class, and immigration status, to name but a few (Crenshaw, 1994; Erez *et al.*, 2009). Intersectionality researchers analyse how the overlapping elements of identity combine to shape a woman's experience of abuse (Crenshaw, 1994). The approach also demonstrates how intersecting personality characteristics with familial, socio-cultural, communal, and political variables may either produce domestic abuse or worsen the existing one (Erez *et al.*, 2009). In particular, the study of Palestinian men from the West Bank and Gaza Strip has indicated that the majority of the male participants rationalise physical violence against their wives in the following cases: sexual infidelity or promiscuity, not meeting the husband's expectations, challenging the husband's masculinity by reminding him of his weaknesses or insulting him in the presence of his friends; disobeying his orders, including refusal to have sex with him; lack of respect for the husband's family. The justification for battering wives is informed by men's patriarchal ideology, i.e. traditional attitudes toward women and expectations of marriage based on inherent and natural inequality (Haj-Yahia, 1998). Brownridge, (2009) criticised the intersectionality approach for focusing too narrowly on oppression and claimed that one should additionally identify violence against vulnerable women. Brownridge defines those populations as

"Groups of individuals who share some common characteristic not held by the rest of the population and who are uniquely vulnerable concerning risk and/or experiences surrounding violence [and] the factors leading to each group vulnerability may be unique (Brownridge, 2009).

Stereotyping results from "singling out" susceptible groups, such as a violent spouse who is jobless, illiterate, and "beer-bellied" due to a link between aggression and poor socioeconomic standing (Brownridge, 2009).

Mixed Marriages and Violence Against Women

Mixed marriages have been found to be especially vulnerable to strain, conflict, and marital dissatisfaction (Kaplan & Herbst-Debby, 2017). Transnational interethnic and inter-faith marriages are not doomed to fail, but they are more likely to divorce and intimate partner violence due to heavy conflicts caused by incompatible practices, attitudes, and beliefs (Binghalib, 2011; Kaplan & Herbst-Debby,

2017). According to the literature, intermarriage affects marital stability and happiness, putting mixed couples at risk for intimate partner violence. Men in mixed partnerships are more likely to mistreat women than in homogenous couples (Brownridge, 2016; Chartier & Caetano, 2012; Fusco, 2010; Martin *et al.*, 2013). According to a US study, interracial couples had higher rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) than mono-racial white couples but equal rates to monoracial black couples (Martin *et al.*, 2013). Another Canadian study indicated that multiracial couples had a greater risk of intimate partner violence and that children increased this risk. Moreover, researchers determined that interracial couples are susceptible (Brownridge, 2016). Research on mixed marriages in highly conflicted (or “deeply divided,” as they have been called) societies has shown that mixed couples are heavily burdened because their spouses' families and social networks rarely support them. Different Israeli religious organisations opposed intermarriages because women were a “national threat” or “sleeping with the enemy” (Erez *et al.*, 2009; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017; Hastings & Hamberger, 1997; Yahya *et al.*, 2016).

Cross-border marriages and their discontents

Women in cross-border marriages are a growing trend due to globalisation and transnationalism and involving migration as an excuse for one partner (Chiu & Choi, 2021). Referring to a marital union that has been an excuse for one of the partner's migration (Deniz & Özgür, 2021) have been identified as particularly vulnerable to domestic, intimate partner violence. The cross-border couple is destined to cope with the outcomes of various categories of difference, starting from gender, race, and social practices to institutional arrangements and cultural ideologies informed by power struggles, as all those generate multiple tensions and conflicts in those marriages (Alexander, 2013; Belli and Lore-toni, 2019; Jongwilaiwan and Thompson, 2013; Kwak, 2019).

It was stated that international marriages may help bring people together by fostering the development of new intercultural and multiethnic family ties (Statham *et al.*, 2020); transnational marriages are invariably and inevitably influenced by the experience of transnational migration. Language barriers and social isolation are two elements that have been

identified as risk factors for domestic violence (L. Williams & Yu, 2006). Studies showed that cross-border marriages necessitate and include a migration experience for one of the spouses, which significantly undermines the individual's capacity to act independently, creating a fertile ground for various types of domination, control, coercion, and violence (Cheng, 2013; Chowbey, 2017; Han *et al.*, 2010; Hoang & Yeoh, 2015; Kudo, 2017; Statham *et al.*, 2020). The researchers identified several factors intensifying or contributing to domestic violence in cross-border marriages, for example, the experience of transnational migration, inequality and dependence, language barrier, political struggles and conflicts, and, eventually, just being a woman has disadvantages. Vulnerability arises from the migration experience itself since, in contrast to nonmigrants, immigrants must cope with the complex challenges of a structural process associated with their position (Kapur & Zajicek, 2018; Kapur *et al.*, 2017). Migration is a key source of compulsion since it leads women to lose their freedom as well as their socioeconomic standing. Transnational migrant flows mirror the power imbalance between nations, maintaining global inequality, subordination, and dominance (Dogan, 2021). Furthermore, migration may spark and intensify domestic violence through the mediating variable of structural inequality and a loss of financial stability, resulting in an inferior socio-economic position (Raj & Silverman, 2002; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005).

According to the study, the migratory experience and intersectionality decreased women's ability to act autonomously, leaving them more susceptible to assault (Cheng, 2013; Chowbey, 2017; Han *et al.*, 2010; Hoang & Yeoh, 2015; Kudo, 2017; Statham *et al.*, 2020). Being in a dependent position within the family inevitably limits a woman's independence. She must rely on her husband for financial, legal, and cultural problems and is therefore “given at his mercy.” In the majority of cases, cross-border couples do not speak the same language; more often than not, the husband is fluent in the wife's maternal tongue, while the wife is just beginning to acquire her husband's language and culture. The lack of communication in the husband's family leads to resentment, confrontations, and aggression (De Hart, 2017; Hourani *et al.*, 2021; Rauf & Ayob, 2020; Tschirhart *et al.*, 2019; F. Williams, 2010). Moreover, the language barrier further restricts a woman's

freedom in the new society and later silences her from reporting domestic abuse (Chowbey, 2017). Literature shows that intimate partner violence is more common in a society undergoing wars or other political conflicts (Kelly *et al.*, 2018). Any civil conflict, including war, brings about easier access to weapons, as well as socio-economic disruptions, while men are likely to suffer more frustration, stress, and underemployment; as a result, they are less capable of fulfilling their traditional roles as "breadwinners" and therefore more inclined to be violent against their female partners to maintain and reinforce what they consider their male authority (Fried, 2003).

The empirical literature has confirmed the impact of political conflicts on the level of domestic violence; in particular, the researchers pointed out the likelihood of community violence directed toward women and their children in mixed relationships during outbursts of intergroup conflicts (Doyle & McWilliams, 2020; Ellsberg *et al.*, 2021) it was found that exposure to conflict affects and augments risk factors for domestic violence (McWilliams, 1997). Loneliness and isolation are among the grave consequences of domestic violence and are risk factors in themselves, damaging migrant women's capacity to quit the abusive relationship. It is also important that abusive husbands use isolating as one of the main instruments to control their wives; they can do so by restricting mobility, producing financial dependence and thwarting their contacts with friends and relatives, to the point of locking a woman in her house (Huang, 2020; Statham *et al.*, 2020; W.-h. A. Tang & Wang, 2011; Tschirhart *et al.*, 2019). Isolation further exacerbates the harmful consequences of domestic violence since support services cannot reach out to migrant women (Lin *et al.*, 2018; F. Williams, 2010; L. Williams and Yu, 2006). Research has also found that many cross-border wives felt lonely and anxious because of the pressure to please their husbands and in-laws. Cross-border marriage is one of the expressions of women's quest for personal happiness (Chang, 2016, 2021), and whether these cross-border wives ever get happiness is something different depending on their various experiences (Huang, 2020). The research has shown that "cross-border wives" are more often than not subjected to domestic abuse, which results not only from migration stress but also from their position as women (Md Said & Emma-

UniversePG | www.universepg.com Kaka, 2023). Verbal abuse, maltreatment, and discrimination of the migrant wife by her "hegemonic" spouse frequently led to divorce, leading to a collapse of the cross-border marriage (Block, 2021; Statham *et al.*, 2020; Zani, 2019, 2022). Furthermore, migration puts women in a margin-alised position where they become powerless and unable to defend themselves or speak out against domestic violence.

Cross-border wives are marginalised in all possible domains: they have limited to no resources, suffer from language and culture barriers, lack employment, they are treated as "dependent" and coerced into thinking and acting like the local women; they are in essence deprived of their identities and become battered every time they attempt to protest against the abusive treatment they receive (A. W.-h. Tang & Wang, 2014). This study examines the experience of victimisation and spousal abuse among Slavic Christian women from the FSU married to Arab Muslims in Israel. Women in cross-border marriages are at a heightened risk of experiencing domestic violence.

METHODOLOGY:

The study was based on the theoretical framework of narrative victimology; in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with five women from post-Soviet countries (Ukraine and Belarus) who were married to Israeli Arab Muslims. The narrative approach was used in this qualitative research. The narrative approach contributes significantly to understanding the experience of crime and damage. Narrative victimology is concerned with how individuals perceive wrongdoing committed against them (Pemberton *et al.*, 2019; Presser, 2016). By employing this methodology, it is hoped to convey the victimisation experience of cross-border brides. The data was collected from five women who had unsuccessful marriages and consented to confessing the tragic stories (**Table 1**).

Table 1: Demographic data.

S.No	Participants	Age	Children
1	Natalia	30	3
2	Marina	35	2
3	Svetlana	33	4
4	Katerina	38	3
5	Anastasia	39	4

All of these women immigrated to Israel from Ukraine and Belarus after marrying Arab Muslims they had met in their home countries while attending universities or on business trips. Semi-structured interview questions were constructed along the axis of sociological categories determined as risk factors for domestic violence among cross-border partners: 1) the trauma of migration; 2) culture shock and language barrier; 3) financial dependence as a result of migration; 4) loneliness and isolation.

RESULTS:

The results showed the women's exposure to persistent maltreatment and multiple externally traumatic events, beginning with migration trauma, their memory representations were disorganised. These memory distortions must be reorganised and regulated for healing to occur (Elbert *et al.*, 2022). To identify the major themes within the categories, reorder the narrative chronologically without losing sight of the emotional content. The narratives provided complex, associative descriptions of life in the shadow of migration and abuse, while the categories of "risk factors" served as reminders.

Trauma of Migration

Three women described it as an extremely stressful, overwhelming, and debilitating experience: *"The world around me was so different and alien; I understood that nothing would be the same and I am not at home any longer"* (Natalia). Marina complained about frustration, self-doubts, and self-blame since she had landed in Israel:

"I began to think that it wasn't a really wise decision, that I might have hurt my parents, that I disappointed them and betrayed my country; I was afraid I would never make it here. I felt worse than a dog - dogs can understand even though they cannot speak back, while I wasn't able at all to understand what was going on around me; I couldn't express my feelings either. I already regretted having come here and blamed myself for not having taken the time to learn the language and prepare myself for the new life in an unfamiliar country".

Svetlana referred to her first experience of immigration as a somewhat fatalistic anticipation of something bad and irreversible:

"When the plane took off, I felt an overwhelming anxiety and fear, as if something really bad was

going to happen. I had a sense of being cut off forever from my native land, my family, and my friends, from everything I was used to".

The women were fearful about the future, as they learned very soon that their previous status had no worth; whatever they had been doing in their countries of origin, including their education and professional formation, seemed to have no meaning or significance. Anastasia spoke a lot about her feeling of worthlessness in professional terms:

Even before his parents told me that "I am nothing, a zero", I already knew that I had no worth here. I mean, everything I'd done in life suddenly had no worth. And everything around me seemed to prove that I was right. I began to recall what my parents had been telling me: Nobody needs you there; you will be nobody."

Katerina spoke about her fantasies before leaving Minsk, her native town in Belarus, and her disillusionment after having arrived in Israel:

"What I fantasised about and what I saw was very different. I was shocked. And I couldn't even explain why. I remember it was like a dream, a state of shock. I was moving like in a dream, thinking about my hopes fade away".

They also complained about an ongoing sense of tension, low mood, and sleep difficulties. Natalia conveyed a feeling of unease mixed with fear and helplessness:

"He met me with a huge bouquet of roses, but I had some gut feeling of something that was not quite right. I was anxious and couldn't calm down, even though he looked very sweet and happy."

Since her arrival to Israel, Marina had been experiencing a sense of guilt and self-blame, along with frustration and helplessness at not being able to communicate. The women also expressed their frustration and fears about the future, as they learned very soon that they had lost their previous status. As Natalia say

"I already understood that I could do very little, if at all, with all my professional certificates; my academic education as a teacher of the Ukrainian language and literature had no meaning here; people just do not know that the Ukrainian language exists, it was so sad to come to terms

with the fact that I became just nothing and nobody”.

How it began

The theme of abuse immediately resurged once the women began to describe their first experiences of marital life in Israel. The women spoke more about one another because of their emotional and mental devastation soon after arriving in Israel: the trauma of what they perceived as a sudden change in their husbands' behaviour; they were no longer sweet and flattering but became judgmental, irritated, offensive, and often time verbally aggressive. According to Svetlana

“I remember that Said would promise to take care of everything, in terms of helping me with learning a language, finding a job, he would assure me that Israel is the right place for me, especially, by his side [...] it has been less than a month when he began shouting at me, accusing me of being stupid, lazy, and manipulative. He would blame me for not understanding Arabic and Hebrew, for not looking for a job, for having lied to him by pretending to be someone I was not”.

Svetlana added she hoped one day things would change for the better and the abuse would stop. She could not believe the change that occurred in Saeed and secretly hoped that the "old Saeed" would be back. Marina described doing her best to please Marwan and prove to him that she "didn't ruin his life"; however, while she prides herself on achievements in mastering Arabic and Hebrew and learning to cook meals from Arab cuisine, Marwan continues to devalue her:

“I learned Hebrew and Arabic in no time; in a few months, I could already have basic communication with his parents. I also learned to cook his favourite meals from Arab cuisine; however, he was never satisfied; sometimes, he would just throw away what I had cooked: “You still have too much to learn to make me happy,” he would say. Then, my knowledge of Arabic also began to make him angry: he would claim that I was having conversations with other men when he was not at home. “I wish you had swallowed your tongue and stayed silent forever”.

Here, a husband's need to control Marina's social life and circles overrides the objective necessity for

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social integration; for Marwan, her command of Arabic is a threat rather than an advantage and then another "excuse", as it were, to perpetrate the abuse. Katerina admitted that her husband-to-be would often raise his voice even before they had married; however, she chose not to make a big deal out of it. Anastasia, too, chose not to make a big deal out of verbal violence or threats; she always believed that something would change and the abuse would somehow end.

An unexpected metamorphosis of the loving partner into a ruthless abuser was extremely traumatising for all the women: they were "frozen", and their will was "paralysed": lacking relatives and resources in the foreign country, they could not leave their abusers, nor could they reach out to the unfamiliar and probably hostile society.

Dependence and inequality

All the women complained about being dependent on their husbands' income and mood. They could not travel alone and ought to ask their husbands' permission first or their mother's approval. The husband was also in charge of all communication means - mobile lines, mail accounts, etc. Hence, the women had no communication opportunities whatsoever on their own and could keep no secrets. Marina says that every time Marwan would become violent, he would threaten her with deportation and promise to leave alone at the airport. Svetlana explained that her future husband convinced her not to work and promised the fabulous life of an Arab princess; however, she believed him and left her career. Said's abusive behaviour intensified.

He began to belittle her and scorn them for not being capable of working and being a "parasite". Marina and Natalia had no bank accounts; Svetlana could use her husband's credit card; however, he would take it from her now and then, claiming that she was incapable of purchasing things, making wise decisions, and therefore needed no financial assets. Anastasia did not have a bank account either but was rather given "pocket money" and demanded a detailed report of how she spent it. Katerina had neither a bank account nor "pocket money." Her husband provided her with "everything she needed", from cosmetics and clothes to food. She barely left the house and eventually became afraid even of thinking to go out.

Loneliness and Isolation

Women expressed how their husbands gradually forced them to cut off all contact with family and relatives, as well as prohibited them from staying in contact with their friends, thereby confining them to full isolation in a foreign country. Each husband acted differently: while Marwan was threatening, according to her husband, "he was worried about Svetlana and just wants to protect her from malignant influence of envious people." Mohammad would say over and over to Natalia that there was no need for other people in their union; "only two of them is enough". The only social circle allowed was the in-laws and the extended family, who were almost always critical and judgmental towards the Slavic wife. Said's mother would always express an open regret that her son hadn't married a Muslim woman and would convince him to take a second wife. That is how Natalia described that:

"I asked him if I could call home and let them know I arrived in one piece, and he said no. I asked him if I could call my best friend, but he said no and got angry again. Then he said he was sorry and we went to sleep together. Something had changed, and I couldn't figure out what it was; of course, I blamed myself. On the following day, he was sweet and considerate again, as if nothing had happened and took me to the market in the old city to buy 'appropriate outfits'. He also demanded that I get rid of all my old outfits, which made me look 'like a cheap slot', even though he had bought them for me in Ukraine. I was so much in love and scared that I did what he demanded and was happy that the Mohammad I knew was back. I asked him again if I could call my mom, but he refused, saying that she had never loved me and it was not healthy and good for our family that I stayed in touch with her. He also claimed that all my friends were cheap prostitutes and that I had better cut off all communication with them. I only thought of pleasing him and making him happy, so I agreed because I thought he meant only good for me".

In the beginning, the women did not see anything "too" wrong in their husbands' desire to "protect" them from their own family and friends; they were determined to please their partners, first to make them happy, later on, to prevent them from battering and abusing.

Svetlana

"First, I thought he was right that my family and my friend did me no good; he was so convincing and just wanted to protect me. In the end, I found out that I was left with no single phone number or contact details of my parents in Ukraine or my girlfriends".

Marina

"I was even grateful to him that he had finally shown that my mom was the source of all our conflicts; I believed him and told my mom to never contact us again. He convinced me to change the phone number and block her mail address".

As the abuse was escalating, the women were becoming more helpless and isolated, and the opportunity to quit or reach out for help was becoming more and more remote. Anastasia spoke about her feelings of shame and guilt, as she did not listen to her parents:

"I couldn't tell my parents about what he was doing to me; it was unthinkable. I couldn't do this to them, and I also felt too guilty and ashamed because I did not listen to them and because I let him do those things to me".

According to all women, the abuse intensified and worsened during pregnancy, when they were particularly weak and vulnerable and could not possibly resist the abuse. Even by that time, they had already been aware that they were victims of abuse. They were not able to leave the relationships because of their condition. Svetlana remembers:

"During the first pregnancy, I gained weight, so he would laugh at me and ask, 'Who is this cow?' he also claimed that I began to disgust him and started avoiding intimacy with me. He refused to help with physical housework and became more demanding and criticising than ever. He shoved me several times; I remember having fallen in the bathroom and crying to him for help. I heard him laugh and say that I lost balance because of being too fat. I managed to get up on my own, but I had bruises all over my body".

Marina's husband prevented her from taking her contraceptives after giving birth to their first baby

daughter, making her pregnant again. Marina speaks about her husband's unmotivated aggression during pregnancy

"He pushed me to the floor and threatened to beat out the baby with his boot if I moved. After hitting me several times, he called his mother and asked her to take me to the hospital to check if the baby was alright. "She was drunk and tumbled down; I am worried for our son".

Svetlana remembered how she was abused and humiliated immediately after giving birth and returning home:

"When I came home from the hospital with my first baby, I was met by Said's two sisters, who immediately took the baby out of my hands and explained that I was unable to take care of her; they also said I wouldn't be able to breastfeed her anyways, so they give her a bottle. When I tried to breastfeed, they would gather around me saying that I should stop trying, as my breasts looked empty".

Katerina stated about losing one of her pregnancies due to her husband's violent outbreak.

"I don't know what I felt back then - I am not sure if I was sad or happy. I did not want this pregnancy anyway. Of course, I could say nothing about the real reason for the "accident" in the hospital; I couldn't tell that it was him who pushed me down the stairs and had to lie about something".

Their stay in the abusive marriage, despite all dangers, was motivated not only by helplessness and fear for their life but also by the husbands' constant threats to take their babies away, according to Muslim law; that was an additional source of fear to leave the abusive marriage. To sum up, the narratives of the three wives revealed the following themes:

- 1) The women in cross-border marriage suffered a double form of traumatising: (1) a general trauma of immigration to a very different country, and (2) their husbands' sudden transformation into an abusive person.
- 2) The abusive husbands used structural inequality, as well as cultural and socio-economic inferiority, to create the women's total depen-

dence and thereby exercise their control over the victims;

- 3) The abusers used language and culture barriers to enforce isolation and make the women cut off all communication with the outside world (source of support/help)
- 4) The abuse tended to intensify during pregnancy, even though the women were prevented from taking contraceptives.
- 5) The women were mostly abused during pregnancy, at the moment of the utmost vulnerability; the husbands used pregnancy as an additional means of control.

DISCUSSION:

This case study results showed that the cultural shock and language barrier were the major attributes of migration stress, loss of status, and socio-economic stability (Kapur & Zajicek, 2018; Kapur *et al.*, 2017). The blow certainly limits a woman's ability to act independently, which tempts a husband to exercise coercion, humiliation, and violence (Cheng, 2013; Chowbey, 2017; Hoang & Yeoh, 2015) (Han *et al.*, 2010; Kudo, 2017; Statham *et al.*, 2020). The women reported being particularly traumatised by their partners' behaviour, even more than by the trauma of migration as a larger event. It was suggested that the nature of abuse prevented those women from succeeding outside the house. In Marina's case, proficiency in the Arabic language and employment opportunities are in themselves a risk factor for domestic abuse, as they threaten Marwan's sense of power and control. The findings confirm the premise of the relative resource theory, which claims that violence against women is a source of patriarchy striving to restore male power, threatened by female income, prestige, and occupational and educational achievements (Atkinson *et al.*, 2005; Kaukinen, 2004). The husband's need to maintain his power over a woman was also expressed in his desire to have her pregnant and thus ultimately weak and unable to leave - despite a relatively young age, all three had at least two children. The participating women highlighted that abuse intensified during pregnancy and immediately after birth. One of the husbands prevented his wife from using contraceptives. The factor of dependence was among the most prominent variables leading to abuse: the cross-border marriage had situated the woman in a position of inherent vulnerability, thereby enabling an abusive partner to take further

advantage of this state of dependence by limiting her resources and mobility. The framework of cross-border marriages inspires, facilitates, and encourages domestic abuse against women by denying a woman her previous status, damaging her subjectivity and subjugating her to the foreign hierarchies of power and structural inequalities. The intersections of violence against cross-border wives create a specific trajectory of domestic abuse: a combination of gender and immigration status with a patriarchal mindset, abusive personality, and communal enabling, in terms of the theories of intersectionality (Erez *et al.*, 2009). None of the women had even thought of reaching out for help for a variety of reasons: shame and lack of language proficiency, fear of the abuse escalation, fear of losing custody over children, and lack of support systems and financial resources. In addition, cultural indulgence and legal lenience for wife-battering in Arab society may have constituted the main reason that prevented those women from exposing the problem and seeking help. The findings emphasise that reaching for help is also a matter of intersectionality and, therefore, should be separately addressed while studying violence against women in cross-border families.

CONCLUSION:

The data obtained from the women's narratives of cross-border victimisation support previous findings and theoretical premises. As a result of their exposure to multiple intersecting pressures, women in cross-border marriages are a particularly vulnerable population. Many internal and external factors contribute to abuse, including the trauma of migration and losing social and economic stability, gender, the patriarchal culture of Arab society, men's need to control others through violence and coercion, language barriers, and relying on others for money. Isolation as a natural consequence of immigration and isolation as a coercive technique employed by an abuser work together to exacerbate the abuse and prevent a woman from seeking assistance. In addition, pregnancy and childbearing appeared to be a particular risk factor for perpetrating domestic violence against cross-border spouses, as it is a debilitating condition that makes a woman particularly vulnerable.

Limitations

The sample size was too small, and husbands were not interviewed. This study addressed sociological UniversePG | www.universepg.com

variables only and did not discuss personal, legal, socio-economic, and other factors which might otherwise contribute to grasping the complete picture. Furthermore, interviewing at least one husband could shed more light on the women's narrative and explain certain events they were referring to from the position of a victim; of course, not to justify the perpetrator or call into question the credibility of the women's narrative but rather with the purpose to understand sociological variables and intersectionality.

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The authors declare no conflicting interest in the present article.

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