

Perception of Unmarried Men about Domestic Violence and Traditional Harmful Masculinity

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Abstract

This study investigated the perceptions of unmarried men living in Lahore toward domestic violence and harmful traditional masculinity. Additionally, this study examined the role of socioeconomic factors influencing unmarried men's perceptions of domestic violence and harmful traditional masculine traits. The cross-sectional survey included 470 men aged 24-35 who were unmarried and belonged to three separate groups using purposive sampling. These groups included final-year university students, employed men with degrees, and unmarried men without degrees. The Attitudes toward Domestic Violence Scale and short Man Box Scale along with a demographic form were used for data collection. Inferential statistics were used for data analysis. The results found that traditional harmful masculinity traits are positively linked with all aspects of attitudes toward domestic violence. Although most background characteristics did not have statistically significant correlations to the study's findings, statistically significant differences were found in factors related to mothers' employment status, mothers' education level, occupation category, birth order, media habits, and levels of organizational membership were found. Consequently, the research indicates that early family socialization and environment at home as well as exposure to different types of media could play a role in shaping unmarried males' attitudes toward violence. Therefore, prevention programs that promote healthy masculinity before marriage may be helpful in reducing the rate of domestic violence.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, Masculinity, Belief, Husbands

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1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, domestic violence continues to be one of the most common forms of abuse (Dobash & Dobash, 2017; Mazibuko & Umejesi, 2015). Approximately one in three women worldwide have experienced sexual or physical violence from an intimate partner at some point in their life (WHO, 2021). Domestic violence is not only about causing an injury to someone; it has severe long-lasting psychological effects, economic disenfranchisement, and creates intergenerational cycles of violence (Devries et al., 2013). In addition to being psychologically harmful, domestic violence has a direct global economic cost estimated to run into trillions of dollars annually in healthcare costs, lost productivity due to injury or an inability to work due to fear of being abused, and legal costs associated with prosecuting domestic violence offenders (UN Women, 2022). The continued epidemic of domestic

violence worldwide presents a challenge to overall public health in the affected nations involved and impedes many of the goals of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Boys are socialized into rigid models of masculinity that reward the use of coercive power and frame violence as a legitimate way to exert authority across many cultures (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This creates a fertile environment for domestic violence, as men who have internalized toxic masculine norms are significantly more likely to commit violence against their intimate partners (Jewkes et al., 2015). In patriarchal societies, toxic masculinity has transitioned into a structurally mandated directive, reinforced by legal, economic, and family systems, that privilege male authority and diminish the autonomy of women (Heise et al., 2019). As a result, there is a great deal of normalization of domestic violence, making it acceptable behavior, to both society and those who perpetrate the abuse, and this power imbalance leaves the victims of domestic violence with few options to seek help (Flood & Pease, 2009). Therefore, male perceptions of masculinity and violence must be understood to examine the ways the internalized dictums of patriarchy within these structures sustain the systemic impunity associated with domestic violence.

It has been widely reported that a country's development is also hampered by domestic violence, because domestic violence limits the ability of women to participate in the workforce, creates strain on public services, and creates an intergenerational cycle of poverty and violence (Ouedraogo & Stenzel, 2021). In Pakistan, the scenario is the same, and domestic violence is a severe problem that affects people especially girls from different socioeconomic backgrounds and geographical areas (Ahmad, 2023; Yusuf et al., 2024). The severity of the situation in Pakistan is further documented in the Global Gender Gap Report 2025, which places Pakistan at the bottom, ranking 148th out of 148 countries, indicating major disparities in education, economic participation, and political participation (World Economic Forum, 2025). Moreover, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) reports that more than 90% of women have experienced some form of domestic abuse in their lives (Ali & Inam, 2023). Additionally, it has been reported that the majority of those who experience domestic violence do not report because of social stigma and the internalization of violence as a normal aspect of their lives (UNFPA, 2023).

In Pakistan, data from the National Commission on the Status of Women and the Sustainable Social Development Organization indicates Punjab had the most reported incidents with 1,167 cases of domestic violence in 2024 (SSDO, 2025). Sindh reported 19.8% of cases involving crimes against women. Meanwhile, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan showed fewer cases, often because of differences in legal reporting and barriers preventing complaints (NCSW, 2024). Population density and district-level support services influence these regional trends, often hiding the abuse realities in remote rural areas (SSDO, 2025).

Pakistan has a deeply embedded culture that expects males to embody the traits of masculinity, strength, and power (Bhana, 2003; Qazi & Shah, 2025), leading to male aggression and the creation of violent acts of masculinity as a means through which men can gain power, while women's reliance on men is legitimized through limited religious understandings of assigned gender roles (Saeed, 2012; Kabir et al., 2017). Therefore, many men use violence as a means of meeting their perceived obligation to be physically strong, honor their family, or fulfill their expectations associated with masculinity (Makhanya, 2023; Kabir et al., 2017). Moreover, patriarchal culture allows men to abuse women to discipline them (Hadi, 2017). These cultural norms are not the only things driving violence; other important factors contributing to violence against women include low levels of education, unemployment, financial dependence on male relatives, women not knowing their rights, and significant differences in socioeconomic status. These factors drive the level and frequency of violence experienced by women living in rural areas that have limited oversight and little to no legal protections (Asghar et al., 2025; Jewkes & Morrell, 2018; Mshweshwe, 2018).

The consequences of violence against women are severe and can affect victims' ability to function normally in multiple dimensions and include physical injuries; emotional pain; sexual abuse; and economic exploitation (Asghar et al., 2025). Imposing traditional masculine ideals on men negatively impacts women's health-seeking behavior in Pakistan and increases their vulnerability during pregnancy due to fear of retribution (Kabir et al., 2017; Madhani et al., 2017). Simultaneously, traditional masculinity ideology forces men to not express emotions and to be more aggressive than normal (Fox et al., 2014; Khan, 2007; Rabbani et al., 2008) which places an undue burden on men who suffer from mental illness, engage in risky behavior, and react violently in response to any perceived threat to their "valuable manhood" (Makhanya, 2023; Walther et al., 2023). Men that are unprepared for healthy marital roles and are hesitant to seek out assistance alter the family dynamic (Ali et al., 2021), creating a toxic cycle of learned abuse across generations (Kabir et al., 2017). Therefore, it is imperative to address the negative norms that support gender-based violence.

To challenge cultural norms related to domestic violence, and raise awareness, educate, and achieve gender equality, it's necessary to create a culture without violence against women (Fatima, 2020). This involves acknowledging the link between domestic violence and toxic masculinity; this includes working to change culture and understanding of domestic violence through educational and awareness-raising campaigns. Despite government initiatives and laws (legal framework such as the three laws legislated to prevent cases of domestic violence including the Punjab Protection of Women Against Violence Act 2016; Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Act Sindh, 2013; and Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Act Balochistan, 2014), implementation challenges persist, with victims lacking legal protection and facing cultural barriers (Rashed et al., 2023; Singh & Naeema, 2021).

As mentioned above, Pakistan has enacted legislation aimed at reducing violence perpetrated against women, however, there are still significant gaps in implementation. For example, in Pakistan, many of these laws do not consider the engagement of men in violence prevention (Ali et al., 2020). Additionally, most studies that exist regarding violence against women and men do so through a quantitative lens and are informed by Western definitions of violence which limits understanding of local definitions, particularly among unmarried men (Ali et al., 2019). There is a need to promote positive masculinity and include men in conversations about gender-based violence (Ali et al., 2020; Makhanya, 2023). Further, while domestic violence is common, little research has focused on the perspective of future husbands, who may be unfamiliar with healthy aspects of masculinity (Ali et al., 2021 & Ali et al., 2019). This research addresses this gap by exploring the perception of future husbands regarding toxic masculinity and domestic violence. The purpose of this study is to identify the potential factors that might influence the perception of unmarried men about traditional masculine traits/characteristics and domestic violence. This study intends to identify the groups of individuals who do or do not endorse domestic violence and harmful masculinity traits.

1.1 Significance of the study

Despite regulations and increasing levels of societal awareness, the incidence of domestic violence within Pakistan remains high as discussed above. Unfortunately, the media is attempting to romanticize harmful standards of masculinity within marriage which can have an impact on young people, particularly males (Zulfiqar et al., 2023). Traditional masculine gender roles and associated concepts, such as honour (izzat) and the idea of males being the guardians of their families, have been instilled in males in Pakistan since childhood and permit men to use aggression to maintain the family structure and the women's submissiveness (Ali et al., 2020). Unmarried males are of particular interest because their views on masculinity and domestic violence will largely shape the nature of family and gender relationships for future generations (Pulerwitz et al., 2019). This study thus highlights the need to design sensitization programs for young men to disrupt the cycle of toxic masculinity that is passed down from fathers to sons and transform the future of domestic life in Pakistan. This research can help policymakers design initiatives or interventions for boys to adopt healthy forms of masculinity and eliminate the pressure of adopting traditional masculine traits in their private and professional lives. This, consequently, will promote the well-being of families in society.

1.2 Objectives

- To examine the perceptions of unmarried men regarding the prevalence of domestic violence and adherence to traditional harmful masculine traits

- To identify socioeconomic and familial factors that influence unmarried men's perceptions of domestic violence and adherence to traditional masculine traits
- To assess the relationship between traditional harmful masculine traits and domestic violence
- To suggest evidence-based strategies to nurture gender-sensitive future husbands and fathers.

1.3 Hypotheses

- H1: There is a correlation between adherence to traditional harmful masculine traits and attitudes toward domestic violence among unmarried men.
- H2: There is a relationship between age, income, and unmarried men's perceptions of domestic violence and traditional harmful masculine traits.
- H3: Unmarried men from different socioeconomic settings including level of education and occupation tend to differ in their perceptions of domestic violence and traditional harmful masculine traits.
- H4: Unmarried men's perceptions about domestic violence and traditional masculine traits are likely to differ based on their preferences related to media programs, different social and cultural factors, including rural/urban background, caste, political or religious group affiliation.
- H5: Familial background, including parental education and employment status, birth order, and exposure to domestic violence, tends to influence unmarried men's perceptions of domestic violence and traditional masculine traits

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Globally, scholars suggest that domestic violence is grounded in the creation of males' characteristics by society in which they live and the institutions that promote men's dominance. This creates a view of masculinity that is male-dominated and shapes the behavior of men (Ani, & Katende-Kyenda, 2025; Graaff & Heineken, 2017; Jewkes & Morrell, 2018). Masculinity is an idea that is fluid and can change over time due to the influence of socialization, culture, and traditional images of masculinity. The research has pointed to patriarchy and traditional masculinity as the primary factors that perpetuate violence against women (Fox et al., 2014; Hamberger et al., 2017; Khan, 2007; Rabbani et al., 2008). These systems create a male-dominated, hierarchical society so that men can use violence as a means of maintaining their dominance.

According to the literature, men's behaviors, health habits, and social connections are largely shaped by the ways in which they express masculine ideals (Harland & McCready 2015). For instance, hypermasculinity, which includes dominant personalities that are emotionally repressed and exhibit

aggressive forms of assertiveness, is also associated with an increased risk of committing domestic violence (Brown, 2016). Following traditional masculine standards is also related to dangerous or unhealthy attitudes and behaviors that affect not only the individual but also other people (Norton-Baker, 2020). Toxic masculinity and masculine honor provide a theoretical foundation for understanding how social expectations of strength, dominance, and reputation can help rationalize the use of violence to protect or establish one's identity or status (Anderson & Umberson, 2001; Ward et al., 2006). Studies have indicated that when men's masculine identities are threatened, they may resort to violent behavior to restore their control (Connell, 2017; Jewkes & Morrell, 2018; Morrell et al., 2012).

Socioeconomic conditions interact with masculine norms to increase domestic violence risk. Studies regularly find links between poverty, joblessness, financial stress, and more domestic violence (Adams et al., 2012; Ahmadabadi et al., 2020; Bassuk et al., 2006; Bhalotra et al., 2021; Slabbert, 2017). Masculinity often connects strongly to being the provider. Therefore, job loss or low earnings can create stress and identity struggles which can lead to increased frustration and stress and may result in violence. Younger men in poorer communities seem more vulnerable to these pressures (Barker & Loewenstein, 1997; Diop-Sidibé et al., 2006; Sánchez-Rodríguez et al., 2019).

Evidence regarding the relationship between age and the perpetration of domestic violence suggests that this crime affects populations differently throughout their lifetimes. Younger men in many circumstances appear to be more likely to engage in domestic violence (Peterman et al., 2015; Wang, 2016). Similarly, birth order was also reported as an important factor in practicing aggressive behavior (Marleau & Saucier, 2005). Employment contexts and overall societal structures have also influenced the masculine characteristics that shape the norms of violence exhibited by men. For example, men's involvement with occupations dominated by one gender (either male or female) is linked with their likelihood of committing domestic violence; a few studies show that men employed in certain occupations are more likely to be perpetrators of domestic violence (Garg et al., 2019; Melzer, 2002). Work-induced stress has been linked to domestic abuse among families (Anderson & Lo, 2011) as well as to job-related settings encouraging males to develop traditional expectations of masculinity and strengthening their commitment to following norms of dominance (Milner et al., 2018); which indicates that workplaces can act as a second level of masculine formation.

Education is one more variable affecting belief about manhood and responses to intimate partner abuse. Research has demonstrated that lower levels of education correlate with greater support for conventional masculine norms and greater tolerance for violence (Davis, 2013; Jakupcak et al., 2002). Because of this possible relationship, education might provide a safeguard through developing critical analytic skills regarding gender norms, thereby lowering acceptance of coercive behavior.

Many cultural and structural factors such as caste, ethnicity, religion, geographic location and rural-urban differences have a significant effect on

the way gender hierarchies and violence patterns develop (Ackerson & Subramanian, 2008; Atteraya et al., 2015; Messerschmidt, 2018; Moffatt, 2012; Silva, 2022). Rural men have been known to adhere strongly to traditional definitions of masculinity and have reported higher rates of violence compared with urban areas (Buriro & Ali 2025; Carnahan et al., 2018). Media also plays an important role in reinforcing gender norms by influencing society's perceptions of appropriate masculine and feminine behaviors (Gürkan, 2017). Furthermore, use of alcohol and drugs has been linked to increased aggression and domestic violence risk (Foran & O'Leary, 2008).

Family structure and intergenerational relationships also play a role. Evidence shows more domestic violence in extended or joint families than in nuclear ones in some places (Marcell et al., 2011). The education level of parents and how they relate to their children affect child development. Likewise, exposure to interparental violence is linked to long-lasting psychological and behavioral effects (Feinberg et al., 2016; Kelly & Johnson, 2008). When violence gets passed down from one generation to another, children who experience domestic violence often repeat aggressive patterns as adults (Eriksson & Mazerolle, 2015). From a structural view, legal and institutional responses still matter a lot. Scholars say state accountability is needed when domestic violence persists due to inadequate prevention, enforcement, or prosecution mechanisms (Moore, 2003). Media organizations also play a significant role in public awareness and changing norms when they follow responsible regulatory guidelines (Honig, 1993).

Even though a great deal of academic research connects several facets of patriarchal structures, the beliefs and ideas associated with traditional masculinity, and the economic pressures surrounding these issues to domestic violence, there are still gaps that remain underexplored. Most of the existing literature is limited to looking at domestic violence only involving males who are married or cohabiting, and far less literature examines the ways unmarried males view, understand, and construct normative definitions of domestic violence while they are still in their early adulthood when many of their normative beliefs around gender are still being formed. Additionally, while a significant amount of the existing body of knowledge includes looking solely at perpetration rates of domestic violence and the risk factors for perpetration, there has not been much investigation into how unmarried males develop their image, identity, and ideas about domestic violence, as well as what males learn from their engagement with masculinity.

Many previous studies assess masculinity as a broad concept. This limits the study's analysis of the different factors that shape an individual's understanding of masculine identity (such as educational level, employment status, urban/rural residence, caste group, religion, and age), specifically unmarried males. There is a scarcity of evidence in the South Asian context. This is particularly evident in understanding how inequities built into structural systems and local gender systems affect unmarried men's perceptions regarding their masculinity. Furthermore, there is little research

regarding the behaviors that develop before marriage dictated by societal beliefs about desirable forms of masculinity. This knowledge gap creates barriers for developing early strategies to change harmful versus healthy masculine norms before they have been integrated into long-term intimate relationships.

This research contributes significantly to the existing body of Pakistani literature that focuses exclusively on women as victims and lacks an adequate examination of how socioeconomic factors influence this pattern (Ali et al., 2011; Raza & Pals, 2024). Research examining the prevalence of domestic violence among women in Pakistan contains estimates ranging from 70% to 85% of women exposed to spousal abuse; however, little emphasis has been placed on the pre-marital development phase of men's perspectives of violence (Raza & Pals, 2024). It is essential to comprehend the way future husbands perceive their roles in the family because many patriarchal gender roles, especially those related to masculinity, such as "street macho," are ingrained in boys at a young age and thus carry over into their adult lives (Ali et al., 2017). As male perpetrators of domestic violence are often found to act within rigid gender structures, targeting unmarried men is a means of identifying and addressing harmful attitudes before they become apparent in marital conflict (Buriro & Ali, 2025; Ali et al., 2017).

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This is based on Connell's (1995) idea of masculinity which focuses on different types of masculinity and the ways in which masculinity is connected to dominance. Robert Connell identified four types of masculinities. These types are hegemonic, subordinate, marginal and complicit masculinity. As Connell (1995) states, masculinity is not a uniform and ageless phenomenon but instead exists in varying ways throughout history, geography, class, culture, and affective experiences such as ethnicity and sexuality. There are many "masculinities" or forms of expressing masculinity in societies across the world (Fernández-Álvarez, 2014; Cummins, 2022), however, using the framework developed by Connell will help researchers analyze the local concept of masculinity and its perceived manifestations of masculinity within gender relations in Pakistan. Hegemonic masculinity can therefore provide a clear example for understanding the relationship between masculine beliefs that perpetuate domestic violence and attitudes toward such actions.

The Man Box Scale measures traits associated with harmful masculinity, which measures the extent to which a boy internalizes hegemonic norms that privilege men. Attitudes towards violence in domestic situations (like controlling and possessive behavior, controlling and possessive verbal behavior, and controlling and possessive financial behavior) are thought to reflect how individuals behave toward other men and women. Power Control Theory (Hagan et al., 1990) further enhances this framework by explaining the ways patriarchal families allow men to use authority over women. By allowing men to control women, patriarchal families create an environment where men feel they can justify using violence against women. This concept

explains, in this study, men's perceptions of dominating and controlling women.

2.2 Power-control Theory

This scientific model is based on John Hagan's Power Control Theory (1990), which emphasizes the importance of establishing dominance and control within the family. This theory describes adaptive behavior within the home, which aids in understanding the underlying motivations of men who control their partners and maintained power within the house. According to Power Control theory hypothesis, patriarchal beliefs contribute to delinquent behavior because of the varied ways in which children are supervised at home (Hagan et al., 1990). This theory emphasizes the differences in how boys and girls are raised within their homes. In patriarchal societies, girls are strictly controlled and subjected to more regulations, whereas boys are given more independence and are consequently more likely to engage in criminal behavior. In the Pakistani context, masculinity is often associated with traditional gender roles and expectations that emphasize dominance, authority, and control. Domestic violence is a significant concern in Pakistan, with cultural beliefs and societal norms often providing justification for the use of violence to maintain control over women (Noor & Shah, 2017). The Pakistani perspective on masculinity also highlights the importance of honor and reputation within society.

3. METHOD

3.1 Research design

This study used quantitative cross-sectional survey design. Researchers chose this design to measure attitudes at one point in time and to compare groups of unmarried men. They examined links between traditional masculine traits and attitudes toward domestic violence without manipulating any variable. So, a cross-sectional approach was ideal for observing natural variations in the target population given the study's time and access limits.

3.2 Population

Men aged 24-35 years old, living either temporarily or permanently in Lahore, constituted the accessible population of this study. There were three groups in the accessible population; final-year university students, employed unmarried men with a university degree, and unmarried men without a university degree. The prior research cited provides evidence that educational achievement and labor market participation have a large impact on the way men view gender equality and how they construct their masculinity; thus, allowing for a comparison of how different socialization contexts influence views of masculinity and gender relations among these groups of participants. The chosen age group is an important transition in the life course for many men who are entering or preparing to enter adult family roles (in the Pakistani

socio-cultural context, it is considered that they will soon be getting married). As such, all three groups of participants will be a prevention-relevant population, as they have only recently begun to develop their views regarding their future roles in relationships in terms of gender relations and the family.

3.3 Sample and sampling strategy

Cochran's formula was used to determine the sample size for this study as a suggested approach for cross-sectional survey research (Cochran, 1977). A total of 384 participants were required based on the following criteria: 95% confidence level; 5% margin of error; and 50% response distribution. To increase statistical power, reduce sampling error, and account for incomplete responses from the study participants, the sample size was increased to include 470 respondents (Israel, 1992; Bartlett et al., 2001). The sample included 156 final-year MS students at public universities in various fields, and 160 unmarried employed men who had completed university, and 154 unmarried men without a university degree (whether employed or not). Due to a lack of a complete sampling frame, the researchers used a purposive sampling strategy with non-probability techniques to recruit participants from three pre-defined groups to obtain access to unmarried men in different educational and occupational backgrounds. Participants from universities were recruited from public universities, while non-university participants were recruited from their places of employment as well as community contacts in Lahore. This sampling strategy allowed the researchers to include respondents that were relevant to their specific objectives through non-probability sampling. Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that the use of purposive sampling is appropriate when the goal of the research is to gain access to a specific subgroup.

3.4 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The sample consisted of only unmarried males aged 24 to 35 and residing in Lahore (permanent or temporary) who belonged to one of the three target groups and consented to participate. Married, divorced, separated and widowed men were not included as their different experience can influence their opinion.

3.5 Tools/Instruments

This study used two standardized instruments and a separate proforma to collect demographic information. Attitudes toward domestic violence were measured through the Attitudes toward Domestic Violence Scale (Banozic, 2018), a 29-item Likert-type measure covering possessiveness and control, verbal abuse, financial abuse, and physical abuse. The scale is reported to have high internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.80, while subscales reliabilities range from 0.7 to .85 (Banozic, 2018). Traditional masculinity beliefs were measured through the short version of the Man Box Scale (Hill et al., 2020), which contains five items with reported reliability of 0.89. The Man Box Scale developed to measure internalized hegemonic

norms that are linked more specifically to harm rather than masculinity in general. Before data collection, the wording of the tools was checked for clarity and appropriateness for the culture of respondents. All scales were used after obtaining formal permission from authors. The instruments' translation from English to Urdu was done using a two-phase forward-backward translation method because many respondents preferred to respond in Urdu. To create an Urdu version of the scales, a bilingual language professional translated the scales from English into Urdu. Then, a different bilingual person translated the Urdu version back into English to ensure that it was conceptually equivalent to the original English version. Corrections were made to improve the cultural-appropriateness and clarity of the instruments based on an evaluation done by professionals. The instruments were pilot tested to determine their clarity and reliability prior to carrying out the official data collection.

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

After getting access to institutions and securing informed consent, the researcher personally contacted eligible participants who were in universities, workplaces, and community settings. Identifying details weren't recorded. Emphasis was placed on confidentiality and anonymity. Respondents were told that participation was voluntary and they could skip any question if they did not feel comfortable answering.

3.7 Ethical Guidelines

The study adhered to all ethical guidelines for social research regarding participant recruitment, data collection, data storage, and reporting of results. Informed consent was obtained from participants and from relevant organizations where access to participants was required. Participation was voluntary and the respondents' data was kept confidential and anonymous. Respondents were informed they could refuse to answer any question and could withdraw from the study at any time.

3.8 Data Analysis

In the present study, to examine male differences in their perceptions of domestic violence (in terms of four factors) and harmful traditional masculinity traits, various statistical tests, such as one-way ANOVA, post hoc Tukey's HSD, correlation, and independent sample t-test, were applied. Hypotheses 1 and 2 examined the relationships among the continuous variables of masculinity, domestic violence attitudes, age, and income using Pearson's correlations (Table 1). Hypothesis 3 used a one-way Anova to determine differences across respondents' educational levels, parental education levels, and occupations (Tables 5-8). Hypotheses 4 and 5 were assessed using independent samples t-tests for background and parental variables (Tables 2-4). The data analysis was performed using SPSS version 26.0.

4. RESULTS

Table 1: Pearson Correlation Coefficients Among Study Variables and respondents' income and age

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
Age	—					
Income	.19**	—				
Possessiveness & Control	-.01	.06	—			
Verbal Abuse	-.03	-.05	.38**	—		
Financial Abuse	-.06	-.04	.28**	.47**	—	
Physical Abuse	-.03	-.11*	.24**	.53**	.42**	—
Masculinity	-.01	-.02	.28**	.47**	.44**	.35**

$p < .05^*$, $p < .001$.

Table 2: Differences Based on Mother's Employment Status

Variable	Working M(SD)	Housewife M(SD)	t(468)	P	η^2
Possessiveness & Control	23.46 (6.40)	22.94 (4.66)	0.87	.384	
Verbal Abuse	16.80 (4.59)	18.03 (4.52)	-2.26	.024-0.27	
Financial Abuse	31.53 (7.93)	30.59 (6.38)	1.17	.243	
Physical Abuse	20.40 (5.26)	21.63 (4.67)	-2.15	.032-0.25	
Masculinity	2.61 (0.48)	2.59 (0.44)	0.45	.653	

$p < .05$.

Table 3: Differences Based on Group Affiliation of respondents (Religious/Political)

Variable	Yes M(SD)	No M(SD)	t(468)	P	η^2
Possessiveness & Control	23.02 (6.04)	23.04 (4.33)	-0.04	.968	
Verbal Abuse	16.77 (4.40)	18.40 (4.54)	-3.78	.000	-0.36
Financial Abuse	29.34 (5.73)	31.58 (7.07)	-3.54	.000	-0.35
Physical Abuse	20.19 (4.65)	22.11 (4.75)	-4.27	.000	-0.41
Masculinity	2.52 (0.43)	2.64 (0.45)	-2.68	.008	-0.27

** $p < .001$.

Table 4: Differences Based on Exposure to Domestic Violence

Variable	No M(SD)	Yes M(SD)	t(468)	P	η^2
Possessiveness & Control	22.11 (4.72)	23.77 (5.13)	-3.62	.000	-0.34
Verbal Abuse	16.91 (4.75)	18.53 (4.26)	-3.89	.000	-0.36

Variable	No M(SD)	Yes M(SD)	t(468)	P	η^2
Financial Abuse	30.10 (6.99)	31.29 (6.41)	-1.92	.056	
Physical Abuse	20.93 (4.79)	21.79 (4.79)	-1.93	.054	
Masculinity	2.55 (0.47)	2.63 (0.42)	-2.17	.031	-0.18

****** $p < .001$, $p < .05$.

Table 5: ANOVA by Education Level of Respondents

Variable	Illiterate	Intermediate	Bachelor	Master+	F	p	η^2
Possessiveness & Control	22.18 (4.39)	21.81 (4.06)	24.04 (5.55)	23.07 (5.01)	4.80	.003	.03
Verbal Abuse	17.36 (4.31)	17.73 (4.73)	17.83 (4.58)	—	0.22	.884	.001
Financial Abuse	30.79 (6.39)	31.60 (6.06)	30.27 (6.57)	—	0.85	.466	.005
Physical Abuse	21.42 (3.74)	21.83 (4.61)	20.70 (4.78)	—	1.87	.133	.011
Masculinity	2.53 (0.32)	2.57 (0.42)	2.65 (0.44)	—	1.39	.242	.008

$p < .05$.

Table 6: One-way ANOVA showing differences based on mother's education

Variable	Illiterate M(SD)	Intermediate M(SD)	Bachelor M(SD)	Master+ M(SD)	F(3, 466)	p	η^2
Possessiveness & Control	22.05 (4.24)	23.14 (4.71)	24.92 (6.02)	22.42 (5.16)	7.89	.000	.05
Verbal Abuse	17.69 (4.51)	17.74 (4.50)	18.33 (4.80)	17.24 (4.30)	0.76	.516	.004
Financial Abuse	30.39 (6.53)	29.92 (6.07)	32.01 (7.15)	31.71 (7.50)	2.45	.063	.015
Physical Abuse	21.54 (4.67)	21.06 (4.70)	21.64 (5.21)	21.30 (4.72)	0.35	.787	.002
Masculinity	2.54 (0.40)	2.58 (0.45)	2.67 (0.46)	2.64 (0.54)	2.20	.088	.013

Note. $p < .05$

Table 7: *One-way ANOVA showing differences based on respondents' profession*

Variable	Doctor	Engineer	Private	Govt	Teacher	Lawyer	Business	Other	F (7, 462)	p	η^2
Possessiveness & Control	23.42 (5.03)	24.63 (5.06)	23.23 (6.55)	22.33 (4.43)	24.49 (4.94)	23.53 (4.33)	21.32 (3.78)	22.54 (4.40)	3.36	.002	.05
Verbal Abuse	16.60 (4.75)	18.75 (4.96)	18.09 (4.29)	18.20 (3.71)	18.16 (4.34)	19.84 (4.75)	16.10 (4.43)	18.40 (4.39)	3.42	.001	.04
Physical Abuse	20.51 (4.95)	21.65 (5.76)	21.24 (4.91)	20.33 (4.94)	21.89 (4.13)	22.46 (5.72)	20.30 (4.98)	22.49 (3.85)	2.08	.044	.03
Financial Abuse	30.24 (7.57)	31.21 (7.54)	30.59 (6.85)	30.75 (5.43)	31.18 (6.72)	33.30 (6.57)	29.47 (6.09)	31.33 (6.38)	0.95	.465	.03
Masculinity	2.52 (0.57)	2.62 (0.67)	2.61 (0.47)	2.68 (0.50)	2.63 (0.42)	2.78 (0.37)	2.49 (0.47)	2.61 (0.36)	1.38	.212	.02

$p < .05$.

Table 8: *One-way ANOVA for differences based on birth order*

Variable	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5+	F(4, 465)	p	η^2
Possessiveness & Control	24.01 (6.26)	22.54 (4.20)	23.17 (4.72)	21.42 (4.31)	23.69 (3.67)	3.65	.006	.03
Financial Abuse	30.63 (6.85)	32.08 (6.51)	29.92 (6.81)	29.35 (5.55)	31.00 (7.59)	2.48	.044	.02
Verbal Abuse	17.82 (4.29)	17.85 (4.94)	17.35 (4.27)	17.98 (4.48)	18.23 (4.83)	0.34	.853	.02
Physical Abuse	21.41 (4.96)	21.80 (4.20)	20.80 (4.84)	20.98 (4.99)	22.04 (5.61)	0.90	.465	.006
Masculinity	2.58 (0.44)	2.64 (0.44)	2.59 (0.51)	2.57 (0.36)	2.51 (0.40)	0.74	.563	.006

$p < .05$.

Table 9: *One-way ANOVA showing differences based on media-related programs' preferences*

Variable	Horror	Romantic	Adventure	Comedy	Action	Animation	Other	F(6, 463)	p	η^2
Financial Abuse	31.25 (7.61)	28.79 (5.66)	30.40 (6.63)	31.19 (5.24)	33.06 (6.87)	29.88 (6.88)	31.23 (8.90)	3.30	.003	.02
Physical Abuse	21.31 (4.75)	19.90 (4.67)	21.11 (5.01)	22.13 (4.32)	22.42 (4.57)	23.62 (3.29)	22.93 (5.57)	3.64	.002	.004
Possessiveness & Control	22.71 (5.06)	22.04 (5.97)	23.27 (4.11)	23.85 (4.48)	23.10 (3.51)	23.37 (4.92)	24.00 (7.13)	1.39	.217	.04
Verbal Abuse	17.34 (4.76)	17.75 (4.34)	17.96 (4.51)	17.67 (4.68)	17.94 (4.85)	18.62 (4.80)	18.58 (3.87)	0.37	.896	.04
Masculinity	2.47 (0.49)	2.54 (0.45)	2.62 (0.40)	2.61 (0.33)	2.74 (0.46)	2.63 (0.42)	2.62 (0.50)	2.74	.013	.03

$p < .05$.

Table 1 provides evidence that masculine attitudes are associated with attitudes towards domestic violence, noting that masculinity has a statistically significant positive correlation with the four types of domestic violence. This correlation is strongest for verbal abuse and financial abuse. Age and income have very little influence on domestic violence. Respondents whose mothers were housewives rated significantly higher in verbal abuse and physical abuse than those respondents whose mothers worked (Table 2).

The data shows that respondents who witnessed domestic violence had considerably greater scores for possessiveness/control, verbal abuse and beliefs about harmful masculinity than did respondents who did not witness domestic violence. Further, social integration was shown to reduce extreme attitudes through group affiliation (religion/politics), which significantly lowered all abuse and masculinity scores (Table 3). There were no statistically significant differences between groups in relation to financial or physical abuse (Table 4).

In addition, there is evidence that challenges the assumption that education reduces controlling attitudes: respondents whose mothers had a bachelor's degree and first-born respondents had significantly higher levels of possessiveness (Tables 6 and 8). Although the respondents' level of education did not reduce justification for domestic violence (Table 5), professional identity did (Table 7): respondents who were lawyers or engineers scored higher in abusive behaviors and control, indicating that some professions have tendency to promote aggression.

The findings regarding media's influence on men's perceptions of adherence to traditional masculine traits and domestic violence are reported in Table 9. The highest scores for the domains of financial abuse or characteristics of hegemonic masculinity were found among those who regularly viewed action media; therefore, there appears to be a relationship between the genres of action media and hegemonic masculinity. Men who viewed relationship-based media (e.g., romantic) had the lowest scores for the same two domains; therefore, viewing relationship-based media appears to reduce the likelihood of men having aggressive attitudes. Men who regularly

viewed animated media had the highest score for physical abuse, which may be due to desensitization to violence in animated media. Neither possessiveness nor verbal abuse showed significant differences by viewing media types; therefore, the strongest influence of media appears to be in the overtly physical, financial, and ideological domains compared to control and verbal items.

In general, the primary psychological predictor of domestic violence attitudes was found to be harmful masculinity, which was found to be shaped by socialization rather than demographic characteristics, and group membership served as a protective factor while traditional family structures, specific professions and action-based media were classified as risk factors.

4 DISCUSSION

The study's strongest insight is finding that traditional masculinity is positively associated with all four dimensions of domestic violence attitudes. Evidence from Pakistan also shows the ways men's excuses for partner violence are influenced by gender roles which expect wives to be obedient and accommodating (Zakar et al., 2013).

The data from Tables 1- 4 show that social influences are primarily predictive of unmarried males' attitudes toward violence against their partners, and harmful masculinity; whereas demographic characteristics (e.g., age, income) have little effect. Table 1 shows a statistically significant positive relationship between masculinity and domestic violence; as such, family dynamics (tables 2, 3 and 4) influence the attitudes of unmarried males toward justifying domestic violence and maintain control in relationships. This resembles the cyclical effect of violence between generations and the power control theory of domestic violence; traditional and violent gender roles serve to create an atmosphere of acceptance toward aggressive behaviors (Eriksson & Mazerolle, 2015; Hagan et al., 1990). Therefore, early socialization is critical in shaping the beliefs of young boys about traits related to premarital masculinities (Ali et al., 2021)

The rejection of many hypotheses is useful information and should thus be treated from a theoretical perspective rather than simply disregarded entirely (Tables 5 to 9). There were no significant differences found in men's perceptions based upon their work status, rural or urban background, caste or the educational and working status of their father. A possible interpretation is that in a city like Lahore, support for controlling attitudes toward women may go beyond visible social categories and be maintained by wider patriarchal norms instead of any single demographic factor. This idea aligns with studies showing masculinities vary and their connection with violence does not reduce to simple social categories alone (Jewkes & Morrell, 2018). It also matches recent South Asian findings showing structural factors like caste and rural living can be important, but authoritarian beliefs about household and sexual autonomy more often predict attitudes toward wife-beating (Pradhan & De, 2024).

Moreover, Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) state that hegemonic masculinity is a cultural "configuration of gender practice," which legitimizes the dominant position of men (Connell & Messerschmidt). These norms are so deeply rooted in our society that well-educated and employed men continue to conform to hegemonic masculine norms to remain dominant (Mushtaq et al., 2025; Smith et al., 2015). This can be a reason of finding no influence of father's education and working status in shaping unmarried men's perception about domestic violence and traditional masculine traits. So, unsupported hypotheses don't mean social structure doesn't matter. Rather, they indicate acceptance of domestic violence in this group might be more broadly spread ideologically than expected

The family-related insights provide a clearer understanding of why some ideas have got support. Men's scores varied with their mother's job, education, and their experience with domestic violence. This suggests early family settings might be linked to later attitudes toward authority, conflict, and gender rights. This matches studies on Pakistani families which show family roles and gender hierarchies affect how partner violence is seen and accepted (Ali et al., 2021). It also aligns with research on violence across generations which links family violence to later attitudes supporting IPV (Eriksson & Mazerolle, 2015). Social learning also plays a part. People can adopt behaviors and justifications from watching them at home. Research shows that maternal education and empowerment have been linked with decreased acceptance of domestic violence and improved child health outcomes (Abreha & Zereyesus, 2020). As stated by Kabeer (2005) education can strengthen a mother's agency, which can then operate "against the grain" of patriarchal norms

The findings regarding education, profession, and organizational affiliation can be seen as partial and specific to certain areas instead of universally decisive (Table 5, 6 & 7). Respondents not affiliated with religious, political, student, or employee groups scored higher on several domestic-violence aspects and harmful traits of masculinity (Table 3). It has been suggested that men who engage with collective organizations may be exposed to alternative perspectives of talking about things, being held accountable through their peers, and being provided with structured gender education that can lessen their support of violent beliefs. Many religious and political organizations within Pakistan will also provide frameworks for behavior and community regulation which may reduce open support of abusive beliefs, although they do not necessarily challenge patriarchal ideology (Mshweshwe, 2020).

The differences in the results show that organizational affiliation is context-based rather than a blanket level of safety. Likewise, educational findings were not as clear-cut with respect to the possessiveness and controlling behavior of different groups of participants; for example, bachelor's degree holders were found to be more likely than other groups to exhibit possessive and controlling behaviors. This may indicate that increased educational attainment has not challenged the patriarchal ideology that

pervades society concerning how a man should control his wife or partner in an intimate relationship. However, it could also indicate that increased educational attainment does present an opportunity to disrupt or change attitudes or beliefs about the use of overt forms of physical or verbal abuse (Jakupcak et al., 2002). Therefore, it is conceptually wrong to claim employment or education either protects against or causes harmful masculinity based on these results. A more accurate understanding is that some institutional settings may influence specific beliefs about entitlement and control without fully changing masculinity ideology itself. This distinction helps clarify the distinction between perceptions, beliefs, and behavior: this study measured perception and beliefs, not actions of abuse.

According to Table 8, the first-born respondents scored highest in possessiveness and controlling behavior compared to later births. This supports Adlerian theory of “dethronement” that first-borns may develop controlling behavioral traits to regain their former level of dominance because they think that they might have lost their parental attention after the arrival of other siblings (Marleau & Saucier, 2005).

The role of media-related preferences was also found to be important in shaping men’s perceptions. Men who liked action films scored higher on views about financial abuse and harmful masculinity, which is not only consistent with hegemonic masculinity beliefs but also with effects of social learning. Bandura (2001) explains that media environments offer models that help people learn behavior scripts, assess social settings, and normalize certain actions. Where patriarchal authority is already socially accepted, repeated exposure to aggressive male control can strengthen existing views on power, honor, and control. It was found that media consumption may interact with existing gender norms, making some beliefs seem more valid or culturally accepted.

Overall, the pattern of accepted and rejected hypotheses shows that masculinity beliefs are the most stable explanation in this study. Meanwhile, socio-demographic factors have selective and inconsistent effects which change with context. This finding is important as it moves discussions from finding a single high-risk demographic to exploring how gender beliefs are socially reproduced across different groups. Socio-demographic predictors may differ because of a strong presence of patriarchal culture throughout Lahore regardless of socio-economic status, education level, or rural versus urban living conditions (Lakhia et al., 2024). Researchers need to develop longitudinal sampling designs based on random probability sampling with multi-site samples (or possibly using mixed methods), which can provide potential explanations for the lack of impact of certain predictor variables while still highlighting the significance of toxic masculinity within the perpetration of gender-based violence.

5. CONCLUSION

This study investigated unmarried men’s perceptions of various aspects of domestic violence and harmful masculinity traits. The findings showed that

stronger harmful masculinity beliefs consistently went along with greater acceptance of possessiveness, control, verbal abuse, financial abuse, and physical abuse. Patterns emerged based on the mother's employment status, education level, organizational affiliation, and profession, the child's order of birth, and the media they consume. However, in many cases, most of those background variables were not significant predictors of respondents' attitudes. One critical finding was that witnessing domestic violence is associated with higher scores on possessiveness and control, verbal abuse, and harmful beliefs about masculinity and therefore is a key indicator of the intergenerational cycle of violence (Eriksson & Mazerolle, 2015) and should be a priority in designing prevention programs. The non-significant relationship between rural–urban backgrounds and fathers' education levels indicates that patriarchal norms supporting domestic violence exist at all social class levels in Lahore. Interventions must not depend on demographic targeting alone but must also work toward addressing the ideological basis of harmful masculinity. The study examined unmarried men as a target group for gender-sensitive attitudes prior to marriage, whereas previous studies focused primarily on married offenders and survivors. The results from this study may help develop interventions at universities, workplaces, and in the media that work to develop gender sensitized attitudes and to promote critical evaluation of power-based concepts of masculinity. This study can be used to design training modules to promote healthy masculinity during boys' early socialization years to nurture gender-sensitive husbands, brothers, and fathers in the future.

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