



ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE STUDIES
SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY
MA PROGRAM

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF MARITAL RAPE UNDER LEGAL SILENCE IN
ETHIOPIA:
A CASE STUDY OF SURVIVORS ASSISTED BY ETHIOPIAN WOMEN LAWYERS
ASSOCIATION IN ADDIS ABABA

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June, 2026
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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A Thesis Submitted to School of Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Masters of Art in Social Psychology

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June, 2026
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

DECLARATION

I, Bethlehem Lemma, hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and that all corrections and recommendations suggested by the board of examiners have been incorporated.

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Certificate Approval

This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Bethlehem Lemma, entitled “The Psychological Impact Of Marital Rape Under Legal Silence In Ethiopia:” submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Masters of Art in Social Psychology with the regulations of the college and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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List of Abbreviations

APA – American Psychological Association

CEDAW – Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

C-PTSD – Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

EWLA – Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association

FDRE – Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

GBV – Gender-Based Violence

IPV – Intimate Partner Violence

IV – Independent Variable

DV – Dependent Variable

NCADV – National Coalition against Domestic Violence

PTSD – Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

UN – United Nations

UN Women – United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

VAW – Violence against Women

WHO – World Health Organization

Abstract

This study investigates the psychological impact of marital rape under conditions of legal silence in Ethiopia, using an interpretative phenomenological case study conducted with the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA) in Addis Ababa. The study addresses the gap in Ethiopian legal and psychological research by examining how the absence of explicit legal silence of marital rape affects survivors' psychological wellbeing, sense of justice, safety and help-seeking behavior. The investigation is anchored in the absence of legal recognition of marital rape under Article 620 of the Ethiopian Criminal Code (2004), which restricts survivors' access to justice and protection. The study aims to explore the psychological and social consequences of marital rape specifically examining trauma-related mental health outcomes, how Ethiopia's legal silence fuels helplessness and emotional suffering, social impacts on relationships and quality of life, doctrinal gaps in legal and psychological protection, and how legal barriers shape survivors' help-seeking behavior. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews for survivors and expert questionnaires for EWLA professionals. The data were then subjected to thematic analysis. Findings show the existence of severe and multi-faceted psychological harm to the survivors. The participants spoke of an ongoing fear, anxieties, depression and emotional turmoil together with a deep and extensive erosion of dignity, self-esteem and integrity. Elements consistent with the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) include flashbacks and intrusions, chronic hyper vigilance and disturbance of sleep, with experiences of complete numbness, self-blame and damaging thoughts leading to despair in critical instances. Secondly, The findings also show that the legal silence exacerbates the psychological injuries by validating survivors' experiences, creating helplessness and reducing the remedies to divorce as opposed to justice. Thirdly, the factors that contributed significantly to survivors' isolation, silence and reduced quality of life are social stigma, community pressure and financial dependence. The study brings forth the existence of an actively injurious legal silence and the need for a greater emphasis on comprehensive support mechanisms, emphasizing the immediate need for a critical re-examination of the criminalization of marital rape within the legal system along with a coordinated approach through integrated legal and psychosocial systems.

Keywords: Marital rape, legal silence, psychological trauma, IPA, gender-based violence, PTSD, women's rights, legal reform.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This chapter presents the introductory section of this research. This is aimed to include background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions, objective of the study, scope and operational definitions.

1.1. Background of the Study

Sexual violence is recognized globally as a major public health and human rights concern. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) defines sexual violence as any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, regardless of the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. Within this broader category, marital rape refers to non-consensual sexual intercourse or other sexual acts committed by a spouse against his or her marital partner. Unlike stranger rape, marital rape occurs within an intimate relationship where trust, emotional attachment, and social expectations of marriage often obscure recognition of the abuse and create barriers to disclosure and help-seeking (Jewkes et al., 2020).

Marital rape differs from other forms of intimate partner violence (IPV) because its primary feature is the violation of sexual autonomy and consent within marriage. While physical violence involves bodily assault and psychological violence includes emotional abuse, intimidation, and controlling behaviors, marital rape specifically concerns forced or coerced sexual activity by a spouse without voluntary consent. Although marital rape frequently coexists with physical and psychological abuse, studies have shown that it produces unique psychological consequences such as sexual trauma, feelings of betrayal, loss of bodily autonomy, and profound disruptions in intimate relationships (Campbell et al., 2018; Dworkin et al., 2017). Therefore, treating marital rape merely as a component of general domestic violence may overlook its distinct psychological and legal implications.

Previous studies have documented the prevalence and consequences of marital rape across

different countries. For example, McCormack et al. (2022) found that women are more likely to experience sexual violence from current or former intimate partners than from strangers. Similarly, Victorio and Brisa (2023) reported that approximately 10–14% of married women in several study settings had experienced forced sexual acts by their spouses. These studies consistently demonstrate that marital rape is associated with depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), emotional withdrawal, and reduced social functioning. However, most of these studies were conducted in Western or Asian contexts where legal recognition of marital rape exists to varying degrees. As a result, their findings may not adequately explain the experiences of survivors living in countries where marital rape remains legally unrecognized or insufficiently addressed.

The concept of legal silence is particularly important in understanding survivors' experiences. Legal silence refers to the absence of explicit legal recognition, criminalization, enforcement mechanisms, or judicial responses regarding a particular harmful act. In the context of marital rape, legal silence extends beyond the mere absence of statutory provisions criminalizing the act. It also includes the failure of legal institutions to recognize marital rape as a distinct offense, the lack of clear procedures for investigation and prosecution, and the limited availability of legal remedies for survivors (MacKinnon, 2017; Freeman, 2020). Scholars argue that such legal silence contributes to structural violence because it minimizes the seriousness of survivors' experiences and weakens access to justice. Consequently, victims may perceive reporting as futile and may internalize feelings of helplessness and self-blame.

Trauma theory provides an important framework for understanding the psychological effects of marital rape. Herman (2015) and Cloitre et al. (2019) argue that repeated interpersonal trauma, particularly when committed by a trusted partner, undermines an individual's sense of safety, control, and self-worth. Unlike single incidents of sexual assault, marital rape often occurs repeatedly within an ongoing relationship, making it difficult for survivors to escape or seek support. Research has shown that survivors frequently experience feelings of powerlessness, shame, self-blame, and emotional isolation, which may affect their ability to make independent decisions regarding their safety and future relationships (Anderson & Saunders, 2018).

In Ethiopia, evidence suggests that sexual violence within marriage remains a significant but underreported problem. The Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey (EDHS, 2016) reported that a substantial proportion of ever-married women experienced various forms of intimate partner violence, including sexual violence by husbands or partners. Other Ethiopian studies have identified cultural norms supporting male dominance in marital relationships, limited awareness of sexual consent within marriage, fear of social stigma, and economic dependence as factors contributing to women's vulnerability and silence regarding marital rape (Yigzaw, 2019; Woldu, 2019). Despite these findings, empirical research focusing specifically on marital rape remains limited, and much of the available literature addresses intimate partner violence broadly rather than examining the unique psychological and legal dimensions of marital rape.

The legal context in Ethiopia further complicates survivors' experiences. Although Ethiopia is a signatory to international human rights instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Ethiopian Criminal Code does not explicitly criminalize marital rape. Scholars have argued that this legal gap creates uncertainty regarding protection and accountability, thereby limiting survivors' access to justice and reinforcing societal perceptions that forced sex within marriage is a private matter rather than a criminal act (Yigzaw, 2019; Woldu, 2019). However, existing Ethiopian studies have primarily focused on legal analysis or prevalence estimates and have paid limited attention to how survivors themselves interpret and experience the interaction between psychological trauma and legal silence.

The Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA) has played a significant role in providing legal assistance, psychosocial support, and advocacy for women affected by gender-based violence. Nevertheless, there remains limited qualitative evidence exploring how survivors understand and navigate the psychological consequences of marital rape in a context where legal recognition remains unclear. Furthermore, few studies have employed an interpretative phenomenological approach to examine the lived experiences of survivors and the meaning they attach to both trauma and legal silence. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by exploring the psychological experiences of marital rape survivors and their perceptions of legal

silence in Ethiopia through an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) case study approach.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Sexual violence within marriage remains one of the most hidden and least addressed forms of gender-based violence worldwide. Although international human rights frameworks recognize that marriage does not extinguish an individual's right to bodily autonomy and sexual consent, marital rape continues to be inadequately recognized in many legal systems (UN Women, 2020). Research conducted across different countries has consistently shown that women who experience sexual violence by an intimate partner face serious psychological consequences, including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), emotional numbing, and diminished self-worth (Campbell et al., 2018; WHO, 2021). Unlike stranger rape, marital rape occurs within an intimate relationship characterized by trust, emotional attachment, and social expectations of loyalty. Consequently, survivors often experience a deeper sense of betrayal, loss of safety, and disruption of personal identity, which may intensify the psychological impact of the abuse (Van der Kolk, 2014).

Existing research on intimate partner violence has contributed significantly to understanding violence against women. Studies have documented the prevalence, causes, and consequences of domestic violence and identified factors such as gender inequality, patriarchal norms, and unequal power relations within households as major contributors to women's victimization. However, many of these studies examine sexual violence as one component of intimate partner violence rather than focusing specifically on marital rape as a distinct form of abuse. As a result, the unique psychological and social experiences associated with forced sexual relations within marriage remain insufficiently explored.

Legal studies have also examined the protection of women from gender-based violence and have identified gaps within legal frameworks addressing violence against women. In Ethiopia, rape is criminalized under Article 620 of the Criminal Code; however, the law does not explicitly recognize marital rape as a criminal offense (FDRE, 2004). Existing legal scholarship has largely focused on legislative shortcomings, women's rights, and Ethiopia's commitments

under international human rights conventions (Yigzaw, 2019). While these studies highlight the legal gap, they provide limited insight into how survivors themselves experience the consequences of living in a context where marital rape lacks explicit legal recognition.

The concept of legal silence requires particular attention. In this study, legal silence refers not only to the absence of explicit criminalization of marital rape but also to the lack of clear legal recognition, protection mechanisms, and effective institutional responses available to survivors. Scholars argue that such silence may function as a form of structural exclusion by communicating that the harm experienced by survivors is less worthy of legal attention and protection than other forms of sexual violence. Consequently, legal silence may create additional psychological burdens beyond the trauma caused by the rape itself.

Psychological research has extensively documented the effects of sexual violence on survivors' mental health, including trauma, shame, self-blame, fear, and social withdrawal (Cloitre et al., 2020). However, relatively little research has examined how legal contexts shape these psychological experiences. Specifically, there is limited understanding of how the absence of legal recognition affects survivors' sense of justice, safety, dignity, self-worth, and willingness to seek help. Therefore, an important unanswered question remains: how does the psychological impact of legal silence differ from, or compound, the trauma resulting from marital rape itself?

In Ethiopia, empirical research specifically addressing marital rape remains scarce. Most available studies focus broadly on domestic violence, gender-based violence, or legal analysis, while few examine marital rape as a distinct phenomenon. Furthermore, limited research has explored survivors' lived experiences of both marital rape and legal silence simultaneously. Consequently, there remains a significant gap in understanding how legal non-recognition influences the psychological wellbeing, coping experiences, and help-seeking behaviors of survivors.

Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by exploring how the absence of explicit legal recognition of marital rape shapes survivors' psychological wellbeing, perceptions of justice, sense of safety, and help-seeking behavior in the Ethiopian context. By examining

survivors' lived experiences, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between marital rape, legal silence, and psychological trauma, while providing evidence to inform survivor-centered interventions and legal reform efforts.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the psychological consequences of marital rape trauma among survivors seeking support from EWLA?
2. How does the legal silence surrounding marital rape in Ethiopia contribute to survivors' feelings of helplessness, worthlessness, and emotional suffering?
3. What are the social consequences of marital rape on survivors' social relationships, family life, and overall quality of life?
4. What doctrinal limitations exist within Ethiopian law in addressing marital rape and providing legal and psychological protection for survivors?
5. How do legal and institutional barriers affect survivors' help-seeking behavior and access to support services at EWLA?

1.4 Objectives of the study

1.4.1. General Objective

The general objective of this study is to explore the psychological and social consequences of marital rape on female survivors seeking help from EWLA and to discuss how the experiences are intensified by the "legal silence" in Ethiopia's legal system.

1.4.2. Specific Objectives

1. To examine the psychological consequences of marital rape trauma, including PTSD, depression, and anxiety, among survivors seeking support from EWLA.
2. To analyze the legal silence surrounding marital rape in Ethiopia and examine how it contributes to survivors' feelings of helplessness and emotional suffering.
3. To explore the social consequences of marital rape on survivors' social relationships, family life, and quality of life.
4. To examine the doctrinal limitations of Ethiopian law in addressing marital rape and providing legal and psychological protection for survivors.

5. To examine how legal and institutional barriers affect survivors' help-seeking behavior and access to support services at EWLA.

1.5 Significance of the study

This study is academically significant because it examines marital rape in Ethiopia through the combined lenses of legal silence, psychological trauma, and gender-based violence. Firstly, it contributes to understanding the scope and scale of the problem and a high prevalence of marital rape in Ethiopia involving physical coercion, insults and violence if the woman refused to comply (EWLA, 2008). This exemplifies that marital rape is a broad, systemic, gender based violence affecting widely socially sanctioned relationships. Researchers draw from statistics to attempt to uncover a tainted reality.

Secondly, this report contributes to legal research by exploring the indecency of state silence over criminalizing marital rape in Ethiopia. Although the human dignity clause appears to make marital rape criminal (the recognition of one's personhood through state protection) the law remains silent (Yigzaw, 2019). There is no mention of the consequences of desecrating marital sanctity and therefore no state recognition or remedy.

Third, this study expands knowledge on psychological consequences of marital rape. Sexual violence leaves chronic mental health and behavioral repercussions, such as stress, depression, emotional detachment, reduced self-esteem, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Victorio & Brisa, 2023). Marital rape compounds other types of sexual violence with betrayal, enforcement, and coercion. When communities and policies deny the experience, women are further psychologically wounded. From a trauma perspective, this work recognizes the mental trauma not just as legal but as visceral, affecting survivors' world and self-view (Maté, 2022).

Fourth, this research disrupts the bias that marital rape is normative. While many societies and institutions do sanction the notion of marital ignorance, the experiences documented in the stories of women clearly attribute that ignorance to rape. This and other studies further indicate that inadequate legislation serves to undermine protections and reinforce

that marital disrespect of women's sexuality, and that interventions should strengthen laws and resist the socially unacceptable idea of ignoring women's experience in the home.

Based on this background, then, few have analyzed how both psychically and legally silence in this context renders survivors invisible and voiceless in Ethiopia. The study contributes to this understanding by framing marital rape as a legal and mental health issue. This research has policy, advocacy and legal practice implications.

1.6 Scope of the study

The research examines the psychological impact of marital rape on women and how denial of its legal recognition contributes to their emotional trauma. The research follows a qualitative study on the experiences of women who suffered from marital rape, and whose cases are supported by EWLA, in the form of legal assistance. The study emphasizes the survivors' subjective experiences, emotional reactions and coping strategies rather than prevalence rate and statistical data.

The research primarily adopts doctrinal legal analysis which systematically analyzing the Ethiopian Constitutional Law, the Criminal Code, the Revised Family Code and other pertinent norms to see if and how marital rape is recognized, dealt with or simply glossed over in the law, including through identification of the legal rules, and analysis of cases to pinpoint issues or inconsistencies. The research also incorporates pertinent international and regional human rights laws that Ethiopia ratified, namely the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (hereinafter CEDAW) and the Maputo Protocol, to determine what Ethiopia is legally required to do.

Thematic scope: the research is limited to the psychological and emotional harm suffered from marital rape excluding comprehensive health assessment. The trauma discussion is only connected to the legal understanding, and getting justice.

The research is geographically confined to Ethiopia and is temporally restricted to examining existing laws, and practices. The research does not attempt to analyze comparatively with other jurisdictions, unless otherwise briefly mentioned as a point of context.

The study's scope is thus limited to married women who experienced marital rape and sought aid at EWLA in Addis Ababa and focused on psychological trauma such as fear and anxiety, depression, emotional numbness, loss of trust, and feeling of invisibility and helplessness. Besides, the study entails a doctrinal review of relevant legal frameworks to contextualize survivors' experience of legal silence. The study is intended to generate in depth understanding rather than generalizable findings.

1.7 Operational Definitions

Marital rape: means any non-consensual vaginal, anal, or oral penetration, or any sexual contact without consent, where a legal or customary spouse uses force, threats, or psychological pressure.

Psychological trauma: refers to the inner wounds left behind by marital rape. It is a form of what may look like PTSD in this study: emotionally absent, hyper-vigilant, or losing control and dignity in life.

Legal silence: This term represents a lacuna in the Ethiopian Criminal Code (2004), that is, the absence of legal regulation of marital rape within the Ethiopian Criminal Code and the lack of clear legal remedies for survivors of non-consensual sex within marriage.

Gender-based violence: covers harm like physical, sexual, psychological, or financial abuse aimed at women, simply because they're women. Here, we look at marital rape as one type of gender-based violence that happens inside marriage.

Doctrinal Legal Analysis; Doctrinal legal analysis refers to the analysis and interpretation of legal literature, such as constitutional provisions, legislations, and international human rights instruments, to examine the position of marital rape and its impact as per the Ethiopian legal system.

Consent means: saying yes to sex freely, knowingly, and without pressure. In this study, consent isn't something you give once and for all. You can take it back any time, no matter what. Just being married doesn't mean you've given consent.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the relevant literature for the study's variables: marital rape psychological trauma and legal silence. The objectives of this chapter are to define central concepts, describe assessment methods, and present theoretical frameworks related to the study's dependent and independent variables, and to review empirical research on the relationships between these variables and how they vary according to socio-demographic factors. Chapter concludes with a review of the study's conceptual framework.

2.2 Marital Rape

2.2.1 Concept of Marital Rape

Marital Rape also referred to as Spousal rape, occurs when one partner compels another to have sexual intercourse through vaginal, anal or oral penetration without obtaining free and explicit consent (Bulus, 2024). It can be termed an intimate partner abuse and domestic violence, where one uses physical strength, intimidation, or psychological pressure to subjugate another individual within a marital relationship (Dworkin et al., 2017; WHO, 2021). It is highly traumatic because it occurs within the marriage, where mutual trust and security should prevail. When this trust is shattered the resulting pain is likely much worse because the victim survives a terrifying ordeal at the hands of a person they are supposed to trust and depend on for safety and support. Contemporary studies on trauma confirm that marital sexual assault is a deeply interconnected and repeated experience of interpersonal trauma rather than an isolated event because it is accompanied by continued violence, constant betrayal, and emotional immobilization (Dworkin et al., 2017; WHO, 2021).

Women victims of marital rape endure consistent anxiety, lack of affect, invasive recall of past experiences, shame, and depletion of self (Dworkin et al., 2017). What makes it worse is the devaluing of sexual coercion within marriage as evidenced by the expected submission of women to their husbands regardless of their desires, a reality where laws like those in Ethiopia

fail to recognize marital rape (Yigzaw, 2019). This betrayal further increases the level of traumatization as victims begin to doubt the extent of their own experiences, wondering if the trauma is real and if their pain matters or if their rights will be defended by those in power (Yigzaw, 2019). Hence, the traumatic experience is as much about the victim's internal world as it is shaped by society and the law.

2.2.2 Assessment of Marital Rape

When analyzing marital rape, researchers are interested in how the coercion takes place and how prevalent the coercion is within a marriage. To do so, they have divided marital rape into three categories: Force-only marital rape is when someone uses threats or a bit of physical force to get their partner to comply sexually. As mentioned previously there is typically some form of verbal or emotional abuse present in battering marital rape (Finkelhor & Yllo, 1985). Battering marital rape is the most severe type. Sexual assault co-occurs with ongoing physical and emotional abuse and there is a broader pattern of one partner attempting to dominate the other (Finkelhor & Yllo, 1985). Sadistic or obsessive marital rape is the worst kind. The perpetrator commits aggressive and degrading sexual acts, which sometimes occur due to extremely intense sexual obsession or other deeper issues (Finkelhor & Yllo, 1985).

Psychologists look at these situations in terms of their impact over time. Survivors experience various types of problems including fear, anxiety, depression, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, hyper-vigilance, numbness, loss of trust and relationship difficulties (APA, 2022; Van der Kolk, 2014). Researchers and clinicians measure how harmful the acts were through surveys, interviews, and trauma scales. This measure not only takes into account the violence experienced, but the emotional abuse as well and the extent to which it occurred.

However in countries such as Ethiopia the problem is further complicated by the fact that marital rape is not against the law and is therefore reliantly ignored (Finkelhor & Yllo, 1985). They can end up feeling invisible, unsupported, and completely unprotected which only adds to the psychological pain.

2.2.3 Theories of Marital Rape

1. Betrayal Trauma Theories; Betrayal Trauma Theory and Marital Rape

The Betrayal Trauma Theory helps to understand the negative impact on mental well-being caused by abuse carried out by someone who holds a significant place emotionally, socially, or economically in the victim's life and, in this case, that person is one's spouse (Freyd, 1996). Differently from the trauma that results from the actions of an outsider, betrayal trauma occurs in the context of relationships wherein the victim is dependent on the perpetrator in terms of emotional, social, or economic support. With regard to marital rape, the damage inflicted by the offender is more than just physical since the trust, feeling of safety, and affection of the survivor have been grossly violated. The survivor, being exposed to such trauma in the context of dependency, is likely to suppress or downplay their experiences in order to ensure social survival.

The current psychological studies show the importance of applying the Betrayal Trauma Theory in analyzing intimate partner sexual violence (Gómez, 2021). According to the findings, betrayal-related abuse causes an increased level of post-traumatic stress, dissociative disorders, emotional numbing, and problems with trust and attachment (Gómez et al., 2021; Freyd, 1996;). The negative consequences of this kind of trauma become even more significant when the survivor feels that their suffering is ignored and invisible to others. For example, in Ethiopia, marital rape is not legally recognized and discussed. Hence, the situation is likely to be interpreted as a betrayal at the societal and personal levels. Namely, the survivor might consider that both their spouse and the justice system have betrayed them. In this regard, the victim might face an increased level of psychological problems and leave the marriage to maintain mental health.

Herman (1992) explains that trauma resulting from repeated and prolonged interpersonal violence differs from trauma caused by a single event. Victims often experience persistent fear, emotional dysregulation, negative self-perception, and difficulties in relationships. Complex trauma is particularly relevant to marital rape because the abuse occurs

repeatedly within an intimate relationship where escape is often difficult. The theory suggests that ongoing exposure to violence can fundamentally alter a survivor's sense of identity, safety, and trust.

2. Feminist Theories; Feminist Theory & Marital Rape

Through feminist theory, marital rape can be understood in terms of gender relations and the effects of oppression within a patriarchal society, as opposed to seeing it simply as a form of sexual assault (MacKinnon, 2017). In accordance with this, feminist theorists believe that marital rape is based on gender norms that view the body of a wife as sexually available during marriage, and that sexual submission is considered a requirement of marital life. Consent in these cases becomes implicit with marriage, making the sexual autonomy of women irrelevant.

Feminist legal theory makes clear that the failure of the criminal justice system to prosecute marital rape has been founded on preconceived notions that favor male dominance and control within marriage. As current feminist studies suggest, the non-criminalization of marital rape poses a serious challenge to survivors, who find themselves facing obstacles in obtaining justice and legal relief, while enduring stigma because of that (Htun & Weldon, 2018; Anderson, 2021). Feminist theories have also shown why women might feel compelled by society to endure sexual violence as a result of their ability to withstand adversity and obey norms concerning the need for maintaining families together at all costs. From the feminist point of view, divorce is even not just an option; it is a way for women to resist sexual violence through divorce and social oppression that keeps women silent.

Galtung (1969) conceptualizes structural violence as harm embedded within social, political, and legal systems that prevent individuals from meeting their basic needs or exercising their rights. Structural violence does not necessarily involve direct physical force; instead, it operates through institutions and policies that perpetuate inequality and suffering. In the context of marital rape, legal systems that fail to recognize or criminalize the act may contribute to survivors' vulnerability and lack of access to justice.

2.3 Legal Silence

2.3.1 Concept of Legal Silence

Legal silence is where the law does not recognize an act as illegal, nor does it criminalize it. In this research, legal silence is where the act of marital rape does not have an explicit codification under the laws of Ethiopia. Sexual violence may be recognized as sexual assault and domestic violence under the Ethiopian Criminal Code (2004). However, marital rape is excluded from the law because the legal codes leave room for ambiguity regarding forced sex in a marriage (Yigzaw, 2019).

The effects of legal silence extend beyond the fact that there are no laws that explicitly address certain matters. The absence of laws sends a message to the public, implying the existence of other issues that are worse than marital rape (Girma & Atnafu, 2021). For instance, if marital rape is ignored in the law, this implies that men are entitled to sexual access inside their marriage because they believe that sex outside their marriage is illegal (Yigzaw, 2019).

Furthermore, legal silence becomes a part of sociocultural context, thus becoming a twofold source of victimization. Legal silence acts as an endorsement to the socially held views about marital rape being a very private issue, which makes it impossible to report, reduces suffering, and leads to increased invisibility for the victims (Heise & Kotsadam, 2015). Therefore, legal silence becomes not just a lack, but also a psychological pressure for the victims of marital rape.

2.3.2 Assessment of Legal Silence

The assessment of legal silence is conducted based on how the lack of legal recognition of marital rape is understood in the context of the Ethiopian legal and institutional system as well as its effect on survivors. This assessment is informed by the analysis of the laws, especially those provided for under the Criminal Code, as well as other family-related laws, which fail to mention marital rape, even when all types of sexual assault are criminalized. In addition to the analysis of the statutes, the "secondary victimization" which happens as a result of how marital rape cases are viewed in courts as being a private matter, thus not subject to the application of laws such as the Criminal Code, (Abate, 2021), has been considered in the assessment of legal

silence. Such a perception by institutions, among others, leads to the non-investigation and non-representation of survivors, leaving them in a state of injustice since their experiences are never taken seriously. Legal silence has also been assessed from a psychosocial point of view based on how survivors understand issues relating to protection, recognition, and legitimacy of the crime, as many perceive that their experiences have no legal significance.

2.3.3 Theories of Legal Silence

1. Feminist Legal Theory

According to the feminist legal theory, laws are neither neutral nor objective because they operate under gender power structures that have favored men's experiences to those of women since time immemorial. In other words, in regard to the issue of marital rape, feminist legal theorists believe that laws tend to ignore or fail to account for the autonomy of women within their marriages, hence maintaining a normative view that perceives women as inferior to men (MacKinnon, 2017). This is based on the belief that these omissions are not coincidental because they arise from the patriarchal view of marriage, sexuality, and consent. According to feminist legal scholars, the failure of laws to challenge existing social norms makes it impossible to identify cases of rape within marriages, leaving survivors of marital violence vulnerable to abuse.

2. Hale Doctrine / Doctrine of Coverture

Although not a relatively recent legal doctrine, the Hale Doctrine serves as a point of historical reference to contextualize the lack of legal recognition of marital rape. This doctrine dates back to early English common law and asserts that it is within the scope of the husband's rights to exercise power over the wife's body because, as a married couple, they are considered a single entity under the name of the husband. Although, the Hale Doctrine is not legally recognized by modern law it continues to linger indirectly in some legal practice including the persistence of the model of marital sexual union, and presumptions about female consent to sexual intercourse (Hasday, 2021). The shadow of this history shows one reason that marital rape has for so long been a subject of ignorance for many legal systems the underlying assumption that sex within marriage implicitly requires consent, and is a matter of private concern.

3. Social Constructionism

Social constructionism posits that the law, including the legal concept of meanings, is not an object reality, but rather it is a product of the interactions between and among the members of society, the presuppositions of the culture and what constitutes realities in society (Girma & Atnafu, 2021). Based on this theory, marital rape is a social construction from the perception and assumptions people have about marriage, sex and women's gender role. The meaning assigned to the term “crime” and those behaviors that are classified legally as acts of harm, together with what it means to be a victim, are all culturally defined concepts. In cultures where marriage is traditionally viewed as a consensual institution, instances where women are sexually assaulted within the confines of their marriage may be socially unacceptable and consequently not legally recognized as an offense despite the harms it entails. Social constructionism demonstrates the relationship between legal silence and social assumptions that tend to trivialize the experiences of survivors of domestic violence.

4. Script Theory :

Script theory ("crime scripts") refers to the study of cognitive frameworks ("scripts") or shared patterns of expectations surrounding certain roles, behaviors, and events. In terms of understanding marital rape and legal silence, social and institutional scripts regarding marriage and gender roles affect how relevant actors (police, judges, family, and victims) understand what qualifies as rape, their responses to disclosures of such events, and whether or how laws are enforced (Bennice et al., 2023). Scripts of rape that focus on stranger assault using physical coercion while neglecting other kinds of coercion have helped us understand why marital rape is not always perceived as rape. Such cultural scripts, which are reflected in the institutions and laws that have been created by society, help maintain the institution of legal silence.

2.4 Empirical Review on the Relationships among Variables

Empirical evidence from recent research clearly indicates that the impact of marital rape within legal silence has profound connections. Intimate sexual violence research has indicated that those females who have faced compulsory sexual interaction with their husbands are likely to suffer severe long-term psychological impacts such as post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal thoughts, depression, anxiety, and emotional isolation, causing harm to the stability of the

marriage (WHO, 2021; DePrince et al., 2019). The sexual abuse experienced by women in marriage can result in the same psychological consequences as non-partnered rape, but they are additionally affected by betrayal and constant victimization (WHO, 2021).

Empirical evidence also reveals that there is a stronger psychological impact on one's identity resulting from violation in marriage due to the nature of the relationship that involves expectations of protection and intimacy. Various cultures show that sexual abuse or marital rape is linked with emotional numbness, self-worth reduction, and learned helplessness when victims do not have any form of protection or social institution.

Evidence from Ethiopia indicates that gender-based violence remains a significant public health and human rights concern, with serious psychological and social consequences for survivors. EWLA (2008) reported that the marital exemption contained in Ethiopian rape legislation reinforces patriarchal beliefs that wives owe permanent sexual access to their husbands. The study argued that this legal framework contributes to the normalization of marital rape and limits survivors' access to justice. Meaza Ashenafi (2005) argued that gender-based violence in Ethiopia is sustained partly through legal and institutional structures that fail to adequately recognize and address violence against women. The study emphasized the importance of legal reform in improving women's protection and access to justice.

A qualitative study by Kassa and Abebe (2019) found that women who experienced intimate partner violence in Addis Ababa reported symptoms of anxiety, depression, emotional distress, and loss of self-esteem. The study highlighted the significant psychological burden associated with gender-based violence. Similarly, Fikre (2020) reported that survivors of domestic violence frequently experienced sleep disturbances, fear, intrusive thoughts, and ongoing emotional suffering. The study further noted that violence occurring within the home transforms what should be a safe environment into a source of fear and insecurity. Research by Girma et al. (2021) found that trauma-related mental health conditions among survivors of violence are often under-recognized due to limited mental health services and inadequate trauma-informed care systems in Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC, 2021) reported significant institutional challenges in responding to gender-based violence, including limited survivor-centered services, weak enforcement mechanisms, and barriers to accessing justice. The report emphasized that legal and institutional gaps continue to undermine protection for women experiencing violence.

The Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey (EDHS, 2016) found that reporting rates for domestic violence remain very low, with most survivors seeking help from family members or informal community networks rather than formal legal institutions. Economic dependence, social stigma, and limited awareness of legal rights were identified as major barriers to reporting. Finally, Tadesse et al. (2019) found that women experiencing intimate partner violence in Ethiopia often remain in abusive relationships due to economic dependence, concern for their children, and strong social expectations regarding marital stability.

2.4.1 Relationship between Marital Rape and Psychological Consequences

Various empirical studies have proven that sexual violence in marriages leads to serious psychological consequences among females. Victims of marital rapes tend to suffer from such conditions as depression, anxiety, PTSD, numbing of emotions, and helplessness. Due to the fact that the violence takes place within the intimate partnership, victims feel betrayed and lose trust, which contributes to the development of psychological suffering (Bonomi et al., 2019).

Another study conducted on a global scale regarding public health issues proved that women subjected to sexual violence committed by their partners tend to be at greater risk of experiencing psychological complications than women who did not encounter such problems. Such psychological issues include constant stress, depression, and other traumatic consequences (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021).

Systematic review on intimate partner violence and psychological consequences indicated that sexual coercion during marriages is closely associated with various psychological problems, such as depression, suicidal tendencies, and emotional distress (Devries et al., 2018; despite being old, this article continues to be frequently cited in current literature). Current

research confirms that sexual coercion during marriages makes women more prone to psychological distress and emotional disturbance (Beydoun et al., 2017).

2.4.2 Relationship between Legal Silence and Psychological Consequences

Apart from the immediate effects of sexual violence, there has been considerable scientific data, which concludes that the institutional and legal context also plays a significant role in the mental health of survivors. Legal systems that disregard and/or do not sufficiently address the phenomenon of sexual assault within a marriage create additional suffering to victims; this is some researchers call institutional betrayal or secondary victimization.

The research shows that when victims see the legal system as indifferent or unhelpful in dealing with their issue, there is a tendency for additional psychological issues, such as feelings of abandonment, lack of control, and distrust toward institutions. Failure of the law to provide recognition for the victims tends to make their experiences feel insignificant and even socially acceptable (Smidt et al., 2019).

Furthermore, empirical evidence from research related to gender violence indicates that women living in countries with weak legal measures protecting them against sexual assault tend not to report such experiences to the relevant institutions and authorities. Such behavior could potentially increase emotional pain for women experiencing gender-related violence (Heise & Kotsadam, 2015).

2.4.3 Relationship between Marital Rape and Legal Silence

Legal silence and marital rape go hand-in-hand; each one strengthens the impact of the other. Legal silence enforces practices that support forced sexual access, and its consequences under-reporting of instances make it unlikely that the laws will be changed in the near future. "Double betrayal," committed by the perpetrator and state, worsens the emotional suffering of the victim and confirms the perpetrator's feelings of self-entitlement (Gómez, 2021). There is evidence that legal silence is responsible for the normalization of and underreporting of cases of marital rape. Victims often have to deal with cultural pressure, which asserts the assumption that marital relations imply a mutual obligation for sexual intercourse. Consequently, the victims feel

afraid of being stigmatized, socially ostracized, as well as denied access to legal means of addressing their problems (Hanney, Shelford, & Guppy, 2026).

Another source of evidence for the existence of this correlation between marital rape and legal silence comes from Ethiopia. The studies on gender-based violence use surveys that confirm that a certain number of women in Ethiopia have been subjected to sexual coercion by their husband, while there is hardly any mention of such acts in court cases because of the culture and lack of criminal status of these acts (EWLA, 2008; Meshesha, 2014). Thus, empirical evidence shows a strong connection between marital rape and legal silence. In case criminal law does not address the issue of marital rape and the act is not recognized as a crime, the situation of marital rape becomes socially invisible, the victimized women will not report their experience, and most likely, the cases would be considered general domestic violence issues.

2.4.4 Integrated Empirical Relationships: Marital Rape, Legal Silence and psychological consequences

Previous empirical studies have consistently demonstrated a significant relationship between marital rape and adverse psychological outcomes among survivors. Research conducted in different cultural contexts found that women exposed to forced sexual relations within marriage report higher levels of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), self-blame, and emotional distress than women who have not experienced such abuse (Campbell et al., 2018; Dworkin et al., 2017). These findings suggest that marital rape is not only a violation of sexual autonomy but also a major determinant of psychological wellbeing.

Empirical evidence further indicates that the effects of marital rape may be intensified by survivors' inability to access legal protection and justice. Studies examining institutional responses to sexual violence have found that when survivors perceive legal systems as unresponsive or dismissive, they experience greater levels of helplessness, shame, and psychological distress (Smith & Freyd, 2014). Institutional betrayal research specifically demonstrates that failure by legal and social institutions to recognize or respond adequately to abuse is associated with increased trauma symptoms, dissociation, depression, and suicidal

ideation. These findings suggest that legal silence may function as a secondary source of victimization that compounds the psychological impact of the original abuse.

Research has also documented a relationship between legal recognition and survivors' recovery processes. Studies have shown that acknowledgment of victimization through legal recognition, access to justice, and institutional support can contribute positively to survivors' feelings of validation, safety, and empowerment (Logan et al., 2021). Conversely, when sexual violence is not formally recognized, survivors often report feelings of invisibility, abandonment, and reduced trust in institutions. Such experiences may hinder coping and recovery, thereby increasing the severity and persistence of trauma-related symptoms.

The literature therefore suggests an interconnected empirical relationship among the three variables examined in this study. Marital rape directly contributes to psychological harm, while legal silence may intensify that harm by limiting access to justice, reducing institutional validation, and reinforcing survivors' feelings of powerlessness. Consequently, psychological outcomes may be shaped not only by the experience of marital rape itself but also by the legal and institutional environment in which survivors seek recognition and support.

Despite evidence supporting these relationships, existing studies have largely been conducted in contexts where marital rape has some degree of legal recognition. In Ethiopia, where marital rape lacks explicit legal recognition, limited empirical research has examined how legal silence influences the psychological experiences of survivors. Furthermore, few studies have explored the combined relationship between marital rape, legal silence, and psychological wellbeing from the perspective of survivors themselves. This gap highlights the need for qualitative research that explores how survivors understand and experience the interaction between these factors within the Ethiopian context.

2.4.5 Gaps in Empirical Literature

The current body of literature on marital rape in Ethiopia identifies several important deficiencies that this study aims to rectify. Firstly, there is a notable theoretical gap concerning the particular psychological effects of the concept of "legal silence." Although numerous studies

have examined the rates of domestic violence and their physical consequences, they tend to ignore the impact of not considering marital rape a criminal offense and how it leads to "Institutional Betrayal" and prolonged mental problems (Smith & Freyd, 2014). Secondly, there is a research design and institutional gap present in existing studies on marital rape in Ethiopia. The prevailing tendency in current literature is to consider laws as an external legal matter unrelated to the psychological effects on victims that prevent them from achieving inner peace (Bennice & Resick, 2018).

Finally, although the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA) provides considerable assistance to victims, there is a lack of qualitative data regarding the ways in which the existing Criminal Code hinders the psychological healing of the association's clients. In this regard, this study attempted to fill this deficiency by using the qualitative case study approach and studying the "psychology of entrapment" of women in EWLA.

2.6 Conceptual Framework of the Study

This study is guided by a conceptual framework developed from Trauma Theory (Herman, 2015), Institutional Betrayal Theory (Smith & Freyd, 2014), and the empirical literature on marital rape and legal recognition. The framework is designed to address the study's central objective of understanding how marital rape and legal silence shape the psychological experiences of survivors.

The framework identifies Marital Rape as the primary independent variable because it represents the traumatic experience that initiates psychological harm. Previous studies have documented that survivors of marital rape frequently experience depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), shame, self-blame, emotional withdrawal, and reduced psychological wellbeing (Campbell et al., 2018; Dworkin et al., 2017). The framework further recognizes Legal Silence as a contextual and aggravating factor. In this study, legal silence refers to the absence of explicit legal recognition and criminalization of marital rape, as well as limited institutional responses available to survivors. The literature suggests that when survivors are unable to obtain legal recognition or justice, they may experience institutional betrayal, feelings of invisibility, hopelessness, and diminished trust in social institutions (Smith & Freyd, 2014).

Consequently, legal silence may intensify the psychological consequences already caused by marital rape.

The dependent variable of the study is Psychological Consequences, which include trauma, depression, anxiety, fear, shame, self-blame, loss of safety, diminished self-worth, and challenges in help-seeking and recovery. The framework assumes that psychological outcomes are influenced directly by the experience of marital rape and further exacerbated by legal silence. Accordingly, the study examines how the interaction between marital rape and legal silence influences survivors' psychological wellbeing, perceptions of justice, safety, and coping experiences within the Ethiopian context.

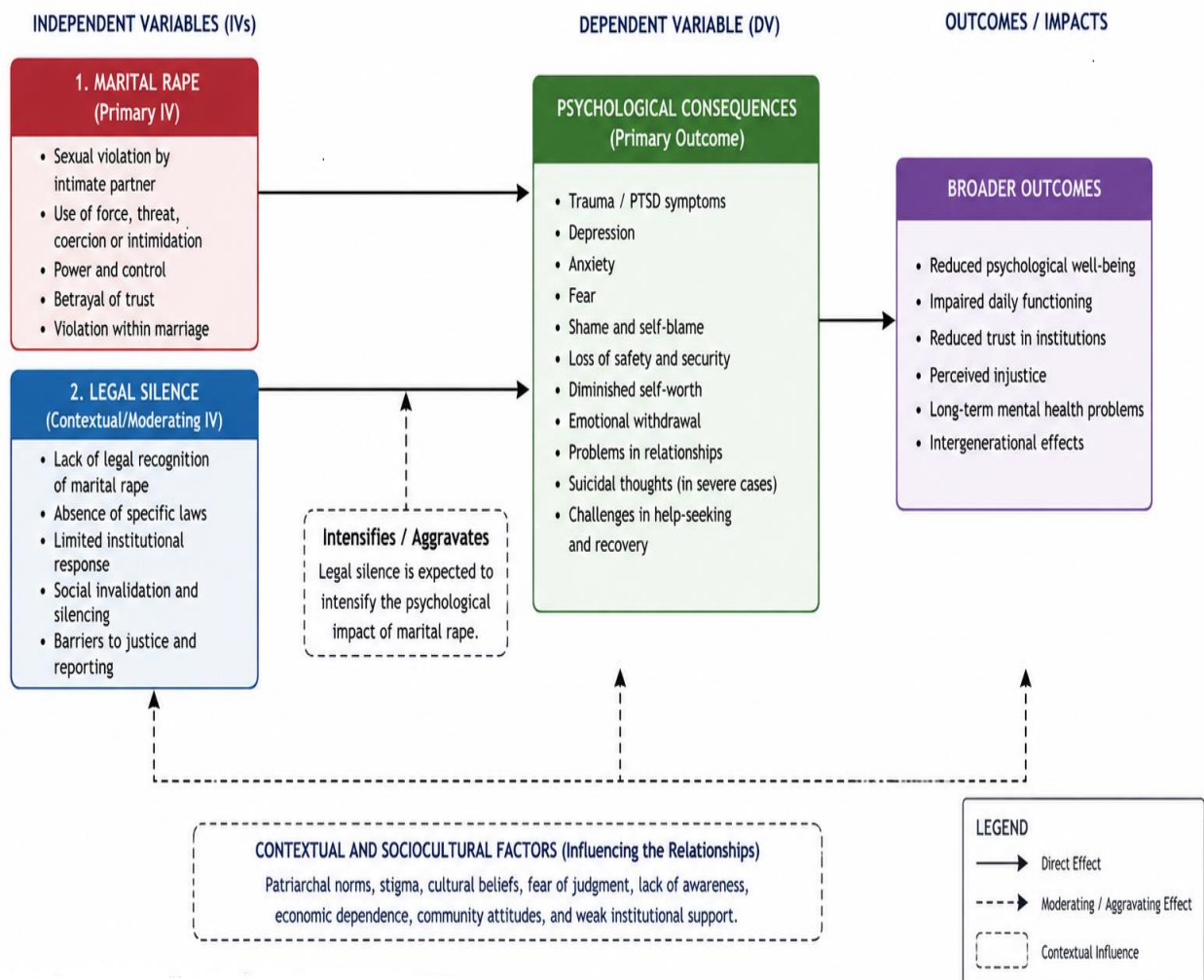


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research design, study area, target population, sampling method, data collection tools, data collection procedures, ethical considerations, and methods of analysis used in the study. The scope of this research includes the sample area of the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA), a free legal aid center based in Addis Ababa. The selection of the women was carried out through purposive sampling based on the recommendations of the legal officer, who was familiar with their cases before and during the data collection process. The interviews were conducted with women who had been married at least once. The methodology aimed at exploring the experiences and perceptions of sexual violence within marital relationships given their complex and very stigmatizing nature. This study differed from quantitative studies by focusing on the effects of sexual violence on women.

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative case study design, with a phenomenological approach and doctrinal legal analysis serving as complementary methods of inquiry. The case study design constitutes the overarching research design because the study focuses on a bounded institutional setting the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA) in Addis Ababa to explore the psychological consequences of marital rape and the effects of legal silence on survivors. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a case study design is appropriate when a researcher seeks an in-depth understanding of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence.

Within this case study, a phenomenological approach is employed to understand the lived experiences and psychological realities of survivors of marital rape. The phenomenological perspective enables the researcher to explore how survivors perceive, interpret, and make meaning of their experiences of trauma, stigma, and limited legal recognition. In addition, the study incorporates doctrinal legal analysis to examine the legal framework governing marital

rape in Ethiopia. Combining legal analysis with qualitative field data allows for a comprehensive understanding of both the formal legal environment ("law in the books") and the lived experiences of survivors ("law in action").

The selection of EWLA as the case study site is justified by its long-standing role in providing legal aid, counseling, advocacy, and support services to women affected by gender-based violence, including survivors of marital rape. EWLA offers direct access to survivors and legal professionals who possess substantial experience dealing with cases involving violence against women. Consequently, EWLA provides a rich and relevant context for examining how legal silence regarding marital rape influences survivors' psychological well-being, help-seeking behavior, and perceptions of justice. The research design consists of the following interconnected components:

1. Doctrinal Legal Analysis

This component involves a systematic examination of relevant legal documents and human rights instruments. The analysis includes the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), the Criminal Code of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (2004), the Revised Family Code (2000), and international and regional human rights treaties ratified by Ethiopia.

The purpose of this analysis is to identify the extent of legal recognition or legal silence concerning marital rape and to assess how the existing legal framework may affect survivors' access to justice, protection, and support. Particular attention is given to the implications of the absence of explicit criminalization of marital rape within Ethiopian law.

2. Phenomenological Inquiry

Within the case study framework, a phenomenological approach is used to explore the lived experiences of survivors of marital rape. Data are collected through semi-structured interviews with women receiving services at EWLA, as well as with legal professionals and counselors working within the organization. This approach enables the study to capture survivors' experiences of trauma, fear, shame, self-blame, coping strategies, and perceptions of

legal and institutional responses. It also facilitates an understanding of how legal silence shapes survivors' psychological well-being and recovery processes.

3. Methodological Triangulation

The integration of doctrinal legal analysis and qualitative interview data provides methodological triangulation. By combining evidence from legal documents with the lived experiences of survivors and insights from professionals, the study enhances the credibility and depth of its findings. This approach enables the researcher to compare formal legal provisions with actual experiences and to generate a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between marital rape, legal silence, and psychological consequences in the Ethiopian context.

3.2 Study Populations and Sampling

3.2.1 Target Population

The subjects were composed of three groups related to EWLA Addis Ababa office. The first group was comprised of women victims of marital rape; women survivors of rape who approached EWLA for counseling and legal aid and sought service from EWLA for being sexually abused in marriage; women who are in the process of divorce or already had divorces from their husbands.

3.2.2 Sampling Technique

The study adopted a non-probability sampling approach through the use of purposive sampling methods. Participants in the study were recruited using a purposive sampling method in consideration of certain traits that made them pertinent to the research question (Creswell, 2014). Through EWLA social workers, women in the survivor group who had been subjected to marital rape were picked as participants. Key informants sampled participants depending on how they dealt with GBV cases. In cases where survivors were difficult to reach, initial contacts within EWLA assisted in identifying additional participants who had consented to being contacted for research purposes.

3.2.3 Sample Size

In the qualitative approach, the number of participants was based on the concept of data saturation, where no additional themes were generated during the interview. In this particular case study, the researcher recruited 11 survivors to give a detailed understanding of their psychological experiences. In addition, 10 EWLA legal experts, lawyers, and legal officers were included to provide a structural perspective on legal silence and institutional challenges within the legal system. Furthermore, 7 psychological professionals involved in marital and domestic violence cases were also included to contribute clinical and psychosocial perspectives on marital rape and its consequences.

3.2.4 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion: Women aged 18 or older: survivors of forced sexual acts by a spouse; individuals who have sought help from EWLA; legal professionals with at least two years of experience in VAW (Violence against Women) cases in EWLA. Psychologists who have seen marital rape cases at least once in their work experience.

Exclusion: Individuals who had never been married, and professionals who had not handled marital rape-related cases, were excluded from the study.

3.3 Data Collection tools

To achieve data triangulation, the study utilized three primary instruments.

3.3.1 Semi-Structured Interview:

For this study, the main instrument is a semi-structured interview guide. What this suggests is that the writing style is a little informal but the overall themes are covered in the discussion. This guide was separated into three parts:

- A: Experiences of marital rape and subsequent psychological trauma.
- B: Interactions with the legal system and the perception of legal silence.
- C. Social Support and Neglect.

3.3.2 Key Informant Questionnaire

A separate questionnaire guide was designed for EWLA legal experts. These questions focused on the doctrinal gap, exploring the difficulty of litigating marital rape as “cruelty” or “grave injury” under the revised family code in the absence of specific criminal provisions.

3.3.3 Expert key informants Questionnaire

A specialized questioner guide was designed that focuses on clinical diagnosis and long-term recovery of marital rape trauma. This separate questionnaire designed for psychological councilors and social workers of EWLA to find the psychological effects of marital rape under legal silence.

3.3.4 Doctrinal checklist

Doctrinal checklist: a guide for reviewing legal provisions to pinpoint how the law remains silent or provides immunity to perpetrators.

A systematic review of:

- Relevant Articles in the FDRE Constitution,
- The Ethiopian Criminal Code,
- The Revised family code,
- International treaties ratified by Ethiopia.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted in three phases.

Phase 1 entailed doctrinal review, including a baseline analysis of the Ethiopian legal framework, which included constitutional provisions, criminal laws, family laws and relevant international conventions ratified by Ethiopia. The phase was directed to identify the gaps, ambiguities and legal silence with regard to recognition, prosecution and protection of victims of marital rape. Following ethical approval, a gatekeeper approach was adopted to select participants using purposive sampling.

Phase 2. An introductory letter was given to the office of the EWLA Addis Ababa and social workers then helped to make initial contact with the survivors to ensure the engagement was appropriate. Participants were also chosen to ensure they were not in an active crisis at the time of contact.

In Phase 3, semi-structured interviews were conducted in a private room provided by EWLA and in another venue agreed with the participants. Some interviews were audio-recorded while for others detailed field notes were taken, depending on participants' consent and later transcribed, translated and coded. Interviews with survivors were conducted in Amharic to enable them to express their lived experiences and later translated to English for analysis.

In Phase 4, questionnaires were created for EWLA legal experts, and a separate structured questionnaire was developed for psychologists that addressed clinical perspectives, diagnosis and recovery from marital rape trauma.

3.5 Data Analysis Methods

The study used two distinct methods of analysis. Thematic analysis was conducted using Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the qualitative data. The analysis followed the steps of familiarization with the data, coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and interpretation in relation to the research questions. In addition, legal synthesis was employed to integrate findings from the doctrinal legal review with the qualitative themes, in order to develop a holistic understanding of how the law failed or supported survivors.

3.6 Trustworthiness and Rigor

In terms of qualitative research, trustworthiness was also sought in the present study using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework. Credibility was sought through method triangulation; by comparing the narratives of survivors with the views and accounts of the EWLA legal and psychological experts, and through doctrinal examination of Ethiopian law; so as to see whether the conclusions reflect a broader reality. Transferability was supported by providing thick descriptions of the socio-legal context of Addis Ababa. Dependability was

maintained through a detailed audit trail that documented every stage of the research process, from the initial legal review to the final stages of thematic coding. Conformability was strengthened through member checking, whereby key findings were shared with EWLA legal experts to ensure that the interpretation of “legal silence” accurately aligned with their professional experiences.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of the topic of marital rape trauma, this study followed the international ethical principles of conducting violence research against women. All participants were read an explanation of the research aims and objectives in Amharic and participation was wholly voluntary. The research fully informed all respondents in written form and/or verbally prior to data collection. All names were assigned in alphabetical pseudonyms for confidentiality. No names or other form of identifier such as case numbers were used within the thesis in order to protect the survivors from social stigma or legal reprisal. Participants' identities were protected by using codes such as P1, P2, and P3, and any identifying personal details were removed from the transcripts and quotations.

The researcher practiced the principle of non-maleficence in the belief that probing into themes associated with sexual trauma could cause re-traumatization; thus interviews were conducted with extreme sensitivity and whenever participants displayed signs of emotional distress the interview ceased until such time as the participant felt ready to resume. A referral system was also set up through EWLA for survivors who needed immediate emotional support. All recordings and transcripts were kept in password-protected files and were subsequently burnt after the successful defense of this thesis.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis and interpretation of the collected qualitative data from three groups of respondents: eleven survivors of marital rape who reported their cases to the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA) in Addis Ababa, ten legal professionals (lawyers and advocates) working on gender-based violence cases, and two psychological organizations (Ye'erk Maed and Ras-Aid Organization) providing psychological services to EWLA clients; thus, seven psychologists participated in the study.

This chapter presents the findings from semi-structured interviews with survivors and questionnaires completed by legal and psychosocial professionals. The analysis uses thematic interpretation to show how marital rape and legal silence shape trauma, safety, justice, social relationships, and help seeking. Demographic information is first presented in tabular form, followed by thematic analysis structured according to the five specific objectives of the study.

4.2. Demographic characteristics of the participants

4.2.1 Survivor Participants

This section presents the demographic characteristics of the eleven survivor participants included in the study. The participants were selected through purposive sampling with the assistance of legal officers and social workers at the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association. All participants were women who had experienced marital rape and had sought legal or psychosocial support services from EWLA.

The age of participants ranged from 24 to 50 years. Their marital status included separated, divorced, married, and in the process of divorce. Duration of marriage ranged from six months to thirty-four years. Educational backgrounds ranged from no formal education to Master's degree holders. Monthly income levels also varied, with several participants reporting no personal income. Most participants were divorced, separated, or in the process of divorce at the time of the study, while only two participants remained married during the data collection period.

Some participants reported experiencing marital rape within the first year of marriage, while others experienced abuse over marriages lasting more than thirty years. Participant P4 reported working as a massage therapist in a spa, which explains the reported monthly income despite limited formal education.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Survivor Participants

Participant Code	Age (years)	Marital Status	Duration of Marriage	Educational Status	Income
P1	26	Separated	2 years 4 months	10th grade	No income
P2	36	Divorced	6 months	8th grade	No income
P3	42	Married	18 years	Not educated	No income
P4	32	Divorced	5 years	9th grade	23,000
P5	35	Divorced	1 year 10 months	Masters	45,000
P6	48	Separated	34 years	Not educated	No income
P7	50	On process to divorce	30 years	Degree	32,000
P8	31	On process to divorce	5 years	12th grade	28,000
P9	28	On process to divorce	5 years	Not educated	No income
P10	24	Married	2 years	Degree	No income
P11	29	Separated	10 years	Masters	65,000

4.2.2 Demographic Characteristics of Professional Participants

The professional participants included ten legal professionals working at the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association and seven psychologists from Ye'erk Maed Psychological Services and Ras-Aid Ethiopia Organization. The legal professionals consisted of lawyers and legal aid providers involved in handling gender-based violence cases at EWLA. Their work experience ranged from three years to more than ten years.

The psychologist participants were professionals providing psychosocial and mental health support services for survivors of gender-based violence, including marital rape survivors referred through EWLA. These professionals had direct experience working with survivors affected by psychological trauma related to marital rape and domestic violence.

Regarding professional exposure to marital rape cases, several participants reported frequent involvement in cases related to sexual violence within marriage, while others reported less frequent exposure. This variation reflected differences in institutional roles and levels of engagement with survivors.

4.3. DOCTRINAL LEGAL ANALYSIS

This section analyzes the Ethiopian legal framework on rape and identifies the doctrinal gap created by the absence of explicit criminalization of marital rape. The doctrinal analysis considered these four legal instruments,

1. The FDRE Constitution
2. The Criminal Code of Ethiopia (2004);
3. The Revised Family Code (2000); and
4. International treaties ratified by Ethiopia namely The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

4.3.1 The FDRE Constitution:

The FDRE Constitution (1995) creates a strong constitutional base in safeguarding the rights of women. The FDRE Constitution (1995) specifically states in Article 35 that women

have equal rights as men, and further under Article 35(4), it is stated that "*Women have the right to be protected from any oppressive and degrading practices which may harm their bodily or mental well-being.*" Similarly Article 18 guarantees "*the right to protection against cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment*". However, the Constitution operates at a general, aspirational level. The Bill does not identify any particular crimes; such a responsibility is vested in the Criminal Code. Thus, whereas the Constitution recognizes the rights of women to bodily integrity and mental security, it offers no remedy to those who suffer from rape within marriage. The gap between constitutional affirmation and criminal codification is where legal silence begins; it is at this point that silence enters the legal discourse.

4.3.2 The Criminal Code of Ethiopia (2004): Article 620 and the Exclusion of Marital Rape

The Criminal Code of Ethiopia (2004): "Crimes against Morals and the Family," Article 620 states that "*Rape is committed when someone forces a woman to submit to sexual intercourse out of wedlock, using force or serious intimidation, or having made her unconscious or unable to resist.*" This person is liable for five to fifteen years' imprisonment.

Doctrinal Observations on Article 620:

First, the phrase outside of wedlock directly limits the legal definition of rape to acts committed outside marriage. It simply implies that any married intercourse will not fall into the scope of the act of rape stated under the Ethiopian law. Hence no rape case can be filed against one's husband under the Ethiopian Penal Code as the words named by the act of rape in Article 620 give the words which can be applied only to a felony committed in an outside of wedlock circumstance.

Second, the exclusion creates a legal immunity for husbands. Where a stranger who commits sexual intercourse with a woman is punishable by 5-15 years imprisonment, a husband who does exactly the same thing with the exact same violence, the exact same intimidation, the exact same coercion is not punishable under the provision of rape at all. The law differentiates between the same conduct of assault solely on the basis of the marital status of the perpetrator.

Third, the exclusion is not addressed elsewhere in the Criminal Code. Article 555 criminalizes physical assault; Article 564 and many others refer to harmful traditional practices, and some other forms of violence. Nevertheless, there is no criminalization of forced sexual intercourse within marriage. Furthermore, sexual assault within marriage is not recognized in the criminal law category of "marital rape." The Criminal Code of Ethiopia (2004).

Fourth, this exclusion results from an outmoded legal fiction. The term "outside of wedlock" was originally based on the common law doctrine of coverture (Hale Doctrine), according to which once a marriage took place, the wife gave implicit consent for sexual intercourse, which could not be withdrawn. Even though coverture is part of the common law, Ethiopian criminal law still includes the Hale Doctrine in the 2004 Criminal Code, making it incompatible with modern standards of human rights and the constitution of Ethiopia.

Fifth, the existence of this exclusion creates difficulties regarding prosecution. Cases of marital sexual assault even when reported under different provisions (such as physical assault, insults, or as a ground for divorce), would be refused registration by the police and prosecuting authorities, because of lack of a specific provision.

Sixth the new 2026 criminal procedure and evidence code focus on victims protection, non-bailable sexual offenses and how we prove crimes (digital evidence, forensic rules) this shows the government is serious about sexual violence, but it didn't fix what we consider a crime. Even with better evidence rules, a victim of marital rape still cannot seek justice because the 2004 substantive law doesn't recognize the act as rape.

Article 620 represents the central legal silence examined in this study because it does not simply omit marital rape; by using the phrase outside of wedlock, it excludes forced sex within marriage from the legal category of rape. This sends a clear message that the system is sending out to society (through the law) that a forced sexual act is not rape in a marriage, and also that a wife does not need the one protection and sanctity of her body and mindset that an unmarried women does.

4.3.4 The Revised Family Code (2000)

The Revised Family Code (2000) governs marriage, divorce, and family relations in Ethiopia. Article 53 specifically addresses the obligation of cohabitation between spouses and the expectation of sexual intercourse within marriage. Sub-article 2 stipulates: *"They shall have with one another the sexual relations normal in marriage, unless these relations involve a risk of seriously prejudicing their health."*

This provision raises several critical doctrinal questions. First, what constitutes "normal" sexual relations in marriage? Second, if sexual relations are not "normal," what are the legal consequences or sanctions? The Code provides no answers to these questions, leaving the definition of "normal" to cultural and social norms that historically assumed as normal. The survivors in this study did not describe sexual relations that could reasonably be characterized as "normal in marriage." One survivor stated, *"He started forcing me to have anal sex and I was a virgin when I got married"* P2. Another reported, *"After I had my 2 sons, my husband started anal sex and I refused, but he wouldn't let me sleep"* P3. A third survivor described her husband's *"use of Viagra and penis-enlarging creams against her will"* P7. Another stated, *"He does many things on me that he sees on pornography"* P8. Yet another survivor reported, *"He started to want anal sex, reasoning that vaginal sex does not give him satisfaction"* P10 these accounts describe violence, coercion, and degradation not "normal" marital relations. These accounts show that the issue is not marital disagreement about intimacy, but coercive and harmful sexual conduct that the law fails to name clearly.

Furthermore, the law fails to define what constitutes a "risk of seriously prejudicing their health." Is health understood exclusively as physical health? What about mental health? Is psychological well-being not a component of health? Under the current legal framework, psychological trauma is treated as legally invisible. A husband could inflict years of intense, chronic psychological trauma as the result of systematically forcing his wife to have sex trauma which could include symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, dissociative episodes, or feelings of worthlessness (ref sec 4.4.1 of qualitative analysis) but he will not face criminal sanctions because his wife's physical health was not "seriously

prejudiced." Even if a woman were physically injured, she would be powerless to receive legal redress because Ethiopian Criminal law explicitly excludes marital rape as a criminal offense in Article 620 of the Criminal Code. Physical injury can be grounds for divorce under the Family Code, but it cannot be used to bring charges of assault against a husband.

Article 76 lists grounds for divorce, including "*grave injury*" and "*mutual irreconcilable differences*." In practice, survivors of marital rape may file for divorce on grounds of cruelty or grave injury. However, this remedy is fundamentally inadequate for three reasons: First, divorce does not constitute criminal justice. Filing for divorce is a civil proceeding that ends the marriage. It does not result in the perpetrator's criminal conviction, imprisonment, or sanction as a sex offender. The survivor may escape the marriage, but the perpetrator faces no legal consequences for the sexual violence he committed. Second, divorce carries significant social and economic costs. As documented in the qualitative findings (see Sections 4.4.3 legal silence and social consequences and quality of life), survivors who seek divorce face social stigma, economic hardship, and loss of family support. Divorce is not a neutral option it is a survival strategy with severe consequences. Third, divorce does not address the underlying harm. The psychological trauma of marital rape PTSD, depression, shame, and worthlessness powerlessness ...(see sec 4.4.1 of qualitative analysis) is not resolved by divorce. Without legal validation that a crime was committed, survivors continue to question their own experiences and internalize blame.

The Revised Family Code implicitly offers divorce as the only remedy for marital rape survivors. But it is not a remedy it is an exit. The law provides no pathway to justice, only a pathway to exit the marriage with continued social and economic penalties. The law thus offers survivors a choice between enduring violence in silence or seeking divorce a civil remedy that provides no justice for the sexual violence they have suffered.

4.3.5 International Treaties: Ratification without Domestication

There are various international and regional human rights conventions, which Ethiopia is a member of which clearly identifies marital rape as a form of violence against women requiring criminalization. These include:

Convention on the Elimination of all Discrimination Against Women and Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights in the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol):

Ethiopia has become party to CEDAW in 1981. In its general recommendation No. 35 (2017) the CEDAW Committee noted that State parties should take measures to ensure that rape, including marital rape, is criminalized on the basis of 'lack of consent' (CEDAW Committee, 2017, para. 33). In this general recommendation it is affirmed that *'rape, including marital rape, constitute[s] a form of gender-based violence and prohibited by States Parties'*. Ethiopia ratified the Maputo protocol in 2004. Article 4(2)(a) of the protocol requires that *'States parties shall enact and enforce laws to prohibit all forms of violence against women including unwanted or forced sex whether the violence takes place in private or public'*. The phrase "in private" clearly includes marriage as a space of state concern.

Although Ethiopia has ratified these treaties it remains that they have not been domesticated into the domestic legal system and thus survive in international law alone. Under international law Ethiopia is obliged to criminalize marital rape but under domestic law it is not. This failure in implementation in turn represents a compliance issue. The article is thus in clear violation of its obligations under the CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol by leaving Article 620 untouched and silent on marital rape. Nor can survivors rely on either treaty because both of these treaties have been ratified but have also not been domesticated.

4.3.6 The Psychological and Social impact of Legal Silence

This doctrinal gap, referred to in this study as legal silence, is not merely a technical omission. It carries psychological and social consequences because it affects recognition, reporting, protection, and survivors sense of justice.

First, the legal silence invalidates survivors' experiences. Several survivors reported feelings of self-doubt and confusion regarding whether their experiences constituted a crime. For example, participant P10 stated, "Did I make this a big deal out of it?" This reflects how the absence of legal recognition contributes to survivors questioning the legitimacy of their own experiences.

Second, the legal silence negatively affects survivors' perceptions of justice and safety. Legal professionals who participated in the study observed that many survivors lose confidence in the justice system because marital rape is not explicitly recognized under Ethiopian criminal law. One legal professional explained that survivors often "lose hope and interest in the justice system" (Legal1), while another described how survivors develop "a pervasive sense of insecurity" (Legal3).

Third, the findings show that legal silence affects survivors' social relationships and family life. Participants described experiencing pressure from family members, community elders, and social norms to remain silent and tolerate the abuse. In many cases, survivors viewed divorce as the only available option despite the social and economic consequences associated with it.

4.4. Psychological Consequences of Marital Rape among Survivors

This section analyzes the psychological effects of marital rape as described by survivors and interpreted alongside the observations of legal and psychosocial professionals

4.4.1. Pervasive Emotional Disturbances

Across all eleven-survivor accounts, emotional disturbances emerged as a constant and overwhelming experience. Survivors described living with a combination of fear, sadness, anxiety, and emotional disturbance, often simultaneously and persistently.

For example P1 described her emotional state as being dominated by "*I fear, sadness, anxiety and anger a lot,*" similarly P2 expressed her feeling saying, "*I have fear when the night comes and feel anxious, I was feeling so sad and there are days I spend as I start to cry morning I will cry till night thinking my night suffering*" reflecting a continuous emotional burden rather than a temporary reaction. P3 P7 and P11 also expressed "*I feel sad and disturbed by unnecessary memories*" and "*I feel so sad today.... I feel sad till this day*" and "*I feel sad fear and emotional disturbances a lot*" consecutively.

Also another participants expressed fear of intimacy and trusting that stays with them till this day by expressing *“even now, after 14 years of separation I fear all the men that come in to my life”*. P6 similarly emphasized, *“ I always have fear and feel anxious that this man will kill me one day”*. And P9 also states *“ I fear him when he’s not even around”* and P10 says, *“am scared of him as if I don’t know him anymore...fear is the feeling that lasted with me till now”*.

Even within ongoing marriages, emotional distress remained persistent. Participant P10 explained how fear disrupted even consensual intimate relationships by stating, *“I fear he might change his mind and do anal suddenly, so I stopped enjoying the sexual intercourse we have.”* This finding indicates that marital rape trauma affects not only survivors’ past experiences but also their present emotional wellbeing and future relationship with intimacy. Legal experts who participated in this research provided important insights into the emotional and psychological effects associated with marital rape. Their professional experience was particularly reflected in their analysis of legal challenges, institutional barriers, and the impact of these barriers on survivors’ behavior and help-seeking experiences, rather than from a clinical or psychological perspective. For example Legal 3 said *“ many may develop a pervasive sense of insecurity, feeling that if safety is not possible in their closest relationship or environment, it may not exist elsewhere either. This can lead to generalized feelings of fear and hyper vigilance, where the world is perceived as unsafe and unpredictable”*. As P5 reported, *“I fear all the men”* this legal professional uniquely provided the theoretical explanation of this pattern. This explains why survivors fear all men, not just the abuser.

The most types of fear that identified by legal professionals are fear of not being believed which survivors anticipate dismissal by police, fear of retaliation thinking the abuser will harm her more if she reports, fear of the world as unsafe generalizing that if home is not safe nowhere is safe and legal fear that law will not protect her.

Psychological Professionals confirmed these patterns stating by Psych1 *“victims commonly experience highlighted fear, shame, guilt, anger, sadness and anxiety”*. And Psych 3 expresses *“fear, hyper-vigilance that survivors remain in constant state of alertness, experiencing anxiety, irritability and exaggerated startle responses”*. Psych 6 also observed that

survivors often state, “*Chronic symptoms include persistent anxiety disorders including phobias*”.

They also identified the progression from acute to chronic anxiety. As psych 2 states “*immediate symptoms may include acute anxiety.... chronic symptoms may include persistent anxiety*”. This timing differences matter greatly, without intervention, acute anxiety following traumatic event becomes chronic anxiety. Psych1 reports “*anxiety fuels panic attacks and phobias*” which indicates that anxiety isn’t merely psychological but manifests in the body, racing heart, difficulty breathing, sweating, trembling which survivors may not recognize as trauma-related.

All the seven psychological professionals explicitly identified anxiety as a core diagnostic feature of marital rape trauma. The manifestation of this violence and these accounts show that emotional distress is not situational but it’s chronic. Even though anxiety may be under-counted in survivors because many used “fear” as an umbrella term, professionals clinically distinguish anxiety as a distinct diagnostic category.

The findings are consistent with previous studies reviewed in Chapter Two. Campbell et al. (2018) found that survivors of sexual violence frequently experience persistent fear, anxiety, sadness, and emotional distress that continue long after the abusive incident. Similarly, Dworkin et al. (2017) reported that survivors of intimate partner sexual violence often experience chronic emotional suffering characterized by fear, helplessness, and emotional dysregulation. The convergence between survivors' narratives, professional observations, and previous empirical studies strengthens the credibility of the finding that emotional disturbance is a central psychological consequence of marital rape.

This finding is further explained by Trauma Theory (Herman, 2015), which suggests that traumatic violations committed by trusted individuals disrupt emotional regulation and produce prolonged psychological distress. The survivors' accounts of persistent fear and anxiety support this theoretical perspective.

4.4.2. The Collapse of Self-Worth and Disruption of Personal Identity

There was a consistent observation among psychological professionals, legal professionals, and survivors that marital rape causes serious damage to survivors' sense of self and personal identity. Participants described this impact through experiences such as loss of self-respect, diminished self-worth, reduced confidence, feelings of worthlessness, damage to self-identity, and self-blame.

Legal professionals mainly observed these effects through survivors' behaviors, including reluctance to pursue legal action, reduced self-advocacy, emotional withdrawal, and acceptance of the abuse as normal or unavoidable. Another noted "*survivors may also begin to internalize the abuse, developing negative self-beliefs and attributing the violence to their own worth. This can result in pervasive feeling of worthlessness*" (legal6). Survivors described these same manifestations from lived experience, using visceral, embodied language that reveals the depth of self-destruction.

Damage on Self

Psychological professionals consistently described how marital rape devastates survivors' belief in their own value. They described this erosion clinically. One professional stated that "*the betrayal by a spouse shatters the survivor core belief in her own value, triggering intense shame and self-blame like 'I must deserve this' or 'I'm broken goods.'* This leads to hating her body, seeing it as tainted or repulsive, which spirals into chronic low self-esteem" (Psych1). The phrase "broken goods" captures how survivors come to see themselves as permanently damaged and worthless.

Similarly another noted that marital rape leaves survivors "*feeling utterly worthless and unlovable in ways that stranger-rape victims might not experience as intensely*" (Psych 4). Professionals also described a "*fractured sense of identity*" (Psych2) as a consequence of prolonged abuse, noting that survivors "*may struggle to assert boundaries, express their needs, or make independent decisions*" (Psych2).

Several survivors described themselves in the most extreme level of self-erosion. One stated: *"I couldn't see myself let alone as a human but as animal"* (P2). She has lost her humanity. Another described herself as *"I feel like am a sex material"* (P8) not a person with feelings, needs, and rights, but an object to be used. Similarly another stated: *"I feel like am in hell"* (P3) not a description of a feeling, but of her very existence. She doesn't exist in the world she exists in hell. This statement reflects the survivors' experience of dehumanization and the collapse of self-worth following repeated sexual violation within marriage.

A victim's description of total destruction was: "It took away my self-perception, self-worth, self-respect, and self-esteem." *I feel it destroyed my value as a respected woman* (P4). She names all four dimensions of self-erosion in one sentence. Another survivor stated: *"I have never seen myself as a person worthy of love, or independent"* (P6). This reveals that the damage began early and became permanent she has never known herself as worthy.

Another survivor, when asked how she saw herself, could not answer coherently, stating only that she had *"never think about myself cause am not useful"* (P9). She has never considered herself worthy of self-reflection. Another described herself as *"a dead person"* (P2) not merely feeling dead, but seeing herself as dead. The self has died. A third survivor simply stated: *"I feel worthless and I want to die"* (P3). Another described herself as *"dirty person"* (P3) not feeling dirty, but being dirty at her core not a clean, whole human being, but something soiled and degraded. Another survivor said: *"I felt regret that I shouldn't get married. It hurts me so much deep and hated myself a lot. I couldn't see myself let alone as a human but as animal"* (P2). This statement captures both self-hatred and dehumanization she does not see herself as fully human.

Also a survivor with a university degree and a managerial job described the split in her identity: *"Makes me feel that am worthless just pretending to be the good or nice person there and becoming unvalued in my house makes me feel am 2 different people"* (P11). She is one person at work competent, valuable, respected and another person at home worthless, unvalued, and invisible. Survivors described not knowing who they are anymore. This shows a "fractured sense of identity" in her words.

The present finding aligns with previous literature indicating that sexual violence within intimate relationships frequently damages survivors' self-esteem, self-worth, and personal identity. According to Finkelhor and Browne's Traumatic Dynamics Theory, sexual victimization often produces feelings of powerlessness, stigmatization, and self-blame. Similarly, research reviewed in Chapter Two found that survivors commonly internalize responsibility for the abuse and develop negative self-perceptions. The consistency between the literature and participants' experiences suggests that erosion of self-worth is a core psychological consequence of marital rape.

Self-blame, and Worthlessness

The depth of worthlessness expressed by survivors is extreme and requires careful attention. One survivor made the most striking statement in the entire data set: *"I honestly started to see myself as a whore or 'setegna adari' but she's (the whore) at least getting paid actually so am not even like her"* (P8). This survivor places herself below a sex worker, a whore has value; she gets paid, but the survivor has none. The whore chooses her transactions; the survivor has no choice. The whore is getting at least something; the survivor is nothing. Another survivor stated: *"I see myself as unwanted "* (P5). The word "unwanted" is critical she believes she has no value to anyone. Another survivor stated: *"am worthless anymore"* (P10).

This finding supports previous literature indicating that legal recognition plays an important role in validating survivors' experiences. Smith and Freyd (2014) argue that institutional responses influence how survivors interpret and understand victimization. When institutions fail to recognize harm, survivors may question the legitimacy of their own experiences. The survivor narratives, legal professionals' observations, and existing literature therefore converge in demonstrating that legal silence contributes to self-doubt and psychological confusion.

The word *"anymore"* suggests that she once had worth, but marital rape destroyed it permanently. A different survivor emphasizes *"I've never think about myself cause am not useful"* (P9). This survivor has erased herself so completely that she does not even consider

herself worthy of her own thoughts. Another survivor asked even asked me while I was waiting her answer " *is this really my only use and worth of myself?*" (P11). She has reduced herself to a function her only use is what her husband wants from her. If that is all she is, then she is nothing.

Self-blame was pervasive among survivors and was expressed with intense emotion. One survivor cried as she stated: "*I blame myself a lot for the situation am in and I know everything is my fault. I deserve this*" (P1). The tears reveal that this is not a casual belief but a deeply painful internalized conviction. Another survivor said: "*yes it's my fault* " (P5). A survivor with a master's degree stated: "*I really blamed myself for bringing this all cost in my life*" (P11). Even highly educated, successful women internalize blame for the abuse. The two groups demonstrate strong convergence between clinical observation and lived experience. Both groups describe worthlessness, self-blame, damaged identity, loss of self-confidence, and dehumanization as central psychological consequences of marital rape. The severity of self-erosion ranges from diminished confidence to complete dehumanization, with some survivors no longer seeing themselves as fully human. These findings establish that erosion of self across all seven dimensions is a core psychological manifestation of marital rape trauma.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous empirical and theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Research has consistently demonstrated that survivors of sexual violence frequently experience profound feelings of worthlessness, self-blame, shame, and damaged self-esteem. According to Campbell et al. (2018), survivors often internalize responsibility for the abuse and develop negative beliefs about their own value and identity. Similarly, Dworkin et al. (2017) found that sexual violence within intimate relationships is associated with diminished self-worth, self-criticism, and persistent feelings of inadequacy. These studies support the experiences reported by participants in the present study, who described themselves as worthless, unwanted, and undeserving of love or respect.

The findings also align with Trauma Theory (Herman, 2015), which explains that traumatic experiences, particularly those perpetrated by trusted individuals, can fundamentally disrupt an individual's sense of self and personal identity. Herman argues that prolonged interpersonal trauma often leads survivors to internalize feelings of shame, powerlessness, and

self-blame, resulting in a fractured self-concept. This theoretical perspective is reflected in the accounts of survivors who described themselves as "animals," "dead persons," "sex materials," and individuals with no value or purpose.

4.4.3. Trauma-Related Psychological and Physiological Responses

Across all three participant groups a cluster of neurobiological and cognitive trauma symptoms emerged as central to the experience of marital rape. These manifestations represent the body and mind's persistent response to threat, even when the immediate danger has passed.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Intrusive Memories and Flashbacks

Was identified as a primary diagnosis. All the seven psychological professionals identified intrusive memories and flashbacks as core symptoms of PTSD in marital rape survivors. Psychological professionals stated, *"over months or years, PTSD digs in deep with persistent triggers, avoidance of intimacy, and a constant sense of threat, often worse than in stranger cases due to ongoing partner contact"* (Psych1). Psych 3 confirms this *"the impact is often profound and can lead to severe psychological distress, including complex trauma such as PTSD"* also psych 7 stated *"intrusive memories and flashbacks are among the most distressing symptoms reported by survivors, as they force the individual to relive the trauma repeatedly"*. Psych 4 also noted *"intrusive memories are often a barrier to treatment engagement."* Which is even hard to give help for them.

These findings corroborate previous studies reviewed in Chapter Two, which identified PTSD, intrusive memories, nightmares, and avoidance behaviors as common outcomes of sexual violence. Herman (2015) argues that traumatic memories often remain psychologically active and may be re-experienced through flashbacks and intrusive recollections. The similarity between survivors' experiences and established trauma literature demonstrates that PTSD-related symptoms are a significant component of marital rape trauma.

Survivors also confirmed this stating how PTSD manifested with them in different manner P2 reports “ *I feel anxious when the nights comes and I couldn’t sleep*” P3 also states “ *I feel so anxious specifically when the night comes out I feel like am in hell I couldn’t sleep, I feel scared and not being able to do anything*”. P6 stated “ *when I try to listen to myself it becomes chaotic I spend with full of nightmares.*” P7 was very agitated and expressed “ *my life completely changed after that day. I still remember this past 10 years as of it’s today. Yes, I feel flashbacks of his sexual aggression every time. Even when we are having consensual sex I feel memories of his aggression on me*”. Referring how he treats her back then when she wasn’t consented as intrusive memories are unwanted, involuntary recollections of a traumatic event that intrude into consciousness. P9 specifically reported, “ *I always challenged to remember other things but I remember every bit of his act as if it happened now.*” Similarly P11 emphasized “ *honestly I started to avoid anything that’s associated with love and intimate connections after those time with him*”. Thus survivors described the lived experience of their chaotic experience in such manner.

Three legal professionals also observed the functional impact. Legal 2 confirms, “ *The impact is often profound and can lead to severe psychological distress, including complex trauma. Survivors may develop conditions such as post traumatic stress disorder.*” This manifestation is also visible to legal experts causing significant distress even though they aren’t psychological experts.

4.4.4. Trauma-Related Sleep Problems and Persistent Fear Responses

All seven psychological professionals identified sleep disturbances as a near-universal symptom of marital rape trauma. It emerged as one of the most consistent and severe psychological symptoms. Sleep disturbance in this context is not merely a symptom but a reflection of ongoing psychological insecurity, where the body and mind remain in a continuous state of alertness. Psych7 stated: “ *Sleep disturbances are one of the most frequently reported symptoms among survivors, often persisting for years after the abuse has ended*”. And as hyper arousal was described as a constant state of alertness, Psychological professionals explained the mechanism as “ *The brain's survival system remains activated because the survivor lives with the*

perpetrator. *Unlike stranger rape where the threat is time-limited, marital rape involves ongoing exposure, so the nervous system never returns to baseline*" (Psych3). Similarly Psych1 stated: *"Hyper vigilance keeps them on edge scanning for danger even at home, which directly interferes with the relaxation needed for sleep"*. Many survivors described nights as particularly distressing, often associated with fear, anticipation, and emotional exhaustion. P2 explained the extent of her suffering by stating, *"I wouldn't have nightmares as I was not sleeping," suggesting that insomnia replaced even the possibility of rest"*. Similarly, P3 described nighttime as a trigger *"When night comes, I feel like I am in hell... I couldn't sleep."*

Survivors described sleep deprivation as a method of protection: Another survivor described fear of being raped during even in the middle of sexual intercourse expressing that *"I just wanted to vanish when the night comes because he wouldn't let me sleep in peace and even though we are having sex normally I fear he might change his mind and do sex on anal suddenly so I stop enjoying the sexual intercourse we have."* (P10) Which shows that she is always alert. For others, the night symbolized vulnerability *"After I had my 2 sons my husband starts to have anal sex and I refused but he couldn't let me sleep but nags me a lot. And I come here (EWLA) because I couldn't have a sleep he disturbs and makes me suffer a lot"* P3. These experiences indicate a state of hyperarousal, where survivors remain constantly alert and unable to relax, even in situations that should be safe.

Legal Professionals reinforced this observation. L3 described survivors as living with *"trauma and the fear of being in danger,"* highlighting a persistent sense of threat. L 4 linked this to behavioral responses, noting, *"Survivors' inability to trust others contributes to isolation and emotional withdrawal"*. Similarly other Legal professional Legal 5 observed how sleep disturbances affect survivors' daily functioning and legal participation. *"The combination of sleep loss and hypervigilance leaves survivors exhausted and unable to function normally, which affects their ability to work, care for children, and pursue legal action."* and *"Hyper arousal manifests as irritability, difficulty concentrating, and an exaggerated startle response, which can be mistaken for hostility or unreliability in legal settings."*

The findings of this study are consistent with previous literature reviewed in Chapter Two, which identifies sleep disturbances, hypervigilance, and persistent fear as common psychological consequences of sexual violence. Herman (2015) explains that traumatic experiences often disrupt survivors' sense of safety, causing the nervous system to remain in a state of heightened alertness even after the immediate threat has passed. As a result, survivors frequently experience insomnia, nightmares, difficulty relaxing, and ongoing fear responses. Similarly, Campbell et al. (2018) found that survivors of sexual violence commonly report chronic sleep problems, fear of nighttime, and persistent anxiety, particularly when the perpetrator is a current or former intimate partner. Dworkin et al. (2017) likewise reported that intimate partner sexual violence is associated with long-term psychological distress, including hypervigilance, sleep disruption, and difficulties concentrating on daily activities.

4.4.5. Trauma Responses Associated with Betrayal and Emotional Distress

Betrayal was identified as the distinguishing feature of marital rape. Psychological professionals stated *"the intimate bond with a spouse creates a deeper layer of betrayal, making trauma processing and recovery far more tangled and prolonged than for stranger-rape survivors"* (Psych1). Psych2 similarly emphasizes, *"Survivors may struggle with conflicting emotions such as love, fear, guilt, loyalty, hope for change and shame"*. Making it hard to bear or let go due to the connection she has with her intimate partner. Legal professionals also observed that *"this betrayal can significantly damage her self-worth, self-esteem, and emotional stability, often leaving her feeling confused about what to do, what to feel, and where to turn for help"* (Legal8).

Survivors expressed this betrayal experientially: *"He was my first men to have sex with and got bad experience because I never expected this would be his sexual desire as he was so nice when we were dating I didn't knew he want anal sex by then "* (P2). She states how he betrays her trust when she laid herself on him. Similarly P9 *"I realized that he doesn't love me when he treats me in so many different rubbish/ cruel way"*.

Helplessness, Hopelessness, Depression and Suicidal Ideation: Emerged as a chronic belief that nothing will improve. Psychological professionals described it as a *"heavy fog of*

worthlessness and suicidal thoughts" (Psych1). Similarly Psych 3 state, *"when the survivor perceives that there's no escape or support available... she develops a belief that nothing can change"*. That led them to feel hopeless. Legal professionals introduced the concept of "legal helplessness," noting that when survivors realize *"the law does not explicitly protect them from spousal rape they develop a sense of legal helplessness"* (Legal6).

Survivors stated: *" I felt hopeless and not having a sense of meaning for my life and called her life "nonsense" (P8) this was also the feeling of P3 " I felt hopeless and feeling to kill myself sometimes not having a sense of meaning for my life. I suddenly get sad thinking that my life's destiny be this and ask myself how I ended up in this kind of situation"*. Hopelessness, Helplessness manifested as learned powerlessness.

Suicidal ideation was present across multiple survivors, with psychological professionals documenting the most extreme example: a survivor who "left her home at night with the intention of being harmed by wild animals, as she had heard there were hyenas in the area" (Psych5). Legal professionals observed the conditions that lead to suicide: isolation, withdrawal, and having *"no safe place to turn"* (Legal8). Survivors stated directly: *"I wanted to make suicidal lots of time"* (P2) *"I felt hopeless and wanted to kill myself"* (P8); and *"I feel worthless and I want to die"* (P3). One survivor explicitly stated that only her Christian faith prevents her suicide (P8) saying *"and wanted to kill myself but I can't do that because am a Christian, I can't get repentance if I kill my self but honestly that's the only thing that keeps me going to this nonsense life"*.

Dissociation or numbing was identified as a protective response. Psychological professionals described it as a "protective shutdown" where the survivor "detaches to survive daily life with her abuser" (Psych1). Legal professionals observed how dissociation and numbing becomes a barrier to justice: emotional numbness reduces *"motivation, energy, and perceived capacity to seek help"* (Legal5). Survivors described being *"a dead person" with eyes open but feeling nothing* (P2), and stated: *"I feel nothing now I just live and don't know how it changes me"* (P9).

Anger was described by psychological professionals as a potential "dominant feeling" and as motivating the "fight response" (Psych1, Psych3). Legal professionals observed that anger often arises from legal abandonment: survivors become *"highly defensive or develop intense emotional reactions, including anger or thoughts of retaliation, as a response to prolonged abuse"* (Legal6). Survivors confirmed: *"Of all anger is the dominant feeling I had experienced"* (P4) and described how fear transformed into anger over time: *"I stopped fearing him but I started to developed anger instead"* (P6).

Hate emerged as self-hate, hate of child, hate of the perpetrator, and hate of marriage itself. Psychological professionals noted *"intense self-hatred"* and *"body hatred"* (Psych1). Survivors stated: *"I hated myself a lot"* (P2); *"I started to hate myself and my life"* (P10); and *"I started to hate and revenge on him"* (P8). One survivor *"developed strong negative feelings toward both her husband and the institution of marriage"* reported by Psych5.

Revenge, while rare, represented the extreme of the fight response. Psychological professionals documented a survivor who thought to *"kill her husband using his own firearm"* (Psych5). Legal professionals made a striking observation: when laws are not explicit, *"survivors take the matter into their own hands by being vengeful; they commit crimes for a sense of justice"* (Legal1) indicating that legal silence does not prevent revenge but may cause it. Survivors expressed revenge fantasies: *"If I was the judge, I would kill that person"* (P2); *"I would sentence this beast husband death or life imprisonment"* (P11) and through physical retaliation, *"I started to beat him as much as I can."* P8

These destructive trauma responses from betrayal to revenge represent the most severe outcomes of marital rape trauma, with suicidal ideation and revenge indicating that for some survivors, the trauma becomes a matter of life and death.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous literature reviewed in Chapter Two, which identifies betrayal, hopelessness, depression, suicidal ideation, dissociation, anger, and self-destructive emotions as severe psychological consequences of intimate partner sexual violence. Herman (2015) argues that trauma inflicted by a trusted individual is particularly

damaging because it violates fundamental assumptions of safety, trust, and emotional security. Unlike stranger-perpetrated sexual violence, marital rape occurs within an intimate relationship that is expected to provide protection and support. Consequently, survivors often experience profound feelings of betrayal, confusion, and emotional conflict, as reflected in participants' accounts of simultaneously feeling love, fear, loyalty, shame, and anger toward their spouses.

The findings also support Institutional Betrayal Theory (Smith & Freyd, 2014), which suggests that survivors may experience additional psychological harm when institutions fail to acknowledge, prevent, or adequately respond to abuse. The concept of "legal helplessness" described by legal professionals reflects this process. When survivors perceive that the legal system does not recognize or protect them from marital rape, feelings of hopelessness, powerlessness, and abandonment may intensify. This supports previous studies indicating that inadequate institutional responses can exacerbate depression, emotional withdrawal, and loss of trust in social and legal systems.

4.5. Existence and Nature of Legal Silence Regarding Marital Rape in Ethiopia

4.5.1. Absence of Explicit Recognition of Marital Rape under Article 620

The findings of this study underscore a systemic legal barrier that effectively sanctions sexual violence within the marital union. All the legal experts agree on one point that Article 620 of the Criminal Code of Ethiopia (2004) is the legal means of legal silence. Article 620 provides a provision that confines the meaning of rape to sex outside of marriage, meaning marriage is a protection clause for sexual offenses. As noted by one legal professional L2, *“this wording ensures that forced sexual intercourse between spouses is not legally recognized as a criminal act, thereby removing it from the scope of prosecution”*. Another respondent L10 corroborated this, explaining *“the law fundamentally ignores the absence of consent if a marriage certificate is present.”* This legislative gap is not merely a technicality but a permissive mandate; as L1 elaborated, the law paves the way for husbands to commit violent acts with a sense of legal entitlement.

The real-world implications are harrowing, as described by L8, who noted that “*even when a woman is physically incapacitated by illness or menstruation, her husband may use force to satisfy his desires without fear of legal reprisal*”. This mirrors the findings of previous Ethiopian studies, such as the research conducted by EWLA (2008) at Addis Ababa, which argued that the "marital exemption" clause in Ethiopian law reinforces the patriarchal notion of a "marriage debt" where consent is presumed to be permanent and irrevocable.

The present finding is consistent with both national and international literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Previous studies have demonstrated that legal systems that fail to explicitly criminalize marital rape often reinforce social norms that prioritize marital rights over bodily autonomy and consent. EWLA (2008) found that the marital exemption embedded within Ethiopian law contributes to the perception that wives have a continuing obligation to provide sexual access to their husbands regardless of their willingness or consent. Similarly, international human rights literature reviewed in this study emphasizes that consent must remain voluntary, continuous, and revocable within all sexual relationships, including marriage. The absence of explicit legal recognition therefore creates an environment in which survivors' experiences are minimized, ignored, or normalized.

This finding is also supported by Institutional Betrayal Theory (Smith & Freyd, 2014), which argues that institutions cause secondary harm when they fail to acknowledge or respond adequately to abuse. By excluding marital rape from the scope of criminal prosecution, the legal system effectively communicates that survivors' experiences are less serious or less deserving of protection than other forms of sexual violence. Such institutional failure may contribute to feelings of invisibility, abandonment, and powerlessness among survivors. The convergence between doctrinal analysis, legal professionals' observations, previous empirical studies, and theoretical explanations strengthens the conclusion that Article 620 functions as a key mechanism through which legal silence concerning marital rape is maintained in Ethiopia.

4.5.2: Legal Silence as a Message of Worthlessness

Legal silence not only affects the judicial process but also affects the psychological aspect of the survivors. Without any need for legal education or legal knowledge of any specific

article, survivors understand the indifference of the state as the valuelessness of their being. The silence in law undermines the survivors' belief in the existence of justice and safety.

Survivors have expressed the actual feelings of their destruction. Survivor P10, when informed by the lawyer that there is no legal protection in the matter, said, "No, I didn't feel protected since the law does not even mention me. It seemed I was doing something wrong by saying that. Am I making this into a bigger deal than it is? *I started to wonder if I am thinking right or not for bringing an issue which is serious to me but invalid to the law?*" and P11 stated: *"I learned that the law doesn't know us. The law of course makes me to stay silent and endure my pain by myself."* P4 stated: *"I didn't think the law would protect me or give me a solution."* thinking how the legal silence makes their violence valueless, which makes them feel, worthless.

Legal professionals observed the practical consequences of legal silence. Legal 1 stated that *"survivors don't actually expect justice and protection but lose hope and interest in the justice system."* Legal2 noted, *"Because the law does not clearly recognize sexual violence within marriage as rape, many survivors feel the legal system may not fully support them. This can lower their expectations of justice and protection."* Similarly Legal 4 stated bluntly: *"A wife doesn't have a legal ground to sue if she is raped by her husband. They seek justice expecting they will get one, but because of the lack of law they regret even seeking justice and feel unprotected."* Also Legal6 observed, *"When survivors realize the law does not explicitly protect them, they develop a sense of legal helplessness."*

Psychological professionals explained the mechanism of this destruction. Psych3 noted that *"when the law fails to name the harm, survivors feel abandoned by the system, which can increase learned helplessness and reduce the likelihood of help-seeking."* Which this learned helplessness changes to worthlessness. Psych4 added, *"Survivors may struggle to fully accept that what they endured constitutes trauma, which can hinder engagement in therapy."*

When survivors eventually discover the actual legal gap, the revelation is often traumatizing rather than clarifying. P10's experience of consulting a lawyer led to a sense of isolation and self-doubt, making her wonder if her demand for prevention of abuse was

"abnormal." This psychological erosion aligns with the state's refusal to intervene is interpreted by the victim as an endorsement of the abuse, leading to what P11 described as the painful realization that *"the law doesn't know us."*

The findings of this study are consistent with previous literature reviewed in Chapter Two, which demonstrates that legal recognition plays a critical role in validating survivors' experiences and promoting psychological recovery. Smith and Freyd (2014) argue that institutional responses influence how survivors interpret and understand victimization. When institutions fail to acknowledge harm, survivors may begin to question the legitimacy of their own experiences, resulting in self-doubt, confusion, and diminished self-worth. This theoretical explanation is reflected in the accounts of participants who questioned whether they were "making a bigger deal than it is" and who interpreted legal silence as evidence that their suffering was insignificant or unworthy of protection.

4.5.3: Powerlessness Amplified by legal silence and Economic Dependency

It is seen from the findings that legal silence is not a phenomenon standing alone but rather one that works together in synergy with social and economic weaknesses to lock women into abusive relationships. The survivor is locked not just by the abuser but by a law that provides no redress, an economy that gives no freedom, and a society that forces her to stay.

Legal silence directly amplifies powerlessness by removing any legal recourse. Legal4 stated bluntly: *"A wife doesn't have a legal ground to sue if she is raped by her husband. Because of this, police won't accept her complaint."* Legal1 noted that *"perpetrators face no accountability, which 'paves the way for perpetrators to do the violence act and economic dependency effectively silences women'"* as they cannot afford to demand respect for their rights if it means losing their livelihood. This is particularly acute for mothers, who, as L8 observed, are often *"stuck"* due to their responsibility for children and a lack of independent income.

In this environment, perpetrators frequently weaponize the marital status to justify their violence. L10 noted that *"abusers claim marriage implies a 'permanent consent' that overrides any current refusal"*. This was starkly confirmed by survivors: P6 states *"I have 0 control over*

my life," while P11 recounted how her husband explicitly told her that sexual access was the *"only reason"* he married her. Such dynamics illustrate a state of multi-layered powerlessness.

Economic dependency traps survivors who cannot afford to leave. Psych2 stated that *"feelings of entrapment commonly arise due to financial dependence."* Psych5 noted that *"when survivors refuse sexual intercourse, their husbands may withdraw financial support for daily expenses."* Legal5 observed that *"economic dependency becomes a significant factor contributing to entrapment."* Survivors provided the most powerful evidence: P6 stated, *"I have 0 controls over my life. I always feel like he's my boss and am his slave. I couldn't manage myself and my kids because I didn't learn."* P9 stated, *"I don't have anywhere to go and anything to give to eat for my children's."* and Psych1 explained the psychological consequence: *"Without legal validation, survivors feel silenced and powerless, facing stigma or gas lighting from family and society."* The cumulative evidence suggests that legal silence in the Ethiopian context is an active, rather than passive, force. Through the preservation of Article 620, the state is in essence sending the message to women that their bodies are considered legally theirs for the use of their husbands to do with as they please. In effect, what this does is construct a language of violence wherein the survivors cannot use any language to explain what happened to them, putting them in a state of cognitive dissonance. The violation of their rights by the very institution whose purpose it is to protect such rights leads to feelings of betrayal. Even more disturbing is the betrayal experienced by the survivor at an even deeper level, namely spiritual and personal, as they struggle with the pain of having to live in a society that negates their very existence. Therefore, the phenomenon of legal invisibility, whereby the perpetrator walks free and the survivor remains vulnerable all because of the lack of recognition of the crime, necessitates a synchronization of the Ethiopian criminal law with the international human rights laws recognizing the sexual violence against women.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous literature reviewed in Chapter Two, which identifies legal exclusion, economic dependency, and gendered power inequalities as major factors that trap women in abusive relationships. Studies reviewed in this research have shown that survivors of intimate partner sexual violence often remain in abusive marriages not because they consent to the abuse but because structural barriers limit their ability to leave. Economic dependency, lack of alternative housing, responsibility for children, and social

expectations surrounding marriage frequently reduce survivors' options and reinforce their vulnerability. These findings closely correspond with participants' descriptions of feeling trapped by financial dependence, childcare responsibilities, and the absence of meaningful legal protection.

4.6. Social consequences of marital rape on survivors' social relationships, family life, and quality of life

Legal silence refers to the fact that the Ethiopian criminal code (Article 620) fails to include the issue of marital rape in the crime of rape, leaving the survivors to face a distinct form of psychological torment. Unlike cases of rape by strangers where legal recognition can aid in recovery, those who experience marital rape under legal silence bear the burden of the assault itself and the systematic denial of that assault by the law and society.

4.6.1: Family Breakdown and Impact on Children

All professionals and survivors noted severe disruption to family relationships. Psych3 stated: *"Some survivors may view divorce as the only coping mechanism or escape, rather than addressing the underlying psychological and relational issues. This can further complicate the therapeutic process."* L1 observed that marital rape *"dissolves marriages, deeply affects children."* And L4 wrote, *"The only solution is to get divorce. When they find out there is no law which governs sexual abuse in marriage, they lose hope in pursuing justice, so they get divorce or continue with the marriage accepting the abuse."* Also Legal8 stated: *"Most of the time we file a divorce because they want divorce as a solution and we don't have any law to stop this violence. We feel sad cause we couldn't help them and file a divorce for them."* Similarly Legal9 stated: *"It's not addressed since there's no law to regulate this issue. Most of the time we file a divorce because they want divorce as a solution and we don't have any law to stop this violence."* Survivors described the toll on children vividly. P3 admitted: *"I mishandle them a lot without any reason and regret it usually because I wasn't happy."* P5 confessed: *"I abused my son a lot... I feel like I am suffering because of him and if he weren't born I would have left that marriage."* P6 noted: *"I explode on my children too."* P9 felt profound sorrow about "unwanted memories hopelessness self-blame and sadness of not being able to give my children a good peaceful life."

From these narratives, it becomes evident that the impact of marital rape affects the family setting to a great extent and influences not only the marital bond but the emotional atmosphere that prevails when raising children. It turns out that such traumatic experiences can influence parenting and result in negative treatment of children. In such cases, parents' misbehavior towards their children should be considered in light of psychological struggles and difficulties, rather than simply being viewed as irresponsible behavior. Constant psychological stress caused by domestic violence decreases one's ability to be emotionally balanced and provide proper care. Meanwhile, in this case, children are becoming collateral victims of violence. In other words, they are exposed to the consequences of an abusive marriage through experiencing fear and aggression in the family environment. It is also important to note the constant mentioning of divorce as the only way out since no intermediate actions are discussed. Thus, it can be said that marital rape leads to forced family disintegration.

4.6.2: Social Stigma and Isolation

Disclosing marital rape often led to dismissal or ridicule. P4 told some people and *"their reaction was kind of that I make it a big deal."* P7 consulted elders who *"advised me not to raise such issue in public again."* P8 told her family and his family, *"but they laughed at me... they took my suffering as nothing."* P9 explained cultural silence: *"A husband and a wife reconcile in bed"* implying that sexual submission is expected.

Professionals confirmed this pattern. L3 stated: *"Survivors may face family or community pressure not to report their spouse."* L5 noted: *"Rape in general is not enough reported even when there is enough evidence and when marital rape is even legally excluded it already kills the little information there is."* L7 observed: *"In our society it is taboo to talk or complain about sexual abuse by spouse."*

The responses survivors received upon disclosure illustrate how deeply embedded social norms contribute to their marginalization. Instead of viewing them as victims of violence, their claims are seen as overstatement, misinterpretations, or breaking down societal norms by talking about such issues. Not only does this attitude discourage the affected person from seeking help; it also contributes to an overall cultural narrative wherein access to one's partner sexually within

marriage is viewed as the norm and unquestionable. P9 quotes the following saying: "A husband and a wife reconcile in bed." Such wording demonstrates that sexual intercourse within marriage is regarded as a normal and mandatory activity. In this case, refusal and resistance may be treated as deviant behavior, while stating their objections may become a matter of exercising personal rights and liberties.

Apart from the above-stated claims, expert opinions also confirm that the fear of being stigmatized prevents numerous individuals from filing complaints about domestic abuse. Sexual matters in general are considered taboo topics. Within the context of a married couple, sexual violence is a particularly sensitive issue as a result of which people are ridiculed, encouraged to tolerate, or judged for discussing their problems openly. Isolation becomes the most probable consequence as the victims withdraw from possible help-seeking resources to escape condemnation.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous literature reviewed in Chapter Two, which identifies social stigma, victim-blaming, and social isolation as major barriers to disclosure and help-seeking among survivors of sexual violence. Previous studies have shown that survivors are often discouraged from reporting abuse due to fear of ridicule, family pressure, community judgment, and cultural norms that normalize male sexual entitlement within marriage. Similarly, feminist scholarship argues that patriarchal beliefs frequently portray sexual access within marriage as a husband's right, making resistance or disclosure appear socially unacceptable. These findings are further supported by Institutional Betrayal Theory (Smith & Freyd, 2014), which suggests that survivors experience additional harm when social and institutional environments fail to acknowledge or validate their victimization. The convergence between survivor narratives, professional observations, and existing literature therefore demonstrates that social stigma and cultural norms surrounding marriage contribute significantly to survivors' isolation, silence, and reluctance to seek support or justice.

4.6.3: Reduced Quality of Life and Long-Term Social Withdrawal

The cumulative effect was a drastic reduction in quality of life. P2 said she couldn't leave her bedroom. P3 described her home at night as "*hell*." P5 developed enduring trust issues: "*I fear all the men I feel they'll do the same on me like my husband did to me. I don't have trust to*

anyone." P11 similarly stated: *"I started to avoid anything that's associated with love and connections after those times with him."* Professionals observed this withdrawal. Survivors get traumatized by even causing self-harm; after divorce, children are no longer the same; it becomes difficult for them to make a new family. L10 writes that lack of legal protection makes it challenging for the family relationship to continue since the survivor experiences disbelief, accusation, and pressures to remain quiet.

The above results reveal that the social impacts of marital rape are both long-lasting and extensive. Survivors talk about the feeling of being imprisoned or afraid; some even say they feel the need to emotionally shut themselves up. The home should provide a safe haven; however, due to the abuse suffered, the survivor sees their home as a source of distress and expectation of harm. This change creates a dramatic difference between how they view their environment and those around them.

The building of trust issues and the unwillingness to form future connections shows that the survivors are psychologically affected. The betrayal within an intimate relationship changes survivors' perception of such relations to the point where any future connection becomes a threat to their wellbeing. Therefore, the social impact of the betrayal influences not only their personal life but also affects their ability to re-establish contact with others.

In general, the quality of life for the survivor becomes reduced to not just their feelings and thoughts but also their activities and relationships. For instance, they may stop participating in the community, seeking job opportunities, and engaging in social interactions. This trend has been confirmed by professionals who mention that despite leaving the abusive partner, the survivors continue experiencing the consequences with their children.

To conclude, the impacts discussed show the extent of the social harm that is experienced by victims. The children suffer indirect abuse, families get destroyed, and the survivors are isolated from society. It must be mentioned that the legal silence allows the suffering to continue since the action is legally recognized. Thus, legal silence becomes social permission.

4.7. Doctrinal Barriers Limiting EWLA's Capacity and survivors willingness to seek formal support

4.7.1: No Criminal Remedy Only Divorce

The most consistent finding across all professionals was that marital rape provides no criminal recourse. L4 stated bluntly: *"There is no law to govern sexual abuse committed within marriage. Because of this police won't accept their complaint and investigate the crime."* L1 wrote: *"Perpetrators are not being accountable for their wrongdoings which worsen the situation."* L6 noted: *"The current legal framework in Ethiopia tends to exclude marital sexual violence from criminal accountability, resulting in minimal legal protection."*

When survivors come to EWLA, the only legal option is divorce. L10 explained: *"Most of the time we file a divorce because they want divorce as a solution and we don't have any law to stop this violence. We feel sad because we couldn't help them and file a divorce for them."* L4 similarly stated: *"The only solution is to divorce."*

4.7.2: Evidentiary and Procedural Barriers

Even when survivors try to use related laws (assault, domestic violence), professionals identified multiple barriers. L1 noted: *"Those abuses occur in closed doors, in police station those survivors are forced to bring witnesses themselves, which makes them traumatized and justice less."* L2 pointed to *"social pressure survivors may face family or community pressure not to report their spouse."* L7 observed: *"When they find out there is no law which governs sexual abuse in marriage they lose hope in pursuing justice."*

One professional (L9) listed multiple barriers: *"Evidentiary barriers: proving lack of consent is extremely difficult within a marriage... institutional bias: police and legal officers may encourage family reconciliation rather than criminal prosecution."*

4.7.3: EWLA's Limited Role as a Legal Aid Organization

Survivors' experiences with EWLA were mixed. P10 came hoping to stop her husband's behavior, but the lawyer could only offer divorce: *"I wasn't coming to get divorce I wanted to sue him and make him stop his unwanted sexual character but I end up knowing*

leaving this marriage." This represents a fundamental constraint: EWLA can provide legal aid for women's right protection, divorce, child custody, and property division, but it cannot create a criminal remedy that does not exist.

Several survivors had not sought help because they assumed it would be useless. P6 said: *"I know that there's no one to help me so I didn't want in the first place."* P4 similarly did not report because *"as I am seeing my society awareness around this and the very thought of marriage I didn't think the law would protect me."*

The doctrinal barrier is absolute: Article 620 excludes marital rape from the definition of rape. No creative legal interpretation can overcome this. EWLA's staff are reduced to offering divorce as the only escape, which is a form of institutional helplessness that mirrors survivors' personal helplessness. This is not a failure of EWLA but a failure of the legislature. The organization functions as a bandage on a wound that requires surgery.

The findings of this study are consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, which highlights the significant challenges survivors face when legal frameworks fail to explicitly recognize marital rape as a criminal offense. Previous studies have shown that the absence of specific legislation limits survivors' access to justice and restricts the ability of legal institutions and support organizations to provide effective remedies. EWLA (2008) similarly observed that the exclusion of marital rape from Ethiopian criminal law leaves survivors with limited legal options, often reducing available interventions to divorce and family-related legal remedies rather than criminal prosecution.

Furthermore, the literature identifies evidentiary difficulties, institutional bias, social pressure, and preference for family reconciliation as common barriers that discourage survivors from pursuing formal legal action. These findings are also consistent with Institutional Betrayal Theory (Smith & Freyd, 2014), which suggests that survivors experience secondary harm when legal institutions are unable or unwilling to provide meaningful protection. The convergence between survivor experiences, legal professionals' observations, doctrinal analysis, and previous empirical studies therefore demonstrates that the lack of explicit criminalization of marital rape not only limits EWLA's capacity to assist survivors but also discourages survivors from seeking formal support and justice.

4.8. Help-Seeking Behaviors and Coping Mechanisms

4.8.1: Overwhelming Non-Reporting to Police

Only one survivor (P10) even considered reporting, and she did not proceed to police after learning the law offered no protection. Ten out of eleven survivors never reported. Reasons included: shame (P1, P3), lack of legal awareness (P2, P5, P7, P8, P9), belief that the law would not help (P4, P6, P11), and economic dependency (P6, P9). P6's explanation captures multiple factors: *"I couldn't possibly report for many reasons... it's my most private secret and plus we are legally married. I didn't think I have a valid claim against him."* P9 was overcome with this issue in such a way that she immediately responded saying "I was crying badly and I could only tell God." This widespread trend of non-reporting is not based merely on individual fear but a silence perpetuated by the existence of ambiguity in the legal structure as well as socio-cultural expectations. It seems like the lack of criminalizing marital rape creates in people a sort of disengagement which leads them to believe that reporting this issue to authorities will prove to be futile, inappropriate and in some cases even illegal. In this respect, it becomes evident that the legal structure does not become the tool for protecting women in their marriages but an instrument that separates them from seeking justice because of its inability to acknowledge such harm.

The mentioned reasons for non-reporting issues such as shame, unawareness, the ineffectiveness of the law, and economic dependence, among others, are interrelated to a great extent. Firstly, shame as a feeling is directly connected with cultural beliefs about marriage, sexual relations, and a woman's honor. Furthermore, awareness can be seen not only as the result of individuals' lack of knowledge but also of a systemic failure in providing women with this information and teaching them their rights. Finally, economic dependence can also become a significant factor. As illustrated by P6 and P9, silence becomes both a coping mechanism and a forced condition, where speaking out feels either impossible or meaningless.

4.8.2: Selective Disclosure to Trusted Individuals

Some survivors did disclose to selected individuals, with mixed results. P2 told her sister a medical professional who "cried and took her to hospital" and later to EWLA this was a

positive help-seeking outcome. P4 told some people but was mocked. P5 told no one. P6 told a neighbor who shared her own story, and they "agreed to keep private and see divorce as the only option." P7 told elders who advised silence. P8 told family who laughed. P10 told a schoolmate who became frightened of marriage, causing P10 to stop sharing: *"I even blame myself for telling her."*

Disclosing selectively can be seen as an instance of strategic and measured assistance seeking, whereby the survivor tries to manage her pain in a confined space of trust. The reactions she gets are often similar to the silence that prevails about marital rape in society as well as legally. The consequence of disclosure is usually not acceptance and understanding, but rather trivialization and ridicule, or worse, being told to simply endure.

The case of P2 illustrates the transformative potential of empathetic and informed responses. Her sister's reaction marked by emotional validation, immediate medical intervention, and facilitation of institutional support demonstrates how individual actors can bridge gaps left by systemic failures. Yet such responses appear to be the exception rather than the norm. However, derogatory or harmful responses, which P4, P7, and P8 have been subjected to, do not just dismiss their experience but also cause secondary victimization.

Moreover, the fact that survivors, like P6, turn to people who have had similar experiences further emphasizes the significance of shared pain in forming networks of mutual support. However, these networks often operate within the same constraints of silence, leading to solutions such as private endurance or divorce rather than legal action. The case study of P10 also shows that, although there may be good intentions in disclosing, unexpected results will happen, such as the fear felt by others, and this creates a situation where individuals censor themselves. In general, selective disclosure indicates the resilience of survivors in their search for companionship and the inability of society to cope.

4.8.3: Coping Mechanisms Endurance, Numbing, and Delayed Action

Survivors employed various coping strategies, mostly maladaptive. P2 described dissociative numbing: *"after 5 months passed I lost my tears I couldn't cry I stopped feeling anything."* P5 endured but later regretted: *"She regrets now and wishes she could have stood for*

herself and said no." P6 stayed for economic reasons: *"I didn't learn so I couldn't manage myself and my kids."* P7 endured for years but eventually sought divorce. P9 remained because she had *"nowhere to go and anything to give to eat for my children."*

Some survivors developed revenge fantasies or aggression. P7 wanted to harm him. P8 started beating him back, but *"he started to enjoy it and beat me back more."* P11 eventually left and now avoids all romantic connections.

Survivors' coping techniques show the interaction between psychological survival and external constraints. In most cases, endurance appears to be the most frequently used coping mechanism. While for some it may mean the actual acceptance of domestic violence, others see it as a desperate attempt to endure and stay alive. In cases when a woman cannot leave her abuser due to her economic dependency, lack of education or any other constraints, she has no choice other than to endure domestic violence because she is unable to change the situation.

Dissociative numbing described by P2 is a kind of defense mechanism that helps individuals to cope with repetitive trauma. Losing one's ability to feel anything as a result of traumatic experience could be viewed as a means of protecting oneself from psychological pain and stress. Nonetheless, these kinds of defense mechanisms have their price; they cause psychological problems in future and prevent from building relationships.

In some cases, delayed actions such as eventual divorce indicate that coping mechanisms might gradually change. The decision of P7 and P11 to leave a man shows that at some point a survivor decides to break the chain of abuse and find ways of self-protection, but it still leaves deep emotional scars which will be discussed later.

Aggression or even revenge fantasies mentioned by P5 show the intensity of a person's negative feelings caused by domestic violence. Such coping mechanisms do not reflect any deviation but just represent the response to long-lasting injustice and inability to do anything against it.

4.8.4: Survivors Advise to Other Women

Despite their suffering, survivors offered advice to other women. P1: *"Not stay quiet thinking this is being god fearing women."* P2: *"Get divorce and nothing is more than one's life."* P3: *"If she has ability to raise her kids to divorce this wild."* P5: *"Not stay quiet and talk to professionals."* P6: *"Run or escape as soon as possible."* P10: *"Seek help psychologically... thank you for considering and calling me to take my idea I felt heard and seen."*

In terms of its ability to break the taboo of silence on marital rape and normalization of it, advice from victims of this crime is invaluable. Despite their experience being characterized by suffering, restriction, and lack of choice, they demonstrate full moral clarity about the problem and recognize the wrong done to them. Their moral stance is important because it proves that survivors of marital rape do not consider it acceptable even in cases when the problem remains invisible to the laws and society.

Breaking silence, seeking help, and focusing on one's health are recurring themes mentioned by survivors in the context of marital rape. On the one hand, it shows their understanding of the damaging nature of cultural values that glorify endurance in marriage. However, on the other hand, the fact that women advise leaving or divorcing suggests that they see such a step as the only possible response to marital rape due to the lack of legal recognition and appropriate measures.

For example, in case of P10, it is apparent that she needs recognition and validation of her experience more than anything else in order to feel better. Thus, being able to tell her story to someone who will not judge her for it seems important for her psychological health. In addition, there is evidence that there may be people who would offer support and take survivors' side despite the lack of legal protection.

Seeking help is hindered by legal silence. Women do ask someone for help, however, it turns out that people usually respond with dismissiveness, laughter, advise of endurance, and urging them not to speak out. The positive reaction described by P2's sister is an exception to this rule. Leaving and getting divorced are the only coping strategies left. Nevertheless, it is obvious

that survivors have sufficient moral clarity to give such advice: they recognize the wrongdoing and want other women to protect themselves from it.

Thus, legal silence is evident not only at the institutional level. Its impacts on social interactions and decisions made by survivors of marital rape are apparent from their responses. However, it is also apparent that legal silence does not stop survivors of marital rape from trying to protect their health and seek help. Therefore, in order to change this situation for the better, it is necessary to enhance legal recognition of such crimes and improve responses to them.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous literature reviewed in Chapter Two, which indicates that survivors of sexual violence frequently face significant barriers to help-seeking and often rely on informal coping mechanisms when formal support systems are inaccessible or ineffective. Previous studies have shown that shame, fear of stigma, economic dependency, lack of awareness, and distrust in legal institutions are among the most common reasons survivors do not report sexual violence. Similar patterns emerged in the present study, where most survivors remained silent because they believed reporting would be futile, feared negative social reactions, or lacked the resources necessary to leave abusive relationships. Research reviewed in this study also demonstrates that survivors commonly disclose abuse only to trusted individuals and that the quality of responses received can either facilitate recovery or contribute to secondary victimization. The positive support received by some participants contrasts with the dismissal, ridicule, and pressure to remain silent experienced by others, reflecting patterns identified in the literature.

These findings are further supported by Trauma Theory (Herman, 2015), which explains that survivors often adopt coping mechanisms such as emotional numbing, avoidance, dissociation, and withdrawal when faced with prolonged and inescapable trauma. Similarly, Institutional Betrayal Theory (Smith & Freyd, 2014) suggests that survivors may become reluctant to seek help when institutions fail to recognize or adequately respond to their victimization. The widespread non-reporting observed in this study, together with survivors' reliance on endurance, silence, selective disclosure, and eventual divorce, reflects the combined influence of trauma, social stigma, economic dependency, and legal exclusion. The convergence between survivor narratives, professional observations, previous empirical studies, and

theoretical explanations therefore strengthens the conclusion that help-seeking behaviors and coping mechanisms are profoundly shaped by both the experience of marital rape and the broader legal and social environment in which survivors live.

4.9 Integrated Analysis and Shared Themes

4.9.1 The Core Paradox: Legal Silence vs. Lived Reality

However, the most striking conclusion is the discrepancy between the legal situation and people's lives. The law does not consider sexual violence within marriage as rape. Nevertheless, both victims and specialists agree that such cases result in severe consequences. As one of the interviewed individuals (P3) noted: *"There's no word for this."*

Such a contradiction is the key feature of the entire study. On the one hand, the law operates as a classification that identifies certain acts as punishable harms. On the other hand, the experiences of women who were forced to have sex in their marriages are independent from such classifications. As evidenced by the narratives, forced sex within a marriage results in psychological, emotional, and physical consequences identical to those that accompany any type of rape. However, due to the absence of proper wording within the legal system, survivors face the challenge of being addressed to in their sufferings. Thus, this situation resembles epistemic injustice, which deprives individuals of the ability to communicate their experiences effectively.

In addition, the phrase "there's no word for this" implies something beyond its literal meaning. The inability to use specific terminology indicates that survivors do not receive adequate recognition of their traumatic experiences. Consequently, without appropriate wording, individuals experience uncertainty and self-doubt, as well as conflicts with family members and other people in their social environments. Hence, legal silence does not just deprive women of protection but influences how harms are perceived and communicated.

4.9.2 The Cycle of Silence and Suffering

The lack of legal recognition of the issue fosters the existence of social silence that leads to the continuation of psychological pain. Survivors of rape do not report cases as they foresee shame and futility of legal procedures. Moreover, professionals are not allowed to take any

criminal actions in order to stop perpetrators legally. Instead, legal experts are able to provide divorces that will end marriages but fail to provide justice for raped individuals.

This mechanism can be interpreted as a self-perpetuating circle where each element of silence helps maintain another one. First of all, the lack of legal recognition shows that marital rape does not have the status of public concern; thus, it does not attract institutional attention. As a consequence, social silence continues to grow as society perceives this problem as a private issue that should not be spoken about. Under these circumstances, survivors start to accept this idea and do not want to share their experiences.

The involvement of institutions such as the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association shows both the possibilities and limitations of existing survivor-support institutions. Although providing survivors with divorce is an important type of help, this kind of assistance is related only to a relational aspect of the problem, while there is no chance of obtaining criminal justice for survivors. Consequently, women may separate themselves from abusers physically but still feel pain and need for justice and closure. Moreover, professionals have their own restrictions that prevent them from acting according to their understanding of situations. Despite the fact that lawyers or counselors know about the seriousness of domestic violence, they cannot do anything about it as long as legal procedures do not cover this type of crime.

4.9.3 The Double Victimization

Many survivors suffered from two violations at once; the sexual violation itself and the later invalidation caused by the absence of legal recognition. As P10 admitted "*the law doesn't even say anything about me*". It means that, in addition to experiencing physical discomfort and pain and being traumatized psychologically, survivors were exposed to legal invalidation, thus enhancing feelings of guilt, worthlessness, and hopelessness.

The idea of double victimization offers important insights into understanding the nature of what happens with women who get raped by their spouses. At first, a person experiences sexual violence and loses their rights and freedom. Secondly, due to the legal system refusing to admit that what happened can be qualified as rape, another level of damage occurs and proves to be long-lasting and even harder to bear than the initial one.

"The law doesn't even say anything about me" - this statement made by P10 shows the emotional reaction caused by the lack of acknowledgment on the part of the law. At this stage, the victim of marital rape realizes that her experience cannot be addressed by any legal institution because it is not even considered as rape. This awareness can make women feel increasingly isolated since there is no official opportunity to get help with their problems.

Legal invalidation can become a source of deepened trauma and additional guilt. In fact, when the experience of a woman is not considered rape by the legal system, she may start feeling confused because of a question arising in her mind whether or not it was true. Doubtful situations like these make women feel powerless, hopeless, and worthless.

4.9.4 Resilience despite Silence

Even in the presence of these barriers, survivors demonstrated resilience by seeking divorce, caring for their children, approaching EWLA, participating in interviews, and offering advice to other women. *The last sentence of P10's interview reads "thank you for considering and calling me to take my idea, I felt heard and I now get a sense of that I was right and heard and seen honestly"*. It means that the very fact of interviewing made this survivor "heard and seen". Hence, the possibility to be heard and seen even in conditions of legal silence might be therapeutic. While the results of the study clearly revealed the widespread nature of silence, its institutionalized character and lack of proper response to it on the part of the system, it still demonstrated the great resourcefulness of survivors in facing these difficulties. Resilience should not be confused with the ability to escape suffering; rather, it refers to enduring adversity, adapting to it, and trying to find ways out despite the existing obstacles. Whatever steps survivors took (left their abusers, took care of their kids, participated in the research), they did it in order to somehow take back control over their lives. Another therapeutic dimension of survivors' resilience is the act of sharing their experience. As P10 said, it was crucial for her to realize that she *"felt heard and seen"*. It means that even in the cases when the systems of protection do not function properly, some therapeutic effect of being heard and seen could be achieved by simply talking to someone and expressing your feelings. In addition, the desire of survivors to help others in their plight through their recommendations means that they were able

to use their difficult experience as an opportunity to learn something valuable and give that knowledge to other people.

It also shows the survivors' resistance against the imposed silence by making their voice heard through discussion of their experience and offering advice to others regarding the issue, as they think that something is right or wrong. In summary, it can be said that providing such space to the survivors in which they can feel supported and listened to becomes essential irrespective of whether any legal action is taken or not.

4.10. Survivors' Experiences and Consequences of Marital Rape

Case 1

In P1, it was evident that she had been married for two years and four months. At this point, she was not living with her husband since she had to part ways with him due to the circumstances caused by throwing her down from the fourth floor of their apartment. From the start of the marriage she noticed his problematic sexual behavior but complied hoping he would change. She repeatedly endured unwanted sex, often accompanied by his intoxication, physical violence and biting.

She now feels hatred toward both her husband and sex. She felt dehumanized, more like a servant than a wife, and believed he only wanted her for sex. When she confronted him, he threatened to seek other women. The abuse continued even after childbirth, despite her physical pain. These experiences led to diminished self-worth, low self-esteem, loss of self-respect, fear, sadness, anxiety, anger, hopelessness, helplessness, emotional numbness, and feeling trapped. Cultural pressures made leaving difficult. She felt isolated and blamed herself, unable to seek help from family because she chose the marriage herself. She also feared judgment and had no awareness of legal protections. She advises other women not to stay silent, not to mistake endurance for being a “good” or “God-fearing” wife, and to seek legal support and leave abusive marriages.

Case 2

A divorced woman reports she remained in her marriage for only six months. Three days after their religious Orthodox wedding (ጥክ ሊል), her husband forced her into anal sex against her will. She entered the marriage as a virgin and felt deeply confused, questioning whether she or her husband was wrong, especially since he had been kind during dating.

She now feels intense hatred, regret, and disappointment, and wishes she had never married. She lost her sense of self-worth and identity, no longer seeing herself as human. She experienced intrusive thoughts, prolonged crying, fear of nighttime, anxiety, anger, paralysis, emotional numbness, and hopelessness. She avoided leaving her room and felt her suffering was invisible.

Despite being financially independent, she felt trapped by religious and cultural beliefs discouraging divorce. She also felt anger toward God and had recurring suicidal thoughts. Over time, she internalized the abuse, believing she deserved it, and became emotionally detached, remaining physically present but unresponsive. She reports memory gaps and persistent emptiness, existing in a numb state without sleep or nightmares. She describes surviving as being “reborn” and uses the phrase “ለ ጉድ የ ፈጠረኝ ፍጥረት” to express extreme suffering.

She initially hid the abuse fearing her brothers might kill her husband. However, her sister a medical professional insisted on knowing the cause of her physical symptoms. After disclosure, her sister offered emotional support and took her to the hospital, where she slept for three consecutive days her first real rest in five months. Witnessing her sister’s reaction helped her realize the severity of the abuse. With her sister’s help, she sought support from EWLA and filed for divorce. She emphasizes that only her sister fully understood her.

She describes the abuse as equivalent to death, feeling she died and came back to life. She expresses anger toward her perpetrator, saying she might kill him with his own gun, and she wished if a judge would impose the harshest punishment. Her advice to other women was to prioritize their life and well-being expressing that nothing is more important than their self and seek divorce rather than stay in abusive marriages.

Case 5

A woman, now divorced for 14 years, was married for one year and ten months. She first realized her husband's sexual behavior was non-consensual during her first pregnancy, and the abuse continued after childbirth, even when she was in severe physical pain.

She felt unable to make decisions, often blamed her-self, and believed women had little agency in marriage. Married at 19, she lacked maturity and confidence to speak up or seek help. She experienced hopelessness, sadness, chronic headaches, emotional exhaustion, and memory problems even needing written reminders. She felt profoundly isolated. The distress affected her relationship with her child; she had emotional outbursts toward her son, sometimes blaming his birth for her inability to leave. She regrets this, recognizing it came from her own suffering.

Even 14 years post-divorce, the impact persists. She has ongoing fear and distrust toward men, expects abuse in new relationships, and struggles to form trust. Though she has somewhat forgiven her ex-husband, interactions about their children trigger memories of abuse, causing sadness and distress.

During the marriage, she disclosed nothing due to fear and uncertainty. She internalized her suffering, remained silent, and lacked awareness of legal protections. She mentions that Even if she had known, she might not have acted due to emotional numbness and compliance. She now regrets not speaking out. And her advice to other women was “*do not remain silent, seek professional help,*” and increase wished public awareness including through media so women know their rights and support systems, fostering hope.

Case 7

The subject of this interview is a 50 year old divorced lady who had been married for nearly three decades before she got a divorce. Around the 20 year mark, she noticed a drastic change in her husband's sexual behavior: he began using enhancement substances (e.g., Viagra) and applying unknown creams. She found this shocking and unnatural, even “*devilish*” In her literal word “*የሰይጣን ስራ,*” especially because their sex life had previously been consensual,

respectful, and emotionally fulfilling. She strongly rejected these conditions but felt physically unable to resist him.

This shift made her feel unvalued, disrespected, and unloved. Over the past 10 years, the memories remain vivid. She expresses deep sadness that her later years “በግረሬያየ ሰአት” have become a period of distress instead of rest. She experiences ongoing stress, anger, memory loss, severe sleep disturbances, sadness, and shock. She struggles to understand how a loving relationship turned hostile and harmful. She has recurring flashbacks of her husband’s aggressive behavior, including during sexual encounters when she tries to comply her participation is submission, not consent. Trust is severely damaged; she no longer feels safe around him, especially intimately. She feels ashamed for staying so long after abuse began, harming her dignity and self-worth. Over time, she developed hopelessness, questioned the existence of love, and sometimes feels life lacks meaning. She has also had thoughts of harming her husband.

She did not report to police due to lack of legal awareness. Instead, she sought help from elders (shmaglewoch), who discouraged her from speaking publicly, calling the issue shameful and private. They framed it as her husband’s personal matter “ገመና” and dismissed her physical pain and aversion to sex. This silencing made her feel unrecognized and unsupported, deepening her suffering and preventing further help-seeking. When asked for advice to other women, she found it difficult to give guidance due to the complexity and severity of her experience, expressing uncertainty about the best course of action.

Case 8

A 30 years old woman, married for five years, has sought help from EWLA to begin divorce proceedings. Her marriage involves continuous conflict and physical abuse. Her husband constantly demands sex regardless of her condition even when she’s ill or under medical treatment. He is heavily addicted to alcohol, drugs, and pornography, and often forces sexual acts he has seen in porn. She has lost all interest in sex. When she refuses, he either forces her or leaves the house overnight. She views his behavior as progressively abnormal as she literally said “አብዳለ”. She now sees herself in degrading terms, feeling dehumanized and treated as a sexual object worse than someone in transactional sex. She experiences anger, fear,

hopelessness, and a sense of being trapped and isolated, believing no one would understand. Though she has no flashbacks, her home life is chaotic and unsafe. Trust is eroded; she no longer trusts herself. She feels ashamed of forced acts, anticipates further abuse, and blames herself for not leaving sooner.

She has developed anger and revenge fantasies, sometimes physically resisting her husband, but this escalates his aggression and leaves her more powerless. She has had suicidal thoughts but refrains due to religious beliefs. She has not approached police or legal institutions, seeing the abuse as a private marital matter and lacking knowledge of legal protections for forced sex within marriage.

She disclosed to both families, but they laughed or told her to endure. These dismissive responses made her feel invalidated and insignificant, increasing self-blame and silence. She wishes societal systems could be held accountable for normalizing such behavior. When asked for advice to other women, she feels unable to give guidance due to the complexity and severity of her own experience.

Case 10

A 24 years old woman, married for two years, sought help from EWLA after her husband began insisting on anal sex, justifying it by saying vaginal intercourse did not satisfy him. She found this act “*disgusting, wild, and unacceptable.*” She felt confused, self-hatred, devalued, and lost respect for herself and the marriage.

She experienced deep sadness, emotional disturbance, and fear of night and fearing her husband “*as if I don’t know him anymore.*” Despite coming from a respected family, religious and social norms left her unprotected. Nights were especially distressing; she sometimes wished to “*vanish*” because he wouldn’t let her sleep peacefully. Even during consensual sex, she feared he might suddenly force anal sex, which ruined intimacy for her. Fear remained her dominant emotion. She felt worthless, had trouble concentrating on her studies, and experienced intrusive memories. She did not report to the police but went to EWLA for legal support. However, a lawyer asked if her husband had committed other acts to justify for a lawful claim. When she

said no and stated she wanted legal action to stop the behavior not divorce she was told no legal framework existed to help her. She concluded that leaving the marriage was her only option.

She said As a Muslim woman, she could not tell her family. She told a close friend and schoolmate, who supported her, but she stopped out of guilt for instilling fear of marriage in her friend. Through her own research, she learned such acts are illegal in some developed countries, which helped her stop personalizing the violence. When I asked her for her advice to other women, she said that the psychological impact is far worse than physical pain and advised to seek psychological support. She expressed gratitude for being heard, seen, and validated, which helped her realize her feelings are legitimate.

Case 11

A 29-year-old woman with a master's degree has been married nearly 10 years but now lives separately from her husband; divorce is not finalized yet not even started. After returning from two years abroad for her studies, she asked her husband to take an HIV test before resuming sex. He refused, and his aggressive sexual behavior began. She felt unable to resist because she was already his wife. He told her sex was his main reason for marrying her, questioning her purpose if she refused.

Despite her education and managerial job, she felt unable to manage her personal life. She expressed that feels like she's "*two different people.*" One much respected in her work environment and another devalued woman in her home, questioning whether her worth was only sexual. She experienced sadness, fear, emotional disturbance, anger, and a lasting feeling of uselessness. Before separation, she had flashbacks, panic-like feelings, betrayal, suicidal thoughts, and self-hatred. After separating, these symptoms reduced, but she remains emotionally numb. She still has difficulty trusting others and avoids love or emotional connection. She did not go to police, believing the law would not protect her since the issue is socially accepted. She said "*the law does not know us*" and that legal silence forced her to endure alone. A friend advised her to stay silent and leave. Her advice to other women was to leave abusive marriages.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the research in light of research questions, prior empirical research and theoretical literature. The research dealt with marital rape by examining the psychosocial, legal and social aspects of how it exists in a context where the law does not recognize it the case of Ethiopia. Employing an IPA methodology, the research explored the lived experiences of survivors and practitioners in the legal field (especially EWLA) in cases of GBV. However, the demographic analysis of the survivors gives us some important clues, which form the basis of other findings in this study. First of all, the data indicate that marital rape takes place across all educational levels. Some of the participants had no formal education while some had attained university education and even Master's degrees. Thus, it shows that marital rape cannot be equated with poor education, as some people believe. The findings of this study show that even educated women can become victims of gender-based violence.

In addition, the data on marital status of survivors show the extent to which marital rape affects marital relationships and family stability. Most participants were either divorced or separated, while only a few remained married at the time of the study. This finding suggests that marital rape contributed to marital breakdown and was an important factor in the dissolution of many participants' marriages. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies, which indicate that sexual violence within intimate relationships often leads to relationship instability, separation, and divorce due to the erosion of trust, safety, and emotional intimacy between partners (Anderson, 2020; DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2018). However, separation or divorce did not necessarily resolve survivors' difficulties, as many continued to experience psychological trauma and faced challenges in obtaining justice.

Furthermore, even after leaving abusive marriages, several participants reported difficulties accessing legal protection and support. This finding is consistent with studies suggesting that survivors of sexual violence may continue to experience long-term psychological distress, feelings of insecurity, and barriers to justice even after escaping abusive relationships

(Cloitre et al., 2019; Herman, 2015). Therefore, the findings suggest that marital rape has lasting impacts on survivors, affecting both their psychological wellbeing and their ability to achieve a sense of justice and recovery.

5.2 Predominant Psychological Trauma Experienced by Survivors of Marital Rape

These findings demonstrate that survivors of marital rape endure intense, chronic psychological trauma such as continuous emotional pain, recurrent intrusive images, heightened arousal, emotional numbing, self-hatred, and suicidal intentions that strongly corroborate the global literature suggesting that intimate partner sexual violence represents one of the strongest and most consistent risk factors for long term mental health disorders (WHO, 2013; Devries et al., 2011). Importantly, the present study contextualizes these IPV-experienced symptoms within the unique socio-legal structure of Ethiopia in which the crime of marital rape is not recognized. This legal construction (or lack thereof) influences both the prevalence of spousal sexual violence as well as its negative psychological consequences in that survivors, unable to invoke their rights through formal institutions, require frequent knowledge validation in their daily lives.

The widespread emotional distress expressed by victims fear, anxiety, anger and sadness constitutes what Herman (1992) refers to as complex trauma, the result of prolonged, and repeated exposure to interpersonal violence. Unlike the experience of trauma as a result of a single traumatic event, the marital rape victims encountered the experience of violence within a continuously existing relationship, where violence was inevitable and public, yet also normalized within the solitary space of the home. The experience of the ongoing sexual violence prompted a cumulative psychological assault on the survivor's reality, gradually diminishing her capacity to feel emotionally stable. None of the study participants illustrated the experience of feeling states as episodic. Instead of experiencing clusters of negative feeling states, the victims described the ongoing presence of psychological distress in their lives:

Studies in Ethiopian gender-based violence have similarly found that survivors suffer chronic emotional pain. Kassa and Abebe (2019) placed a qualitative lens to this finding, reporting that women who had experienced intimate partner violence in Addis Ababa experienced anxiousness, depression and emotional disturbance. This study extends the

understanding of the detrimental effects of marital rape by suggesting that this form of sexual violence causes a more profound fracture of psychological integrity. Findings in the current study that participants felt as if they were no longer "human" or as if they were not "there" suggest a more marked breaking of the participants' self-model that exceeds mere emotional distress. This notion of a distinctly depersonalized state underpins the phenomenon of depersonalization, which, as described in the APA (2013), is fundamental to trauma-related disorders. In this way, marital rape is not simply painful; it devastates the participant's very construct of self.

The results also suggest that intrusive memories, hyper arousal and sleep disruption form core elements of the survivor's psychological disorder. A number of women describe a range of symptoms including difficulty sleeping, flashbacks of the abuse and hyper vigilance, especially at night. When considering the diagnostic criteria for PTSD (DSM-5 - APA, 2013), these are some of the core features of the symptom cluster. Their recurrence at 8 years post-trauma highlights the fact that the trauma is not 'past', but living on in the survivor's day-to-day existence. The focus on sleep disturbance appears to demonstrate a mental state where rest is impossible due to the sense of ongoing threat.

In the Ethiopian context, similar studies on survivors of domestic violence by Fikre (2020) found sleep disturbance and fear/annoying thoughts to be common aftereffects. However, this study sheds light on the unique aspect of 'marital rape': the turning of the home into a traumatic space. While violence can occur in any environment, the home, even in the context of marital rape, was once supposed to be a place of safety and comfort for women. This inversion of their environment changed everything; Fikre (2020) argues that the presence of violence in the home altered women's perception of space, which in turn shaped their ongoing experiences. According to international literature, the same is true for sexual violence by an intimate partner such offenses may result in more profound psychological outcomes than sexual violence by strangers because of the disruption of preconceived notions of safety (Basile, 2022). The victim's constant proximity to her attacker hindered psychological recovery and perpetuated hyperarousal.

Emotional numbing and dissociation featured heavily in survivors' narratives. These can be presented as protective factors that aid survival in the face of persistent and unavoidable trauma. As Dr Gabor Mate (2022) states "Dissociation is a protective response in which people disconnect from their feelings, their sensation of the body, or, sometimes, their very sense of reality, and this is intended to reduce or eliminate pain". In cases of marital rape, where resistance is futile, or, indeed, harmful, dissociative states are an understandable lifeline. However, this is not necessarily a positive factor in the long term, as it can impair aspects of emotional development, relational bonds and self-conception.

While research in Ethiopia is starting to acknowledge trauma psychopathology there is comparatively little on dissociation, or its misapplication. According to Girma et al. (2021), trauma symptoms are commonly missed because of the lack of systems for mental health treatment or training specifically in this. The findings presented here highlight those services to GBV victims should incorporate a trauma framework, lest their symptoms go unrecognized or be mistaken for something else.

Perhaps most disturbing finding that emerged from this research was the high levels of suicidal ideation present among this sample of survivors. Those who expressed a desire to die or escape life from these narratives represented an even more profound expression of psychological breakdown than that captured by traditional traumas measures. Indeed this result mirrors global data about the association between Intimate Partner Violence and suicidal ideation and completed suicide (devries et al., 2011). Sociality in abusive relationships can be interpreted as a response to prolonged trauma, cries of abject despair, and lack of support.

5.3 Legal Silence and Its Influence on Survivors' Wellbeing, Justice, and Safety

This silence about the marital rape that occurred in Ethiopia affected the survivors' experiences and perceptions of justice and wellbeing in a powerful way. Article 620 of the Ethiopian Criminal Code explicitly excludes marital rape, constituting institutionalized invisibility. The effects of this invisibility cannot be seen as simply the legal omission of marital rape, but as was experienced by the women in this study, a state refusal to see happening what was strongly felt and attested in their lived experience. In this sense, the law does not function as

a neutral apparatus, but as an active body that shows what matters and what can be regarded as inconsequential. The legal non-recognition became a fundamental way in which the women in this study could understand their histories and their status as victims of injustice and whether it was relevant and even possible to appeal for/redress.

Legal silence acts as a form of structural violence (Galtung, 1969), whereby injury takes place within social institutions, rather than in direct physical action. As far as marital rape is concerned, the violence is extended through the legal legislation that refuses to criminalize such acts. When marital rape is not included within the definition of rape at all, the law in effect affirmatively promotes fearful coercive sex within the institution of marriage. You don't have to say so explicitly. It can't be a crime because it's in marriage. Survivors in this study spoke of this conviction. Some of them in fact believed that there is no crime in what they suffered for it was all in marriage.

Central to the arguments of most Ethiopian lawyers, such as Meaza Ashenafi (2005), is that the prevalence of GBV is partly due to its "legal construing." This research adds amply to this argument by illustrating how the law's void takes on material form in women's everyday lives, impacting the behavior of assailants and expectations of victims in ways that legitimize sexual access and marginalize principled resistance. In other words, the law's silence operates as an organizing principle of social life, constructing power asymmetries, consolidating habitus, and promoting the persistence of abuse.

Particularly great is the effect of this legal silence on views of justice. Survivors in this research not only detailed their suffering; they also conveyed a great feeling of unfairness based on the law's neglect of acknowledging that suffering. This mirrors Fraser's (2008) conception of recognition justice that is; justice needs not just reallocation of resources but also respect of people's experiences and identities. The statute's omission of marital rape as a crime essentially denies survivors the acknowledgment needed to define their experiences as breaches of rights. This lack of acknowledgement leaves survivors in a condition of uncertainty where they are aware they have been hurt but have no institutional vocabulary to support that knowledge, therefore separating lived experience from legal categorization.

There are major social and psychological ramifications from this disconnect. Survivors could start to doubt their own perceptions, wondering if they are misinterpreting or embellishing their experiences. As people try to match their anguish with a legal system that does not support it, the internal struggle arising from this dissonance might exacerbate feelings of self-blame and uncertainty. Viewed in this way, the denial of acknowledgement becomes a kind of secondary damage that worsens the suffering from the first abuse.

Comparing data from nations that have criminalized marital rape offers a helpful contrast. According to research done in places like South Africa and the United Kingdom, legal recognition is very important in influencing survivors' will to report and pursue justice (Jewkes et al., 2010). Criminalization alone does not remove obstacles to reporting; rather, it creates a moral framework that upholds survivors' rights and highlights the social and legal inadmissibility of such conduct. Under these circumstances, the law serves as a symbolic confirmation of physical independence as well as a deterrent. The lack of such recognition in Ethiopia not only restricts legal options but also undermines the larger societal message that marriage rape is a crime rather than a personal affair.

The results also show that legal silence influence survivors to lose trust and safety. Survivors in this study repeatedly said they did not think official systems, like the police and courts, would protect them. This view is based on the actual reality that the law offers no foundation for action rather than in thin air. Therefore, institutions meant to provide safety are seen as useless or unattainable. This is consistent with Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC, 2021) statistics indicating major flaws in the reaction to gender-based violence, including inadequate survivor-centered methods and minimal enforcement tools.

Beyond legal systems, trust erosion spans more general networks of support. Survivors are less prone to use official channels even in circumstances where other kinds of violence could be punishable if they feel that reporting will not result in significant action. Because people opt not to share their experiences or get aid, this expected mistrust strengthens cycles of silence. This helps to normalize abuse over time as the lack of reporting gives the impression that such instances are either few or unimportant.

Furthermore, the belief that reporting is pointless affects survivors' feeling of personal safety. Survivors may feel that legal action is the only way to stop the abuse or punish the abusers, but without it they feel helpless. This can cause people to feel trapped and stay in bad environments because they don't have any other options. Without defensive systems, there is a higher chance of repeated and worsening abuse because perpetrators act in an environment of impunity.

Legal silence thus has multifaceted impact on wellbeing. It influences mental health by exacerbating sentiments of worthlessness, disorientation, and despair; it shapes views of fairness by rejecting recognition and validation; and it compromises safety by restricting access to protective agencies. Importantly, these influences are linked. The absence of awareness strengthens psychological anguish, which then affects choices about institutional participation and help-seeking. The outcome is a self-reinforcing cycle whereby legal silence helps to sustain both individual pain and larger societal inequalities.

In the Ethiopian setting, these forces are exacerbated by societal expectations that stress marital unity and female obedience. Legal silence does not exist alone; rather, it interacts with these standards to build a strong structure that deters rebellion and justifies endurance. Survivors negotiating this system have to deal not just with the direct consequences of abuse but also with a larger structure that, in many cases, actively contradicts their claims and fails to provide support.

In the Ethiopian setting, socio-cultural expectations that value marital unity and female obedience exacerbate these dynamics. Legal silence interacts with these standards to generate a potent structure encouraging endurance and legitimizing resistance, not by itself. Survivors negotiating this world have to deal not just with the direct results of abuse but also with a larger system that doesn't back up their statements and, in many cases, actively challenges them.

Taken together, the results highlight that legal silence is an active state with broad ramifications not a passive absence. It influences how justice is viewed, how harm is defined, and how safety is experienced. Therefore, dealing with the problem of marital rape in Ethiopia calls for more than just person-level actions; it calls for a radical change in the legal system to

acknowledge and condemn the act, so bringing the legislation in line with the lived realities of victims and creating a basis for real protection and justice.

5.4 Impact of Legal Non-Recognition on Psychological Trauma and Social Relationships

The lack of legal recognition exacerbates both psychological suffering and social ramifications in ways that stretch much beyond the first-hand experience of abuse. Legal non-recognition in the setting of marital rape in Ethiopia not only reflects a deficiency in the law; it also actively influences how survivors and their surrounding society experience, understand, and react to trauma. The results of this research reveal that if the law ignores a violation, it changes the perception of that crime for the victim as well as the society. This dynamic increases psychological damage, disrupts family ties, and reinforces patterns of stigma and isolation that make recovery much more challenging.

One of the most important consequences of legal non-recognition is the exacerbation of psychological trauma by means of what the literature refers to as secondary trauma. Campbell (2002) argues that institutional responses or lack of suitable reactions might make the effects of the initial abuse worse since they invalidate the survivor's experience. This model is highly supported by the current research. Survivors not only suffered the direct harm of forced sexual acts inside marriage but also faced a legal system that ignored their pain. This lack of acknowledgement works as a kind of institutional invalidation, subtly implying that the suffering they went through falls short of the standard for a valid complaint.

This process has great psychological ramifications. If survivors can't find their experiences in a well-known legal category, they might start to question their own views, which can cause confusion, self-doubt, and inner conflict. As a result, the trauma is not only re-experienced by means of intrusive memories and emotional suffering but also viewed via a lens of ambiguity and illegitimacy. Such circumstances layer the mental weight: The awareness that there is no official way to identify, question, or fix the initial violation makes it worse. This fits with more general trauma research that underlines how crucial acknowledgement and validation are in the healing process. Recovery is severely slowed without these components, and symptoms like dissociation, anxiety, and depression can become more ingrained.

The aggravation of trauma is likewise closely related to the disruption of social and family connections. The results of this study show that marital rape often causes families to split up, which can lead to separation or divorce. But the lack of legal acknowledgment implies that this disintegration happens without any responsibility or justice framework. Though survivors might flee abusive situations, they lack the validation that their choice is based on a known violation of rights. As people negotiate the repercussions of family dissolution still dealing with unresolved trauma, this can cause more emotional stress.

Especially severely affected are youngsters. The current study, which is consistent with national data from the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and (EHRC, 2021) that emphasize the intergenerational consequences of domestic violence, reveals that children living in surroundings defined by marital rape are indirectly impacted by the ensuing stress, emotional instability, and parental distress. Survivors related problems controlling their emotions and keeping up consistent caregiving, which in turn affected their relationships with their kids. These trends point to the fact that the consequences of marital rape go beyond the victim to impact household emotional environment and guide children's development.

Children exposed to such surroundings may experience long-term effects including a higher chance of behavioral issues, anxiety, and problems forming good relationships. These impacts might help to perpetuate cycles of violence over time since kids raised in surroundings where abuse is accepted may internalize these dynamics and repeat them in their own adult relationships. Legal recognition is very important in this process since it doesn't stop or challenge the fundamental patterns of abuse. Absent a definitive legal and social condemnation of marital rape, the conduct stays rooted in family systems and passes from one generation to next.

Social isolation further intensifies survivors' psychological distress by reducing access to emotional support, practical assistance, and validation. The study shows that people who have gone through this often get bad reactions if they try to talk about it. Some are ignored, laughed at, or told to keep quiet. This fits with other studies in Ethiopia and Africa. There, culture says marriage and sex are not things to talk about openly when there's violence (UN Women, 2020). Often, marriage problems should stay private. Talking about sex in a marriage can seem wrong or embarrassing.

Legal silence reinforces marginalization by means of these cultural mores. The law's lack of awareness of marital rape as a crime indicates that it somewhat reinforces the idea that such matters should be kept personal. This justifies social reactions that reduce or discount the experiences of victims. The end result is a feedback loop whereby legal and social types of quiet interact with one another, making it progressively difficult for survivors to get help or validation.

Within this framework, isolation turns into both a result and a coping mechanism. To escape judgment or further invalidation, survivors might pull away from social networks; this reduces their access to emotional and practical help. This withdrawal can make psychological distress worse and increase feelings of loneliness, which would make it even harder to get better. Simultaneously, the absence of encouraging comments from family and community members strengthens the idea that there is no secure place to discuss their experiences.

These forces working together produce a kind of increased vulnerability. Institutional rejection aggravates psychological trauma; family ties are stressed or broken off without means of responsibility; and social surroundings lack the support needed for recovery. Legal non-recognition so serves as a main means by which damage is not only allowed but also exacerbated and maintained.

Importantly, these results show that one cannot completely appreciate the effects of marital rape without also considering the larger societal framework in which it happens. Trauma is influenced by legal systems, cultural norms, and institutional procedures rather than felt in solitude. In the Ethiopian setting, the lack of legal recognition is very important in determining each of these aspects since it affects how survivors understand their experiences, how others react to them, and what choices they have for pursuing justice and help.

Meeting these difficulties so calls on a multifaceted strategy. Although legal reform is vital to give official acknowledgement and protection, it has to be matched with initiatives to change societal attitudes, improve institutional reactions, and increase availability of mental health and support services. Meaningful change in lowering the effects of marital rape and helping victims in their recovery can only be achieved by considering the interaction of legal, social, and psychological aspects.

5.5 Influence of Legal Absence on Coping Strategies and Help-Seeking Behavior

The findings show that legal silence strongly shapes survivors coping strategies and limits help-seeking behavior. In settings where marital rape is not criminalized, the response of survivors is therefore strongly conditioned by structural factors, and not just by individual preference. This is consistent with a large body of work in the gender-based violence literature that emphasizes help seeking as a socially and institutionally mediated process and not simply a personal choice (García-Moreno et al., 2015). These structural constraints are particularly pronounced in Ethiopia where marital rape is excluded by Article 620 of the Criminal Code and influence not only the reporting by survivors but also how they interpret their experiences and construct coping strategies.

One of the most consistent finding is that non-reporting is the predominant response among survivors. This is not an Ethiopian phenomenon. Reporting rates for intimate partner sexual violence, especially when it occurs within marriage (Jewkes, 2002; Abramsky et al., 2011; UN Women, 2020), are very low in studies in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. For example, a multi-country study on violence against women by WHO found that less than 10% of women who experienced intimate sexual violence by partners sought formal help from police or legal institutions, and marital violence was the least reported form of violence (WHO, 2013). Similarly, studies in Uganda and Bangladesh show that norms of privacy, shame, and fear of social consequences make women much less likely to report sexual violence within marriage (Naved et al., 2017).

The Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey (Central Statistical Agency, 2016) also finds very low levels of reporting of domestic violence in the Ethiopian context with a large proportion of survivors reporting to informal networks or not at all. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that non-reporting is not just a cultural norm, but one that is actively reinforced by legal silence. In the absence of legal recognition of marital rape as a crime, survivors see reporting as unlikely to bring justice or protection. This is consistent with Heise's (1998) socio-ecological model, which states that behaviors at the individual level such as

disclosure are influenced by the institutional and structural environments. In this sense, not reporting is not a lack of agency but a contextually rational strategy.

The main coping mechanism is endurance and this is related to non-reporting. This finding is consistent with the international literature on intimate partner violence that shows endurance is one of the most common survival strategies of women in violent relationships, particularly when economic dependence and lack of legal protection are involved (Campbell et al., 2009; Ellsberg et al., 2008). In many low-income contexts, women stay in abusive marriages because of financial insecurity, childcare responsibilities, and fear of social exclusion (Jewkes, 2002; García-Moreno et al., 2015). This is also true in Ethiopian studies. For example, Tadesse et al. (2019) found that women experiencing intimate partner violence in rural Ethiopia frequently stayed in abusive relationships because of economic dependence and cultural norms about the permanence of marriage.

The present study builds on this by extending the understanding of endurance as a psychological adaptation as well as a socio-economic constraint. Descriptions from survivors suggest patterns of learned helplessness theory (Seligman, 1975), an approach that has been popularized in trauma psychology to understand how repeated exposure to uncontrollable violence can result in a reduction of resistance efforts.

This interpretation is also supported by international trauma literature that chronic intimate partner violence can lead to adaptive resignation, emotional numbing and reduced help-seeking motivation (Herman, 1992; Campbell, 2002). However, feminist scholars warn against reading endurance simply as helplessness, as it is often a form of limited agency within structurally circumscribed options (Stark, 2017). The results of this study are consistent with this more nuanced perspective, indicating that survivors do not endure because they accept abuse, but because structural conditions restrict viable options to a considerable degree.

The literature also identifies another important dimension of coping, the role of informal support networks. Informal disclosure to family and/or friends is the first and most common form of help-seeking among survivors of intimate partner violence, and this has been consistently documented across global studies (Sylaska & Edwards, 2014). The thing is these

networks do not work the way everywhere. It really depends on where you're from. In a lot of places in Africa like Ethiopia what family and community think is very important. They care more about keeping the family and what people think of them than about keeping one person safe. This is what the UN Women said in 2020. So when someone tells people what happened to them they often get told to deal with it work things out with their family or just be quiet. That is what we found out in our study. Some people did get help like they were sent to see a doctor or a lawyer. Most of the time people did not believe them or they were told it was not a big deal or they were told to just be quiet about the whole thing. Family and community responses, in Ethiopia and other African societies are shaped by these norms. That is why disclosure often leads to advice to endure, reconcile or remain silent rather than to seek formal intervention, like the UN Women said in 2020.

The other important factor that plays a role in influencing the efficiency of informal networks is knowledge. Various international studies show that when people around the survivor have education or are health-trained or have awareness about their rights, the chances of intervention become much higher (Goodman et al., 2016). This point is evident from the present study, which reports one case of intervention because of someone being medically trained and thus being able to help the person gain access to services.

However, it must be pointed out that this interaction of legal absence and social coping mechanisms constitutes a vicious cycle. Previous research on other countries has demonstrated that criminalizing marital rape would substantially increase reporting rates and normalize such behavior in the long term despite some initial resistance (Basile & Black, 2011; Jewkes et al., 2010). On the contrary, if laws regarding marital rape are not enacted, people tend to cope with their traumatic experience in other ways, which emphasizes "institutionalized invisibility" as identified by legal anthropologists, according to which the lack of legislation results in the lack of discourse, which perpetuates violence (Merry, 2006).

To summarize, the existing literature indicates that coping mechanisms and help-seeking behaviors cannot be explained merely by individual characteristics since they are heavily influenced by legal, cultural, and economic factors. It can be illustrated with the example of Ethiopia, where the absence of legislation concerning marital rape has restricted the possibilities

and increased the role of endurance as well as channeled help-seeking into informal networks that are not necessarily effective. On the other hand, victims exercise strategic agency through the use of selective disclosure, access to support where possible, and eventual detachment once survival becomes impossible.

These results underscore the importance of intervention strategies that would tackle both personal knowledge and structural factors. As long as marital rape remains unrecognized under the law, attempts at enhancing reporting rates or seeking help will prove inadequate, considering that victims continue to navigate a system that does not consider their cases as crimes.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

6.1 Summary of Major Findings

This study explored the psychological consequences of marital rape in Ethiopia within a context of legal silence, using an interpretive phenomenological approach supported by doctrinal legal analysis.

1. The findings indicate that the psychological harm resulting from marital rape extends beyond any immediate responses. The women repeatedly experienced chronic fear, anxiety, depression, and traumatic states. Chronic fear was the most common response, which persisted even after the relationships ended. According to mental health professionals involved in this project, the lived experience of the women closely resemble the clinical syndrome of anxiety and trauma disorders.

2. The research exposed how badly the survivors' sense of self, and consequently their self-esteem, had been damaged. The women were forced to accept their degraded sense of dignity and humanity and internalize their experience of Abuse by believing it was their fault (blaming themselves) and demeaning (worthlessness and dehumanization). This harm to the self was profound and influenced survivors' sense of who they were as autonomous human beings.

3. The researcher found solid evidence of PTSD and neurobiological trauma responses. The victims' testimonies indicated the presence of flashbacks; sleep disturbances, numbing, and intrusive memories. Time alone offered insufficient respite for many women as sleep deprivation induced fears, their dissociation served as refuge. Psychologists pointed out that the perpetual re-encounter in the marriage condition's the nervous system to lack safety and amplify trauma.

4. The findings indicated that extreme psychological effects resulted from the trauma, such as depression, passive suicidal ideation, and anger and revenge fantasies. Many survivors

experienced feelings of being trapped and lacking meaning, with some questioning the meaning of life itself. A few reported that only religious beliefs kept them from actually committing suicide. Many developed extreme anger towards the perpetrators and some experienced ideas of revenge. These findings demonstrate that trauma is a deadly condition.

5. The study found that legal silence under Article 620 of the Ethiopian Criminal Code intensified survivor's trauma by making their experiences feel legally invisible and socially invalidated. Survivors believed that legal silence communicated to them that their experiences were not even illegal and therefore did not exist, causing feelings of self-doubt, internal condemnation, and worthlessness, leading them to question if they even deserved to suffer, thus illustrating the ways in which silence becomes internalized.

6. The findings further demonstrate that silence in the legal system leads to powerlessness and legal helplessness. Survivors had little access to criminal remedies and divorce was the only option, which was not justice, accountability or psychological closure. Legal professionals confirmed that divorce alone reduces the survivor's trust in the justice system and prevents victims from seeking help.

7. Sociological consequences were also prominent in the study. Family breakdown, effects on children, social stigma and isolation were often noted as consequences. Respondents often received dismissive or harmful responses from other community members and family elders, exacerbating silence and self-blame. Children indirectly experienced the consequences through the experience of maternal trauma and disruption to the family network.

Finally, the study found that legal silence under Article 620 of the Ethiopian Criminal Code intensified survivors trauma by making their experiences feel legally invisible and socially invalidated. And institutional limitations placed on EWLA and organizations similar to them which prohibit pursuing criminal responsibility because of the lack of the legal provisions, resulted in a parallel institutional helplessness where the legal actors had to provide divorce as a solution: "although knowing that it was not the solution".

6.2 Conclusions

This study provides an in-depth understanding of survivors lived experiences and the meanings they attach to marital rape in a context where the law does not explicitly recognize the harm.

First, the study concludes that survivors of marital rape experience severe psychological trauma. The findings revealed persistent fear, anxiety, depression, emotional distress, low self-esteem, emotional numbness, intrusive memories, sleep disturbance, hyper-vigilance, and social withdrawal among survivors. The experiences shared by survivors, legal professionals, and psychological professionals demonstrated that marital rape produces long-lasting emotional and psychological harm that affects survivors' daily functioning, interpersonal relationships, and overall wellbeing. The harm is intensified because the perpetrator is also expected to be a source of trust, protection, and intimacy.

Second, the study concludes that legal silence regarding marital rape intensifies survivors' feelings of powerlessness, insecurity, and injustice. The absence of explicit legal recognition under Article 620 of the Ethiopian Criminal Code contributes to survivors' perceptions that their experiences are not socially or legally acknowledged. As a result, many survivors develop feelings of helplessness, self-doubt, hopelessness, and reduced trust in legal institutions and protection mechanisms. So legal silence operates as a secondary harm because it denies recognition and narrows survivors routes to justice

Third, the study concludes that the absence of legal recognition of marital rape negatively affects survivors' social relationships and quality of life. Survivors experienced stigma, social isolation, family pressure, economic dependency, and emotional disconnection within their social environments. In many cases, survivors perceived silence, endurance, or divorce as the only available responses to the abuse. However, the findings indicate that divorce alone does not address the psychological trauma, stigma, and lack of justice experienced by survivors.

Fourth, the study concludes that legal silence influences survivors' coping strategies and help-seeking behavior. Many survivors adopted coping responses such as emotional

withdrawal, silence, isolation, endurance, and avoidance due to fear of stigma, lack of legal protection, and limited institutional support. The findings further revealed that survivors often hesitate to seek legal or psychosocial assistance because marital rape is not explicitly recognized within the legal system.

Fifth, the study concludes that social stigma and cultural expectations intensify survivors' psychological suffering. Patriarchal norms, community attitudes, and pressure to preserve marriage contributed to survivors' isolation and discouraged disclosure of abuse. These social conditions reinforced emotional distress, self-blame, and reduced self-worth among survivors.

Overall, the study concludes that marital rape in Ethiopia must be understood not only as an individual act of violence, but also as a structural problem shaped by law, culture, gender inequality, and institutional response. The findings demonstrate that effectively addressing marital rape requires legal reform, survivor-centered psychosocial support, institutional protection mechanisms, and broader social awareness regarding women's rights and bodily autonomy within marriage.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that the psychological impact of marital rape cannot be fully understood without considering the legal and social conditions that silence survivors and limit their access to justice.

6.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to address the psychological, legal, and social consequences of marital rape in Ethiopia.

1. Legal Reform of the Ethiopian Criminal Code

The House of Peoples' Representatives of Ethiopia and relevant law reform authorities should revise Article 620 of the Ethiopian Criminal Code to explicitly recognize and criminalize marital rape. The revised legal provision should define rape based on the absence of consent rather than marital status. This reform is necessary to ensure equal legal protection for married

and unmarried women and to align Ethiopian law with international human rights obligations under Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the African Union Maputo Protocol. So any reform should define rape through lack of consent rather than marital status.

2. Strengthening Trauma-Informed Criminal Justice Responses

Next to the legal reform, the Federal Police Commission of Ethiopia, judicial institutions, and public prosecutors should provide regular training for police officers, prosecutors, and judges on marital rape, trauma-informed interviewing, survivor protection, and gender-sensitive investigation procedures. Such training is important to reduce institutional bias, improve survivor treatment within the justice system, and encourage survivors to seek legal protection without fear of stigma or dismissal.

3. Expansion of Survivor-Centered Psychosocial Support Services

Organizations working on women's rights and gender-based violence, particularly the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association, should strengthen and expand trauma-informed psychosocial support services for survivors of marital rape. This support should include psychological counseling, legal aid, emergency shelter services, referral systems, and long-term rehabilitation programs. Increasing institutional support is necessary because the findings revealed that survivors experience severe emotional distress, social isolation, and barriers to accessing justice.

4. Improving Access to Mental Health Services

The Ministry of Health of Ethiopia, in collaboration with mental health professionals and civil society organizations, should increase access to affordable and trauma-informed mental health services for survivors of gender-based violence. Specialized counseling services, community mental health programs, and survivor support groups should be integrated into

existing healthcare systems to address trauma-related conditions such as anxiety, depression, fear, sleep disturbance, and emotional withdrawal identified in this study.

5. Community Awareness and Social Education Programs

Government institutions, educational institutions, media organizations, and civil society groups should conduct sustained public awareness campaigns regarding marital rape, women's rights, consent within marriage, and the psychological consequences of sexual violence. These programs should aim to challenge social norms that normalize abuse, discourage victim-blaming attitudes, and encourage survivors to seek support services. Community education is necessary because the findings demonstrated that stigma, patriarchal beliefs, and pressure to preserve marriage contribute significantly to survivors' suffering and silence.

6. Engagement of Community and Religious Leaders

Community elders ("Shimagilewoch"), religious leaders, and local community institutions should actively participate in efforts to prevent marital rape and support survivors. Religious institutions, including churches and mosques, should promote teachings that reject violence within marriage and encourage respect for women's dignity and bodily autonomy. Community-based interventions are important because survivors often rely on community structures for guidance and support before approaching formal institutions.

7. Economic Empowerment Programs for Survivors

The Ministry of Women and Social Affairs of Ethiopia, non-governmental organizations, and development partners should strengthen economic empowerment programs targeting women affected by domestic and sexual violence. These interventions may include vocational training, access to microfinance, income-generating opportunities, and employment support. Economic empowerment is necessary because the findings showed that financial dependency often prevents survivors from leaving abusive relationships or seeking help.

8. Strengthening Research and Policy Development

Universities, research institutions, and policymakers should conduct further research on marital rape, psychological trauma, legal protection, and institutional responses in Ethiopia. Additional evidence-based research is important to inform policy reform, improve survivor support mechanisms, and increase national awareness regarding the psychological and social consequences of marital rape.”

6.4 Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged.

- First, the study was conducted mainly at the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association in Addis Ababa. Therefore, the findings may not fully represent the experiences of survivors and professionals in other regions of Ethiopia, particularly in rural areas where social, cultural, and institutional conditions may differ.
- Second, the study relied primarily on self-reported experiences obtained through interviews and questionnaires. As a result, some responses may have been influenced by emotional distress, recall difficulties, fear, or reluctance to disclose sensitive personal experiences related to marital rape and psychological trauma. Despite this limitation the study provides important firsthand insights in to survivors’ experiences and the realities of marital rape.
- Third the sensitive nature of marital rape required one-on-one interviews with a psychological counselor present to prevent re-traumatization. Coordinating the schedules of the researcher, participant and psychological counselor extended data collection by several months, leaving limited time for in-depth data analysis. But still the study remains useful as it provides valuable insights into survivors’ lived experience.
- Fourth, the taboo nature of the marital rape in Ethiopian society significantly hindered participant recruitment. Although a psychological counselor informed potential

participants that the data would be used for academic purposes only and that their identities would remain confidential, many survivors who had sought help from EWLA were unwilling to participate. As a result the sample size was limited to those who felt comfortable disclosing their trauma outside of the therapeutic relationship.

- Fifth, although 11 survivors agreed to participate, only 4 were consented to audio recording. So the researcher therefore relied on handwritten notes for the remaining interviews, which made it difficult to capture every detail of their emotions and responses, potentially resulting in some loss of data richness.
- Sixth, the study focused specifically on women survivors of marital rape who sought support services through EWLA. Therefore, the findings may not reflect the experiences of survivors who did not seek institutional support or individuals in other forms of intimate relationships.
- Finally, the sensitive nature of marital rape and the cultural stigma surrounding discussions of sexual violence may have affected participants' willingness to disclose their experiences openly. This may have limited the depth or scope of some responses during the data collection process.

6.5 Future Directions for Research

Future research should extend beyond Addis Ababa to include rural and traditional communities, where social norms and access to formal support may differ substantially. In order to better understand the organizational movement extending the issue at stake, further examinations could be carried out on the position of male perpetrators, legitimate authorities, and religious institutions. Quantitative analysis is also recommended to measure the frequency and wide public consequences of marital rape in Ethiopia. Finally, in order to distinguish effective approaches to addressing marital rape, the next study should examine the intervention model, including authorized modifications, psychological support, and community-based approaches.

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APPENDIX A

A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SURVIVORS

Dear respondent,

I am a MA student at Addis Ababa University, School of Psychology. As part of the requirements for completing the program, I am currently working on research focusing on marital rape. The objective of this interview is to collect relevant information for the study. In order to understand what happens to survivors of marital rape and successfully accomplish this study, your responses, for the items in this interview, are very important. Please provide genuine responses and give your comments and idea frankly. There is no need of mentioning your name and all the information you provide will exclusively be used for the research purpose will be held in the strictest confidence and your individual responses will not be passed to a third party.

1. How old are you?
2. What's your marital status now?
3. How long have you been in marriage?
4. What's your educational status?
5. How much is your salary if any?
6. Without sharing anything you are uncomfortable with, can you describe when you first began to feel that your husband's sexual behavior was against your will?
7. At the time the incident occurred, how did you understand or interpret what was happening to you?
8. How did these experiences affect how you saw yourself as a woman, wife, or person?
9. Since these incidents began, how have they affected your emotional or mental wellbeing? Have you experienced feelings such as sadness, fear, anxiety, or anger? Have these experiences affected your sleep or concentration. Have you ever felt emotionally numb, hopeless or trapped because of the situation?
10. What kinds of feelings have stayed with you since these experiences?
11. Are there moments when memories or emotions related to these events return unexpectedly? What is that like for you?

12. How has this situation influenced your sense of safety or trust in others?
13. Have these experiences affected how you feel about yourself as a person? Have these incidents affected how valuable or respected you feel as a person? Or do you sometimes feel ashamed, blame yourself, or feel less valued?
14. In what ways, if any, did your emotional or mental state change over time?
15. Do you struggle with persistent feelings of sadness, nightmares, unwanted memories, hopelessness, flashbacks or thoughts of harming yourself?

Section 2: Perceptions of "Legal Silence" and Institutional Support

1. Did you ever consider reporting these experiences to the police or other institutions? Why or why not?
2. What did you understand about the law's position on forced sex within marriage?
3. How did learning about the legal situation affect you emotionally? Does it make you feel protected, unprotected, or feel safety? Please explain.
4. In what ways, if any, did the legal context influence your decision to stay, leave, or remain silent?

Section 3: Social Support and Neglect

1. Did you speak to anyone about what was happening? What was their reaction?
2. How did those responses affect you emotionally? Did it affect your willingness to report or seek help?
3. Have you faced any pressure from family or in-laws to remain silent or to "endure" the situation? How did that impact you?
4. If you could change one thing about the law or how the community treats women in your situation, what would it be?
5. What advice would you give to another woman who is experiencing similar problems in her marriage?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share?

APPENDIX B:

Key Informant Questionnaire For EWLA Legal experts

Target Group: Legal Officers, Psychosocial Counselors, and Social Workers at EWLA.

Participant Information

Role: -----

Years of Experience at EWLA: _____

Section 1: The "Legal Silence" and Statutory Framework

1. How many years have you been handling cases involving gender-based violence?
2. How frequently do you encounter cases that involve sexual violence within marriage?
3. In what ways, if any, do these cases differ in intensity or nature from other forms of domestic violence you handle?
4. What psychological patterns have you observed in how survivors describe their experiences?
5. In your professional opinion, how does the wording of Article 620 of the Ethiopian Criminal Code (2004) about rape affect the handling of sexual violence cases within marriage?
6. In practice, what legal challenges arise when survivors seek legal remedies for sexual abuse by a spouse?
7. How does the absence of explicit criminal recognition influence how cases are processed and resolved?
8. From your observation, how does the legal framework shape survivors' expectations of justice and protection?
9. Have you observed any impact of this legal gap on survivors' willingness to report or pursue formal action? Please explain
10. Based on your experience at EWLA, how are cases involving forced sexual relations within marriage addressed under the current legal framework in Ethiopia?
11. How does this "legal silence" influence a woman's willingness to report the abuse or seek formal help in a timely manner?
12. Do you observe patterns where the lack of legal protection leads to the breakdown of family relationships or social isolation for the survivor?
13. What reforms or changes, in your professional opinion, could improve outcomes for these women?

APPENDIX: C

Key informant questioner guide for psychological counselors

Professional Title: _____

Years of Experience in Counseling: _____

Purpose: To gather clinical data on trauma manifestations and the "secondary victimization" caused by the law.

The Nature of Marital Rape Trauma

1. How often encounter survivors of sexual violence within marriage?
2. Based on your clinical experience, how would you describe the psychological impact of sexual violence within marriage?
3. In what ways does the intimate relationship with the perpetrator influence the depth or complexity of trauma processing and recovery for these women compared to stranger-rape survivors?
4. What are the immediate and chronic psychological symptoms you observe with marital rape survivors, (e.g., sleep disturbances, hyper-vigilance, social withdrawal, PTSD, Dissociative Disorders, Anxiety, Major Depression...)?
5. In your professional experience, what types of trauma responses do survivors of repeated marital sexual violence commonly experience?
6. Does the experience affect survivors' self-esteem, her perception of her own value and sense of personal worth? How?
7. In your clinical experience, do survivors of marital rape express feelings such as entrapment, emotional numbness, helplessness or internalized guilt? If so, what factors do they describe to these feelings?
8. In your perspective, how does the lack of explicit legal recognition affect survivors psychologically?
9. How does institutional and community response influence recovery?
10. How can experiences of marital rape affect a women's self-esteem and her relationship within the family and society?

11. In your view, how does the trauma of marital rape affect a woman's ability to trust others or maintain future interpersonal relationships?
12. What are the primary psychological barriers that prevent these women from seeking mental health support earlier?
13. What challenges arise when treating trauma that is not openly acknowledged socially or legally?
14. In your opinion, what psychosocial interventions are most needed in the current context?
15. If the law were to explicitly criminalize marital rape, what psychological impact might that have on survivors?

ውድ መልስ ሰጪ

እኔ በአዲስ አበባ ዩንቨርሲቲ የሳይኮሎጂ ትምህርት ክፍል ውስጥ የማስተርስ ተማሪ ነኝ፡፡ በአሁኑ ጊዜ የማስተርስ የፕሮግራም ማጠናቀቂያ መስፈርት የሆነ ውጤት ጥናታዊ ጽሁፌን በማዘጋጀት ላይ እገኛለሁ፡፡ ጥናታዊ ጽሁፉ የሚያተኩረው በጋብቻ ውስጥ የሚፈጥጽ አስገዳድ መድፈር ጥቃት ላይ ነው፡፡ የዚህ ቃለመጠይቅ አላማ ለጥናቱ አስፈላጊ የሆነ መረጃ ማሰባሰብ ነው፡፡ በጋብቻ ውስጥ የአስገዳድ መድፈር ጥቃት የሚያጋጥማቸው ግለሰቦች ላይ ምን ዓይነት ስነ-ልቦናዊ ጫና እንደሚፈጠር ለመገንዘብ እንዲሁም ይህንን ጥናት በተሳካ መልኩ ለማጠናቀቅ በዚህ ቃለመጠይቅ ላይ ለተዘረዘሩት ጥያቄዎች እርስዎ የሚሰጧቸው ምላሾች በጣም አስፈላጊ ናቸው፡፡ እባክዎትን እወኅተኛ ምላሾችዎን በማቅረብ አስተያየት እና ሀሳቦችዎን በነጻነት ይግለጹልን፡፡ ስምዎትን መስጠት አስፈላጊ አይደለም፡፡ እንዲሁም የምታቀርቡልን መረጃ በመሉ ለጥናታዊ ጽሁፉ አላማ ብቻ ጥቅም ላይ ይውላል፡፡ በጥብቅ ሚስጥራዊነትም የሚያዝ ሲሆን የእናንተ ተናጠል ምላሾችም በሶስተኛ ወገን አይተላለፉም፡፡ በቅድሚያ ምስጋናችንን እናቀርባለን፡፡

ሀ . በክፍል መዋቅር የያዘ ቃለመጠይቅ መመሪያ (ለጥቃት ሰለባዎች)

1. ስንት አመትዎ ነው?
2. አሁን ያለው የጋብቻ ሁኔታዎ ምን ድን ነው?
3. ለምን ያህል ጊዜ በጋብቻ ቆይተዋል?
4. የትምህርት ደረጃዎት ምን ድን ነው?
5. ደሞዝዎት ምን ያህል ነው? ስራ ካለዎት
6. ምቹት የሚሆኑ ሳዎትን ማንኛውንም ነገር ሳይጠቅሱ የባለቤትዎ የወሲብ ባህሪ ከእርስዎ ፍቃድ ውጪ እንደሆነ ለመጀመሪያ ጊዜ የተሰማዎት መቼ እንደሆነ ሊገልጹልኝ ይችላሉ?
7. ከስተቱ በተፈጠረበት ጊዜ በእርስዎ ላይ ለምን ተፈጥሯል የሚለውን ጉዳይ እንዴት ተገነዘቡት ወይም እንዴት ተረጎመች?
8. እነዚህ ተሞክሮዎች እርስዎ እራስዎትን እንደሰሩ ሲሆኑ፣ እንደሚሰሩት ወይም እንደግለሰብ የሚያዩበት ሁኔታ ላይ በምን ኤነት መልኩ ተጽእኖ አሳደሩብዎት?

9. እነዚህ ክስተቶች ከጀመሩበት ጊዜ አንስቶ በእርስዎ የሰሜኑ ወይም የአእምሮ ሁለንተናዊ ደህንነት ላይ በምን አይነት መልኩ ተጽእኖ አሳድረዋል? እንደ መከፋት፣ ፍርሀት፣ መረበሽ ወይም ብስጭት የመሳሰሉ ስሜቶች አጋጥመዎታል? እነዚህ ተሞክሮዎች በእርስዎ እንቅልፍ ወይም አትኩሮት ላይ ተጽእኖን አሳድረዋል?

የመደንዘዝ፣ ተስፋ የማጣት ወይም መሄጃ የማጣት ስሜት በዚህ ሁኔታ ውስጥ አጋጥሞዎት ያወቃል?

10. ከእነዚህ ተሞክሮዎች አንዱ ምን አይነት ስሜቶች ከእርስዎ ዘንድ ቀርተዋል ?

11. እነዚህ ቅጽቦች ከክስተቶቹ ጋር የተያያዙ ትወስታዎች ወይም ስሜቶች በድንገት ተመልሰው ወደ እርስዎ የሚመጡባቸውን በሩ?

12. ይህ ለእርስዎ እንዴት ነበር ?

ይህ ሁኔታ እርስዎ የሚሰማዎት የደህንነት ስሜት ወይም በሌሎች ላይ ያለዎት እምነት ላይ በምን አይነት መልኩ ተጽእኖ አሳድሯል፡፡

13. እነዚህ ተሞክሮዎች እርስዎ እንደግለሰብ ስለራስዎ የሚሰማዎት ስሜት ላይ ተጽእኖ አሳድረዋል?

እነዚህ ክስተቶች እርስዎ እንደ ግለሰብ በምን ያህል ደረጃ ጠቃሚነት ወይም እክበራለሁ ብለው የሚያስቡበት ደረጃ ላይ ተጽእኖን አሳድረዋል? ወይም እንዳንድ ጊዜ ሀፍረት ፣ እራስን መውቀስ ወይም ደግሞ አነስተኛ ቦታ / ዋጋ እንዳለዎት ይሰማዎታል?

14. የእርስዎ የስሜት ወይም የአእምሮ ሁኔታ በጊዜ ሂደት በየትኛዎቹ መንገዶች ተቀይሯል?
(ከተቀየረ)

15. ቀጣይነት ባለው የሀዘን ስሜት፣ በቅዠት፣ በልተፈለጉት ውስታዎች፣ በተስፋ ማጣት፣ የትወስታ ብልጭታዎች ወይም ደግሞ እራስዎን በመጥዳት ሀሳብ ይቸገራሉ?

16. እነዚህን ተሞክሮዎች ለፖሊስ ወይም ለሌሎች ተቋማት ሪፖርት ማድረግን አስበው ያውቃሉ? ለምን አስቡ፤ ወይም ለምን አላስቡም?

17. በጋብቻ ወሰን የሚፈጸም በግዴታ የሚከናወን የግብረሰጋ ግንኙነትን በተመለከተ ህጉ ስላለው አቋምዎን ተገኝተዋል?

18. ስለህጉ ሁኔታ ማወቅዎት በእርስዎ ላይ ምን አይነት የስሜት ተጽእኖን አሳደረበዎት?
የመጠበቅ፣ የለመጠበቅ ወይስ የደህንነት ስሜትን ፈጠረብዎት? እባክዎትን ያብራሩ፡፡

19. የህጉ አወድ እርስዎ ለመቆየት ፣ ለመሄድ ወይም ጸጥብ ለመቆየት የወሰኑት ወሳኔ ላይ በምን አይነት መንገዶች ተጽእኖ አሳድረ? (ካሳደረ)
20. ምን እየተፈጠረ እንደሚሻ ያሳወቁት /ያወሩት ሰውአለ? የእነርሱ መልስ ምን ነበረ?
21. እነዚህ ምላሾች ከስሜት ረገድ በእርስዎ ላይ እንዴት አይነት ተጽእኖ አሳደሩ?
- እርስዎ ሪፖርት ለማድረግ ወይም እርዳታ ለማፈላለግ የነበረት ፍቃደኝነት ላይ ተጽእኖ አሳደረ?
22. ከቤተሰብ ወይም ከትዳር አጋር ቤተሰቦች ጸጥብ ለመቆየት ወይም ደግሞ ሁኔታውን “ችሎ ለመቆየት” ማንኛውም አይነት ጫፍ ገጥሞታል? ይህ ጫፍ ከእርስዎ ላይ እንዴት ተጽእኖ አሳደረ?
23. ስለህጉ ወይም ማህበረሰቡ በእናንተ ሁኔታ ላይ ያሉ ሴቶችን የሚያስተናግድበት አግባብ ላይ እንድንገር መቀየር ብትችሉ ምን ይሆን ነበር?
24. በጋብቻ ላይ ተመሳሳይ ችግሮች እያጋጠሟት ለምትገኝ ሌላ ሴት ምን ምክር ትሰጣላችሁ?
25. ማለት የምትፈልጉት ማንኛውም አይነት ሌላ ነገር አለ?