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Marital rights: Lived experiences of Iranian women with retired spouses in a qualitative study

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Abstract

Background The aim of the present study was to analyze the lived experiences of Iranian women living with their retired spouses in relation to their marital rights.

Methods The research method was qualitative and descriptive phenomenology. The statistical population included women living with their retired spouses in the city of Isfahan, and the sample consisted of 15 women. Data were collected through semistructured interviews, with three general questions on emotional rights, economic rights, and sexual rights, and were approved by five experts. Data were analyzed using the seven-step Colaizzi method.

Results After transcribing the interviews and coding the data, the following axial codes were identified. Emotional rights included the two categories of camaraderie and dissatisfaction. Economic rights included the four categories of economic management, economic well-being, respect for women's economic property, and economic problems. Finally, sexual rights consisted of the two categories of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with sexual relationships. The results showed that some participants were satisfied with the implementation of their rights during their spouse's retirement, while others were dissatisfied. Most current marital problems related to emotional, economic, and sexual rights result from past and unresolved marital life conflicts that lead to the escalation of family tensions.

Conclusions According to the dissatisfied participants, the best strategy for resolving these problems was to "sweep them under the rug," i.e., to rehire the men and protest the lack of support for the retirees by the state organization. In contrast, satisfied participants played an important role in solving the problems and actively dealt with their spouse's retirement rather than taking a passive and protesting role to realize their marital rights.

Keywords Spouses, Retirement, Women's rights, Qualitative research

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Background

Retirement is a major life change that often has a profound impact on people and their families. Retirement entails changes in responsibilities, habits and relationships, especially in the context of family life, even if it is generally associated with more leisure and relaxation. From a legal point of view, retirement in Iran means the completion of about 25 to 35 years of service [1]. At this point, for many, a job is synonymous with self-definition, identity, purpose, time structuring, social communication and social participation [2]. Retirement also has an impact on their social relationships, family and leisure time [3].

According to the Pension Fund, the number of retirees is expected to increase and account for 25% of Iran's total population in the next three decades [4]. These figures, along with the increasing trend in retirement years and life expectancy [5], highlight the importance of addressing this critical stage, making it a serious and difficult dilemma [6].

Various studies on aging and retirement in America, the European Union and England have shown that social participation changes in the years before and after retirement [7–9]. When people leave a social role and face financial problems, various theories of aging consider retirement as a challenge in a person's life that affects their role, status, life patterns, expectations and available resources. Role theory, for example, discusses the importance of transitioning into retirement and leaving the work role [6]. The sudden transition and changes lead to incompatibility and instability for retirees [10], which requires coping with the consequences for retirees, their relationships and family ties [11, 12].

Couples' retirement decisions are influenced by financial incentives and spillover effects between spouses [13]. Factors such as perceived health may influence men's and women's retirement decisions differently, emphasizing the need to consider gender issues in retirement planning [14].

Marital rights are an important aspect of an individual's life that affects their well-being and satisfaction within a relationship. The transition to retirement can evoke complex feelings in couples, balancing relationship needs and individual freedom [15]. Previous research has shown that retirement has an impact on marital relationships, which in turn influences retirement decisions [16–18]. Most workers reaching retirement age and their families are anxious and stressed because retirement is a time of transition and significant changes in plans, lifestyle, relationships, activities, self-esteem, health status, family relationships, marital relationships, and economic conditions [19]. The dynamics of the transition from work to retirement can affect the quality of marriage, especially

when traditional gender roles are challenged [16]. Retirement can also have an impact on the health and well-being of spouses [20].

Research on Iranian women living with a retired spouse has revealed several factors that play a role in this. Studies have shown a strong correlation between the quality of the relationship with the husband, marital satisfaction and mental health [21]. Spouse's interference during retirement can affect wives' marital satisfaction, which emphasizes the importance of considering factors that affect women's well-being during their spouse's retirement [22].

Research on retirement or well-being has traditionally focused on retiree characteristics such as health, income, occupational factors, or activities. Numerous studies on retirement have shown the consequences, such as mental disorders, decreased social relationships and life expectancy, feelings of loneliness, increased stress leading to psychosomatic illnesses, decreased public health and social status, and rejection [23–25]. Life course theorists criticized this approach because it ignored the links between life domains, such as work-family relationships [26]. The failure to consider the link between the retirement and family domains is particularly problematic as the family domain is often the most important for retirees [27]. However, a review of studies conducted in Iran found that marital problems related to retirement as a crucial phase of family life have not been adequately studied. To summarise, examining the experiences of Iranian women living in retirement with their spouses offers valuable insights into marital rights, retirement decisions, and gender dynamics. By examining the impact of retirement on mental health, spousal relationships and legal implications, a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by Iranian women in such scenarios can be gained.

Methods

The goal of the qualitative and descriptive phenomenological research approach was to examine the real-life experiences of women whose spouses were retired. Phenomenological research aims to investigate the participants' mental structures. Participants in this approach are usually asked to describe the phenomena they come across. Purposive sampling was used to identify fifteen women whose spouses were retired, and they took part in this research.

Women who did not work a full-time job and lived with a husband who retired at least two years ago were included in the study. Up until data saturation, sampling was carried out. It should be mentioned that prior to their enrollment in the study, participants were informed of the goals of the research and their informed consent

was obtained. A few interviews were done online because of the coronavirus outbreak. To increase diversity, participants were chosen from a pool of working, home-making, and retired women of various ages, educational backgrounds, husband occupations, and socioeconomic statuses. Semistructured interviews with both open-ended and semistructured questions were used to gather data. The duration of each interview was roughly eighty minutes. Following every interview, the participants' nonverbal cues were noted in addition to the meticulous dialectal transcription of the content. To determine codes and categories, the transcripts were reviewed multiple times. After that, the statements were summarized and examined in order to obtain the original conceptual codes. Based on their commonalities, the extracted codes were then combined and divided into more manageable groups. Subsequently, these codes were merged into more expansive groups based on their shared characteristics. The third-level or core concepts were eventually extracted following the detailed classification and summary of the codes. Credibility and acceptability are the two criteria that are utilized to make sure a qualitative study is valid and reliable [28]. In order to achieve this, field notes were taken, ongoing observation was carried out, enough time was set aside to go over the specifics of the data, and participants and colleagues verified that the circumstantial evidence could be verified.

Results

The life experiences of women who live with retired spouses were to be described in this study. The subjects consisted of fifteen women, ages 58.13 on average, whose spouses had retired for a minimum of two years. They included three retired teachers, one retired employee, 10 housewives, and one domestic worker. There were no more than two and no more than six kids among these participants.

Three core category, eight axial codes, and 75 open codes were obtained from the interviews. In this study, emotional rights, economic rights, and sexual rights were the three main category.

Satisfaction and dissatisfaction were the choice codes for emotional rights; economic issues, economic management, economic well-being, and respect for women's economic property were the selective codes for economic rights. Lastly, contentment and discontent with sexual relationships comprised the selected code for sexual rights. The following is a list of the respondents' demographic details (Table 1).

Couples' emotional rights

As the conceptual model [1] shows, couples' emotional rights included two main categories. According

to the participants, companionship means respecting the emotional rights of the spouse, respecting privacy, showing affection, empathy and sympathy with the spouse, enjoying being together, respecting the spouse's family, living a peaceful life, forgiveness, mutual respect, the husband's affection for his family, trusting the wife with matters because she is trusted, intimacy in the family, valuing the wife, subjectivity and obedience to the husband, care for the wife, travel, participation in good deeds, division of tasks, respect for the husband's position in the family, making up the wife for the husband, advice, friendship and tolerance, fun in the family, no resentment and initiative for reconciliation, popularity among relatives, commitment in marriage, helping the wife with household chores, loyalty, secrecy, honesty, truthfulness, and trustworthiness. Some of the participants stated (Fig. 1):

Participant 3: "After my husband retired, we had more fun and free time to travel, but now it is less because of the coronavirus pandemic."

Participant 10: "We never told our children and even my mother-in-law, who lives with us, about our life problems."

Participant 12: "Since I am sick, I am glad he is more available and by my side."

Participant 9: "He is very nice. Even when he was at work, he called several times a day to see how we were doing."

Dissatisfactions include forced silence to make peace, male dominance, lack of attention and couple communication, man's lack of responsibility, man's nagging and excuses, bad manners due to man's addiction, man's stubbornness and prejudice, tensions and disagreements over small things, lack of proper communication with family, not paying attention to woman's fun, expecting too much from woman, emotional and sexual coldness, and man preferring to spend time with friends rather than family. In this context, the participants mentioned the following.

Participant 2: "I keep quiet most of the time because if I say a word, we argue"

Participant 15: "Since he retired, his objections and nagging have increased. He used to grumble and nag too, but now he's at home all the time. It is unbearable. My children cannot stand him."

Participant 7: My husband prefers to have fun with his friends. He hangs out with his retired friends."

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of the interviewees

No	Woman's age	Man's age	Woman's level of education	Man's level of education	Years after man's retirement	Woman's job	Man's job	Number of children	Income
1	65	76	Elementary school	Elementary school	12	housewife	Driver	3	3–5 million
2	60	72	High school	Elementary school	3	housewife	Self-employed	5	7–9 million
3	75	73	Diploma	Diploma	25	Domestic worker	Military personnel	4	5–7 million
4	66	67	Associate	Bachelor's	12	Retired employee	Court employee	2	7–9 million
5	46	53	Associate	Bachelor's	3	housewife	Military personnel	2	7–9 million
6	51	57	Diploma	Master's	2	housewife	Water and sewer organization employee	3	7–9 million
7	45	52	Master's	Diploma	3	Retired employee	Mobarakeh steel company employee	3	7–9 million
8	61	66	Elementary school	Diploma	15	housewife	Bank clerk	6	3–5 million
9	67	67	Diploma	Diploma	18	Retired teacher	Electricity department employee	3	3–5 million
10	61	72	Diploma	Bachelor's	10	housewife	Water organization employee	3	5–7 million
11	59	66	Elementary school	Junior High school	6	housewife	Polyacryl company employee	4	3–5 million
12	58	62	Junior High school	Junior High school	10	housewife	Textile company employee	3	3–5 million
13	60	65	Associate	Bachelor's	8	Retired teacher	Office staff	3	5–7 million
14	49	54	Bachelor's	Diploma	4	housewife	Steel company employee	3	5–7 million
15	49	60	Bachelor's	Bachelor's	6	housewife	School principal	3	5–7 million

Participant 8: "He gets irritated easily and prefers to stay home. I cannot leave him home alone, so I have to stay home."

Participant 1: "We do not talk much. He always watches TV and the news."

As shown in Fig. (2), economic rights included 17 open codes and four axial codes for economic management, economic well-being, respect for women's economic property, and economic problems; each code is explained below.

Economic management

Economic management refers to the preservation of women's economic rights and the management of income and living expenses that should be considered before and after retirement. Four subcategories emerged from the interviews: the man's economic activity after retirement, economic participation, the man's economic

management, and the woman's economic activity. For example, regarding the husband's economic activity after retirement, participant [14] stated, "My husband was active in the stock market before retirement, and he still does so more actively after retirement." In terms of economic participation, some respondents mentioned working with their spouses on economic matters, whether in the form of advice on purchases or helping to pay for joint living expenses.

Economic well-being

It included the four subcategories of payment of living expenses, generosity of husband, financial opportunities, and relative well-being in life. Some interviewees said that their spouses pay for living expenses and alimony and that they have no problems in this regard. Interviewee [1], for example, said, "My husband lets me buy everything the kids and I need, and I have no problem with that."



Fig. 1 Main category related to couples' rights: emotional rights

Respect for women's economic ownership

It included the four subcategories of payment of the marriage portion, division of property, no desire for the wife's property, and respect for her financial independence. Some women confirmed that their husbands respected and recognized their financial independence. Interviewee [11], for example, stated, "My husband signed over part of the house to me as a marital share."

Participant 9: "My husband never coveted my income or my father's inheritance."

Participant 3: "It is like we learned how to manage money properly only after my husband retired

(smiles). We used to pay for unnecessary expenses. Even though my husband's salary is lower now, we know how to spend more on ourselves.

Economic problems

Some respondents felt that living costs and expenses increased after their husbands retired, while their salaries decreased. When retirees cannot afford expenses and living costs and cannot find jobs, the economic rights of women and children are not realized; as a result, economic and family problems arise due to low income and unemployment. Economic problems included the five subcategories of concealment of

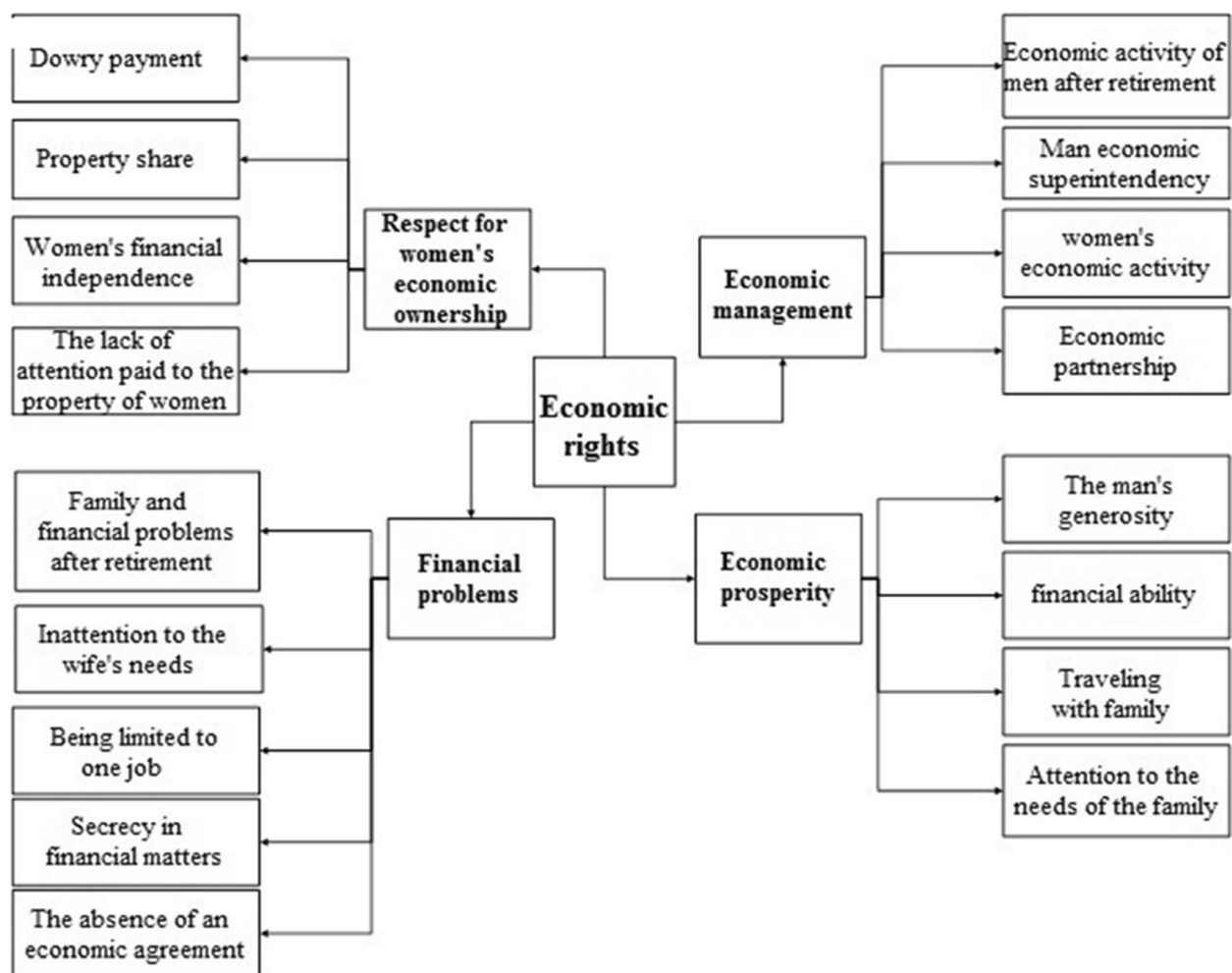


Fig. 2 Main category related to couples' rights: economic rights

financial matters, financial and family problems after retirement, unemployment of the husband, lack of economic agreement and consideration of the financial needs of the wife, and payment of the spouse's share. For example, participant [13] said, "Whenever I ask my husband for money, he says he has no money on his bank card or it is not enough. He never asks what we need."

In some cases, women's nonparticipation in financial matters was noted. Participant [13] noted, "We both work and pay living expenses, but I should not ask about my husband's income." Regarding the lack of economic agreement, the couples' disagreement on economic issues and lack of understanding of each other led to economic problems, arguments, and conflicts. For example, participant [1] said, "My husband is a spender. He spends a lot and thinks our income is still enough. I, on the other hand, am frugal, and we disagree on this issue."

Sexual rights

As shown in Fig. (3), the results of the interviews on sexual rights yielded two axial codes for sexual satisfaction and dissatisfaction and 25 open codes.

Sexual satisfaction

Satisfaction with the sexual relationship means that the sexual rights of the spouse are respected. It included twelve subcategories, such as satisfactory sexual relationship, sleeping together in the same bed, and wearing makeup for spouse. The interviews revealed that some women were satisfied with or had come to terms with their sexual relationships before and after their husband's retirement. In terms of sleeping together, some participants stated that although their sexual desire had decreased compared to before, they still slept in the same bed as their spouse. For example, participant [4] stated, "Our sexual relationship has been satisfactory since the beginning of our married life. Now

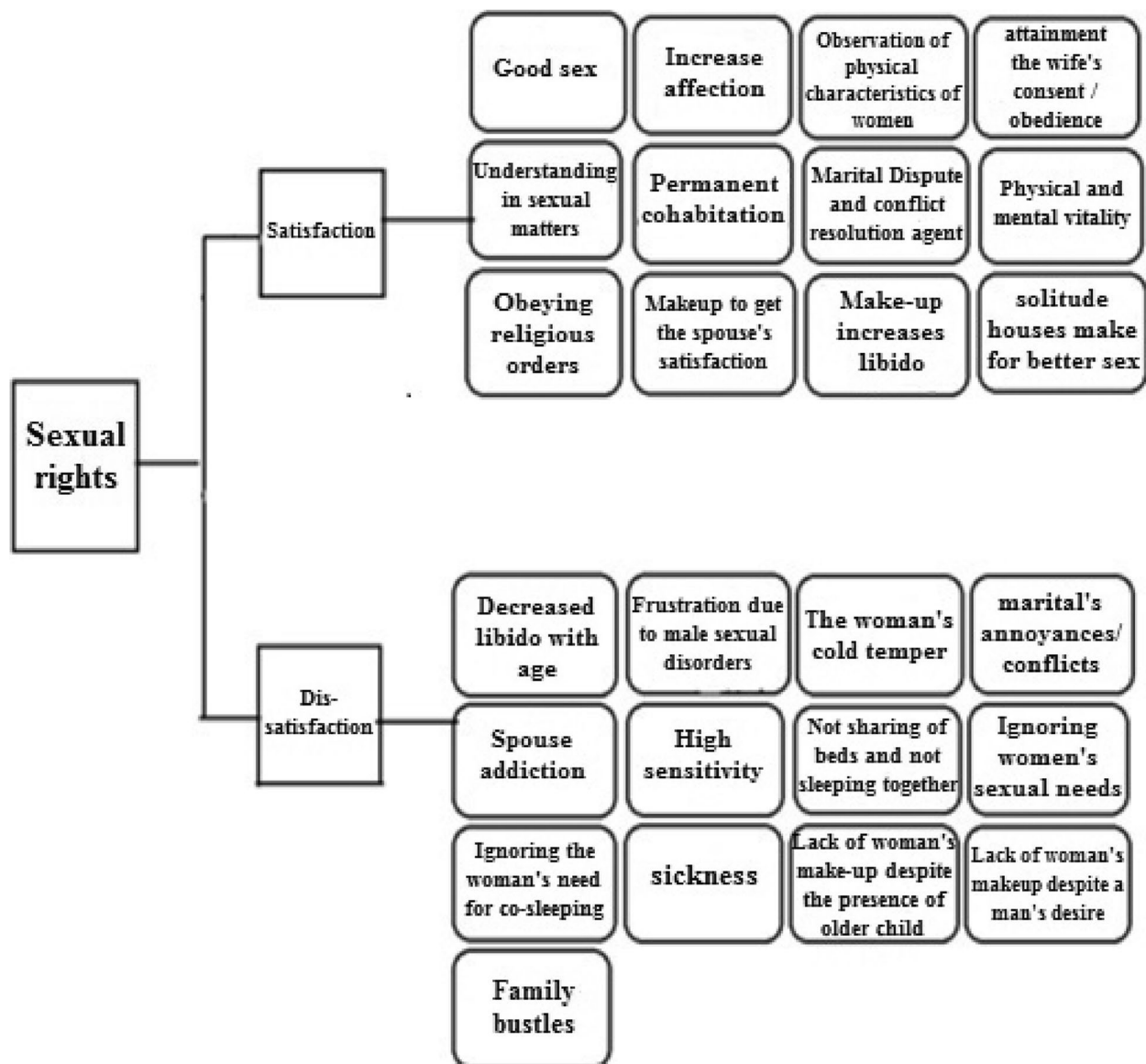


Fig. 3 Main category related to couples' rights: sexual rights

that we have more free time and do not have to worry about oversleeping, it has improved further (laughs)." Participant [4] claimed, "my husband and I always sleep together." Cleanliness and wearing makeup at home were particularly important to some participants. Not only were they interested in cleanliness and makeup, but they also showed an even greater interest in it because of Islamic teachings. They considered the limitations of wearing makeup at home and believed that putting on makeup and wearing colorful and attractive clothes affect the vitality and spirit of themselves and the family, teach children how to behave in the future,

increase sexual desire, and create love and attraction between couples. For example, participant [14] said, "I have been interested in putting on makeup and wearing attractive clothes at home since the beginning because it makes me happy and improves my mood. Participant [3] acknowledged that "my husband is very considerate of me in sexual relations because of my illness" in terms of observing physical condition. Participant [5] stated, "After retirement, my husband became ill with prostate disease, which limited our sexual relationship, but we managed our sexual positions or contacts so that we were not harassed."

Sexual dissatisfaction

It included thirteen subcategories, namely, lack of a satisfying sexual relationship, not sleeping together in the same bed, and not wearing makeup at home. Most respondents indicated that they had a satisfactory sexual relationship with their spouses, but their sexual relationships gradually decreased or stopped altogether, sometimes leading to their dissatisfaction. A few respondents admitted that they had problems in sexual relations with their spouses at the beginning of their married life, but these gradually decreased. For example, participant [15] stated, "Because of my husband's sexual disability, he could not satisfy me sexually. I became frustrated, and my sexual desire decreased".

Regarding the lack of satisfaction with cosleeping, some respondents stated that they did not cosleep with their spouse due to family circumstances, such as the presence of a young son or daughter, a grandchild, or even a divorced son or daughter at home. Participant [2] noted, "We sleep separately since we have a young son." Almost all respondents took care of cleaning and clothes at home. However, due to family circumstances such as sons-in-law, older sons at home, busy lives, or lack of interest in putting on makeup at home, they cared less about these issues. Participant [2] stated, "Since I have grown sons, I am ashamed to wear makeup and I have to wear loose fitting clothes."

Some participants stated that their lack of interest in sexual relations was due to their husbands' poor hygiene. Participant [13] noted, "I am not interested in having a sexual relationship with him because he smokes, smells bad, and smells like sweat. It appears to be he cares about cleanliness because of his job and he does not care about me." Some also pointed out their husbands' inattention in this regard. Participant [13] complained, "My husband sleeps in front of the TV every night. He says, 'I have been depriving myself of watching TV in the evening all my life because I had to get up early in the morning to go to work.' Now that I am retired, I want to sleep before TV.' He does not care that I have to sleep with him. He comes into the bedroom whenever he wants." Some also use life circumstances as an excuse. Participant [2] explained, "When our house was small, we did not have a proper space for sexual relations. Now that the situation is much better, I have no interest in a sexual relationship. The age and sexual relationship!".

Discussion

The findings of this study contribute to our understanding of the lived experiences of Iranian women living with retired spouses and highlight the intersection of gender, aging, and cultural expectations in shaping these experiences. By uncovering the complexities of women's roles,

relationships, and coping mechanisms within the context of retirement, this research informs the development of culturally sensitive interventions and support services to address the needs of Iranian women and their families during this life transition. The few studies that have been conducted in Iran on couples' retirement generally fall into two categories. The first group of studies describes the positive effects of retirement on mental health, such as higher levels of life satisfaction, quality of life, independence, and reduction of stress and depression, which may be due to the absence of occupational stress at the beginning of retirement [24, 25, 29]. The second group of studies reported the negative effects of retirement, such as socioeconomic changes, loss of social status and personal identity, reduction in work relationships, loneliness, high likelihood of depression, stress, and anxiety and chronic diseases associated with aging [30]. In a study, retirement was identified as the most ignored stressor in aging [31]. Retirement initially triggered a sense of satisfaction from having more free time; however, it later triggered disappointment and changes in orientation, evaluation, acceptance, and adjustment, leading retirees to adopt a new lifestyle [25]. In one study, people were found to be more concerned about health, family, and global issues after and during retirement. However, they are less concerned than younger people [32]. Marital status and Mental Health Literacy (MHL) affects stress coping styles in the women and elderly [33, 34]. Existing research on the consequences of retirement has generally focused on individual characteristics or the household level [35]; however, no study has been conducted on the impact of the positive and negative aspects of retirement on the marital life of retirees, especially from the perspective of retirees' spouses.

The purpose of this study was to examine the marital rights of women living with their retired spouses from emotional, economic, and sexual perspectives. Emotional rights included the two subcategories of companionship and unwillingness. Part of this research showed that once husbands retired, they exercised power and interfered in matters previously managed and controlled by their wives. As a result, wives were dissatisfied with their husbands' retirement and perceived it negatively. Consistent with this finding, one study showed that women's satisfaction with their husband's retirement decreased significantly when the husband's interference and power increased with retirement [26]. In such a condition, many participants reported that their stress and depression levels increased and their physical health deteriorated after their husband retired. This phenomenon is often referred to as "retirement husband syndrome" [35]. However, the results of the present study suggest that women welcomed their spouses' friendly involvement in household

affairs. As a result, they perceived their husbands' retirement positively. Similarly, one study found that men devoted much time and energy to their work and careers before retirement. In contrast, they devoted more time to family life and household decisions afterward. The increasing involvement of retired men in female and general household responsibilities creates an atmosphere of cooperation and equality. Therefore, husbands and wives experience a new type of relationship in which the husband is willing to participate more in household chores and the wife allows him to enter an area that she used to manage alone [36]. Another study concluded that the characteristics of the husband's job, division of labor, health, and social support influence the quality of marriage after retirement. Leaving a stressful job improved marital quality, whereas factors such as a change in gender role, poor health, and lower social support reduced marital quality after retirement [37].

The results of the present study also included cohabitation and satisfaction with the provision of emotional rights after the retirement of the spouse. A similar study in China found that men's retirement promoted their wives' mental health [35]. In contrast, some of the studies conducted in Japan and Europe reported that men's retirement was detrimental to their wives' mental health [38, 39]. The reason may be that men's retirement in China allows women to exercise and relax more because they have more free time, which may not be the case in other countries. For example, research has found that husbands' retirement reduces the frequency of moderate physical activity and increases alcohol consumption among European women. However, the effects of husbands' retirement on wives' mental health have not been specifically studied [39].

In examining the economic rights of retirees' spouses, the results of the present study showed that participants' positive and negative perceptions were influenced by the retiree's economic status and level of income. In other words, financial security prevents some marital tensions, and the retiree or his wife does not have to look for a job; as a result, they have more time to have fun together. Iranian studies show that the elderly in Iran are not very satisfied with their leisure time and that their sporting activities are limited to walking, which is done by less than one percent of the respondents. The most common leisure activities of Iranian retirees were TV, visiting parks and sleeping [40–42]. The results of the present study show that family and even marital problems are exacerbated in families with insufficient income after retirement. In families where the husband is usually the primary or sole breadwinner, retirement is likely to reduce income [35]. Similarly, a study conducted in China found that the spouses of retired men who were forced to

work because of economic conditions had poorer mental health than those who had financial resources [36] because the stress from fewer financial resources is transmitted to the family after retirement [43]. One of the first studies on retirement and marital relationships showed that men, particularly those with lower levels of education, experienced a loss of power in their relationships after retirement [44], which could be due to a decrease in their income or social influence. In general, economic changes are among the consequences of retirement [30]. Tavernier and Aartsen identified economic worries and cost of living as major causes of stress in retirement; according to them, financial problems significantly limited the social participation of older people [45].

Another part of the results of this research is related to the sexual rights of the couple. Sexual health is one of the most important health issues for older people. This health dimension focuses on the couple's enjoyment of a healthy and normal sexual relationship [46]. Sexual health is an important indicator of quality of life for older people, but despite its importance, many of the sexual health needs of older people are not being met. The results of this study show the two categories of sexual satisfaction and dissatisfaction. It appears that cultural factors influence the continuation of sexual activity. Participants who grew up in a patriarchal educational system denied the importance of their sexual desires, as if they should not have sexual desires at that age and there was no need to talk about it. Consistent with this finding, research has shown that sexual pleasure encompasses a variety of experiences that are influenced by cultural and social factors as well as individuals' religious beliefs [47]. It appears that age-related changes in women's perceptions, understandings, and sexual needs cause them to neglect and have misconceptions about their sexual relationships [48, 49]. The results of the present study suggest that repeated stereotypes have an impact on couples' sexual relationships. Likewise, research has shown that the main problem in today's society is the wrong attitude toward sexual issues, especially in families [50]. Women suppress and ignore their sexual needs because of these stereotypical thoughts. For example, they said, "When we were young, we had less privacy, and now that we have more, it is too late." In a study conducted with African American women, it was found that they could not readily discuss their sexual behavior with their doctors, partners, and friends [51]. A study confirming the influence of women's healthy thoughts on the realization of their sexual rights shows that mental health plays a key role in older women's sexual desires. In addition to mental health, some reports in this study indicate that illness or medication use may affect sex life. One study confirming this finding reported that 26.9% of men and 17.1% of

women aged 55–74 had a medical problem that affected their sex life [52]. In this context, a study in America found that increasing age significantly predicts sexual satisfaction [53].

Some of the study participants also referred to the increase or stability of satisfying sexual relationships after their spouse retired. The increased presence of their spouse at home and domestic tranquility were among the reasons for their sexual desire. In addition, sexual relationships helped them cope with their own crises and those of their midlife spouse. In other words, sexual tenderness was an effective way to cope with the phenomenon of empty home, midlife crisis, and to solve some physical problems, such as those related to menopause. The 2018 National Healthy Aging Survey results confirm that the need for and interest in sexual relationships do not disappear at a certain age and that sexual health in older people depends on quality of life, physical health, and well-being [54]. Other studies have also shown that people remain interested and active in sexual matters in the last decades of their lives [46, 51, 55]. A study conducted in Iran in 2021 showed that while the sexual desires and activities of older Iranians have decreased compared to younger Iranians, interest in sexual relations was moderate or high among a quarter of women 65 and older. More than a third of them reported being sexually active in the past three months. A large percentage of women were still interested in sexual relationships despite their increasing age [56]. The results of a systematic study of older people's attitudes toward sexual issues have shown that "health," not "age," determines sexual satisfaction and that there is a unique and complex relationship between age and sexual issues [57].

Conclusions

This research on analyzing the lived experiences of Iranian women living with retired spouses, several key points can be considered. Firstly, the findings of the study may shed light on the changing dynamics of marital relationships in Iran post-retirement. Understanding how retirement impacts the roles, responsibilities, and power dynamics within marriages is crucial in addressing potential sources of tension and promoting healthier relationships.

Secondly, exploring the lived experiences of Iranian women in this context can offer insights into the intersection of gender, culture, and aging. By delving into the narratives and perspectives of women who are navigating life with retired spouses, this research can illuminate the challenges and coping strategies that arise within the cultural framework of Iran.

Additionally, discussing the implications of the findings for policy and practice is essential. The research may

inform culturally sensitive interventions and support systems for Iranian women and couples facing challenges in the post-retirement phase. Understanding the marital rights and experiences of Iranian women can also contribute to broader discussions on family dynamics and aging in Iran.

Limitations

This research is subject to some limitations. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a few exceptions, it was not possible to conduct face-to-face interviews, and most interviews were conducted via video calls.

Furthermore, acknowledging the limitations of the study, such as potential biases in participant selection or cultural nuances that may impact the interpretation of results, is crucial. Recognizing these limitations can guide future research directions and ensure a more nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in studying marital relationships in specific cultural contexts like Iran.

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Authors' contributions

MNB: Writing—original draft, Resources, Investigation, Writing—review and editing, Data analysis and coding. BSH: Confirmation of interview questions, provided critical revision of the article. HGK: Confirmation of interview questions, provided critical revision of the article, NH: Designing interview questions, Conducting interviews. AH: Designing interview questions, Confirmation of interview questions, Data analysis, and coding. All authors reviewed the manuscript.

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Data availability

The datasets used or analyzed in the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, but the interviews and all coding steps are in Persian and require translation.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

The ethical code (IR.ARUMS. REC.1398.552) was received from the Ethics Committee of Iran-Ardabil University from Medical Sciences. All participants provided their informed consent to participate and allow the use of personal information for research purposes by checking the corresponding boxes. All procedures were carried out in accordance with relevant guidelines and regulations.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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