

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE STATE OF KUWAIT (2015–2025): A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF SURVEY STUDIES AND SOCIAL TRENDS

FATEMA A. BAQER

SOCIAL CRIMINOLOGICAL AND BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF CADIZ, KINGDOM OF SPAIN.
EMAIL: fatema.a.baquer@outlook.com

Abstract: This study examined the issue of domestic violence in Kuwait in terms of the concept, causes, types, effects, and legislation. The author employed a survey and descriptive-analytical approach, based on a review of the literature and recent field studies on domestic violence in Kuwait. The main findings of this study are that the most prominent causes of domestic violence in the State of Kuwait are: Economic and living pressures, psychological disorders, wrong socialisation, parental interference in the lives of spouses, weak commitment and religious values, and educational and cultural differences between spouses.

Keywords: *Domestic Violence, Social Trends, Kuwait, Sexual Violence.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the State of Kuwait has witnessed major social and economic transformations, which have affected the structure of the Kuwaiti family and the patterns of relations between spouses. There has been a noticeable increase in interest in the issue of domestic violence. This issue is considered one of the most serious social challenges, which is closely linked to the family entity because of its negative effects on family stability and community cohesion. This has been reflected in the promulgation of legislation, the intensification of awareness campaigns and the increase in academic studies in this area.

A survey conducted among women attending primary care centres in Kuwait indicated that there is a significant prevalence of domestic violence, including violence from husbands to their wives, through various forms of violence such as physical, psychological and sexual violence (Alshammari et al, 2023).

Domestic violence against wives takes multiple forms, including physical, psychological, verbal, and economic violence and usually occurs within the framework of family relationships, making it more complex than random community violence, as it is intertwined with patterns of relationships, power, and social norms.

Official reports of violence against women in the Kuwaiti family have increased, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the need for in-depth studies that address the phenomenon from an academic and systematic perspective.

Despite the promulgation of Law No. (16) of 2020, the debate is still ongoing about its effectiveness in changing the field reality, especially in light of cultural, legal and structural obstacles, despite the imposition of measures such as protection orders, shelters, an emergency and judicial number, the effectiveness of changing the social reality is still not visible in society (Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, 2020).

The current study aims to analyse the scientific production published during the period 2015-2025 in Kuwait, to explore the theoretical frameworks adopted, comparing explanatory contexts, and reviewing the accompanying legislative and institutional challenges. The current study focuses on conducting a multidimensional analysis, including theoretical, legislative, and field analysis, with recommendations based on a systematic review of recent relevant literature.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Concept of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is generally defined as any act or omission that results in physical, psychological, sexual, or economic harm to a family member and is committed by a member of the family.

Spousal violence can be defined as a wide range of negative behaviours towards an intimate partner, which includes physical aggression, sexual violence, stalking, psychological torment, and coercive behaviours (Stewart et al, 2021).

In this study, I am referring to violence directed at the wife by her husband.

Kuwait's Protection from Domestic Violence Law expanded this definition to include neglect as well, as well as providing protection centres for women victims of violence (Kuwait Today Newspaper, 2020, September 13).

The concept of systematic review

This method uses systematic methods to collect and summarise the results of previous studies and analyse them to reach general conclusions about a specific topic. Joanne et al (2020).

Theories explaining domestic violence

1. Feminist theory: This theory explains domestic violence as a product of a patriarchal societal structure that promotes male dominance and limits women's autonomy (Dobash & Dobash, 2004).
2. Social learning theory: This theory asserts that violent behaviour is acquired through imitation and modelling within the family (Bandura & Walters, 1977).
3. Systemic theory: This theory indicates that the family is a cohesive and coherent system, and that violence emerges as a result of the disruption of social relations within the family. (Gelles, 1993).
4. Psychological Stress Theory :This theory explains that economic and social pressures within the family will increase and enhance the likelihood of violence. (Straus, 1994).

From my point of view, I believe that the theory of social learning through modelling and imitation fits the environment of Kuwaiti society, as violent behaviour is a learned behaviour from the family and society based on male authority, although many of these concepts that restrict the personality and authority of women have changed, there are still traces of this authoritarian culture of men, which affects marital relations, especially after women obtained many of their rights and equality with men in terms of education, employment, salary, and access to high positions and positions in the state.

Many voluntary organisations, committees and teams in the world protect women and support their various rights, including Human Right Watch, an international non-governmental organisation that focuses on defending human rights around the world, an independent organisation that conducts research and documents human rights violations in more than 90 countries, and issues reports and statements to pressure governments and institutions to respect human rights.

In 2021, this organisation issued a report on wives' rights, where this report stipulated some legal gaps in wives' rights laws in the world, including the failure to criminalise marital rape within the family in some countries, and the report calls for amending laws to apply the global definition of violence against women and provide effective protection for them. Human Rights Watch, 2021).

In short, the organisation's approach in this report was a comprehensive legal approach based on analysing legislative texts, supporting them with real-life testimonies of affected communities, comparing them with international standards, and ending with recommendations aimed at closing the gaps.

Legal and legislative framework

Through my perusal and survey of many Kuwaiti studies, I noticed that they often relied on combining psychological and sociological frameworks, with limited reliance on critical theories such as conflict theory. The trend towards the use of multidisciplinary frameworks is on the rise, especially after 2020.

Law No. (16) of 2020 was issued to strengthen the protection of the family from violence, as it stipulated the establishment of shelters, the provision of communication lines, and the activation of reporting by women who have been subjected to domestic violence and was linked to the Child Law No. (21) of 2015 to ensure the integrated protection of minors (Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, 2015).

Despite the promulgation of the Protection from Domestic Violence Law (No. 16/2020) and the approval of its implementation law in 2023, a Human Rights Watch report (2024) confirmed that many support facilities) especially shelters, have not been activated due to slow procedures and poor institutional coordination. The Human Rights Council document (UPR 2025) also noted the absence of effective implementation mechanisms in the areas of coordination, awareness-raising, and staff training (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2025, May 9).

Justifications for choosing the topic of domestic violence.

I chose the topic of domestic violence in the State of Kuwait due to the increasing prevalence of this phenomenon in recent years, specifically after the issuance of Law No. (16) of 2020, which represented an important legislative step towards protecting the family, in addition to being a member of the Family Awareness and Counselling Committee of the Supreme Family Council, where we receive reports of domestic violence and deal with them according to social and legal procedures.

Despite institutional development, there are still legal and cultural gaps that hinder radical solutions, and the lack of studies that combine theoretical and applied analysis prompted me to choose this topic to contribute to providing a comprehensive treatment based on the Kuwaiti reality, taking advantage of previous studies in the period between 2015 and 2025. A review of the most important studies and reports in the field of domestic violence in the State of Kuwait from 2015-2025.

Studies and reports on domestic violence in the State of Kuwait from 2015-2025

1-Al-Tabtabay (2021):

This study aimed to investigate the prevalence of types of violence against women in Kuwaiti society. The study sample consisted of 520 women employees at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, and the descriptive-analytical approach was used. The main findings of this study are: Psychological violence directed against women in the family is the most prevalent, followed by verbal violence, economic and social violence, and physical violence, and the age group of women (25-34 years) is the most exposed to violence by their husbands.

2-Kuwaiti Institute for Judicial and Legal Studies (2021):

The report issued by the scientific seminar of the Kuwait Institute for Judicial and Legal Studies indicated that 2,799 cases of domestic violence were recorded during 10 months in 2021, that 80 per cent are women, and that there is a weakness in the application of urgent protection for children.

3-Albalhan & Alnaser (2022):

This study aimed to investigate the behaviour of violence against Kuwaiti wives in Kuwaiti society using a survey and quantitative approach. This study was applied to 500 married Kuwaiti women with children. The main findings of this study: 83.6% of women were subjected to verbal violence, 80% to threats of punishment, 50% to restriction of personal freedom, 48% to abuse during pregnancy and childbirth, 34% to sexual violence, and 26% to physical violence. The study recommended enforcing laws and providing psychological and social support to victims.

4-Al-Kandri, 2017, June 22):

This study aimed to reveal the extent of increased violence against married women. The study was conducted on a sample of 1071 Kuwaiti wives (18-68 years old). The main findings of this study were that 40.2 per cent of wives were subjected to physical violence of various types by their husbands for the age group (30-39 years), and the results of the study also indicated that battered wives compared to others believe that there is a high prevalence of physical violence against wives in Kuwaiti society.

5-Al-Rashid (2022):

This study aimed to explore the extent of citizens' acceptance of the idea and activation of centres to house and shelter women who are victims of violence from their husbands. This study followed a descriptive and analytical approach and relied on a social survey method for the sample of 3524 male and female participants. The main findings of this study are that the opinions opposed to the idea of establishing and providing these places for women who are persecuted by their husbands are due to the fear of community reactions, and the possibility of shame and bad social reputation that may follow the women, so this study considered that awareness and social culture must be spread at the beginning to educate community members about the objectives of the shelters so that they accept the idea easily without any objections from them.

6-Alsaleh (2022):

This study aimed to measure the prevalence of violence against Kuwaiti women and identify the factors associated with the occurrence of such violence.

The study included a large sample of Kuwaiti women, numbering 1000, who were selected according to a systematic method to represent different socio-demographic groups. This study applied the survey and quantitative methods. The results indicated that cultural, religious, and demographic factors were among the most important causes of violence against women in their families. It indicated that 71% of the women were physically abused, 81% were sexually abused, 89% were psychologically abused, and 75% were abused based on cultural and religious factors.

7-Al-Sejari & Al-Ma'seb (2022):

The two Author s, from the Faculty of Social Sciences at Kuwait University, conducted a survey on measuring the rates of verbal and physical violence and aggression prevalent in Kuwaiti society during the COVID-19 pandemic, by applying the descriptive survey method, on a sample of 815 Kuwaiti women. The most important findings of this study indicated that women were exposed to verbal aggression such as insults or insults at a high rate compared to the pre-Corona period.

8- Al- kandari (2023):

This study aimed to uncover the subjective and environmental factors that prevent Kuwaiti wives who are physically abused from seeking help from others. The sample included 1071 Kuwaiti wives. The study used the Barriers to Help Seeking Scale from

The results revealed that a large proportion of the participating wives had experienced physical violence from their husbands, indicating a marked prevalence of spousal violence in Kuwaiti society, and that the abused wives were mostly in the age group of 30 years and above. All participants, whether they were victims of violence or not, belonged

to the middle-income group and had a high level of education; moreover, these wives were suffering from physical health issues and exhibiting psychological symptoms.

9- Al-Saleh, (2025):

This study sought to analyse the extent to which the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence in Kuwait (No. 16 of 2020), complies with the provisions of Islamic law. It is a comparative jurisprudential-legal theoretical study, based on the analysis of sharia and legal texts without adopting a survey or empirical tools. The main findings of this study Most of the articles of Law No. 16 of 2020 to protect the family from violence in Kuwait are consistent with the provisions of Islamic Sharia, especially with regard to protecting women from physical and psychological abuse.

General commentary on previous studies

The Author noted that most of the previous studies used the survey and analytical descriptive method, and few of them used the quantitative method; the results of some of these studies indicated a high rate of marital violence against women in Kuwaiti society. Some of these studies stated that cultural, subjective and demographic factors are the most important causes of violence against women, while some of these studies concluded that psychological abuse is the most common type of abuse to which women are subjected, and some confirmed that environmental and social factors prevent battered Kuwaiti women from seeking help out of fear of shame and bad social reputation.

3. STUDY METHODOLOGY:

Procedures

The current study adopts a survey and descriptive-analytical approach based on collecting and analyzing studies published from 2015 to 2025, whether published in peer-reviewed scientific journals or in official authorities' reports. A systematic review method was used that relies on collecting, classifying, and analyzing the content of studies and their theoretical and methodological trends. These studies were scanned through several websites belonging to public and private universities, and through a database known in the Arab world as System House.

Selection of studies

Previous studies related to the current research topic were selected, provided that they were applied in the State of Kuwait from 2015 to 2025, so that they include only marital violence without other types of violence, provided that the wife is the victim who was exposed to types and methods of violence from her husband, so I collected all types of studies, whether quantitative, qualitative, experimental or case study, after that they were examined and verified, and some were excluded for not meeting the required conditions, such as not writing the sample size, and unclear methodology of the study.

Tool

In the current study, a specific tool was used, which is a table consisting of 12 paragraphs, and each paragraph has a subheading, and this table is adapted from the PRISMA 2020 model (Joanne et al, 2020).

Based on this model and the specific paragraphs, I transcribe the contents of the previous studies, and then I analyse the previous studies to reach the required scientific objectives. Based on this, this model helps and facilitates the Author to transcribe, categorise and analyse previous studies in a structured manner to ensure the accuracy of the discussion and analysis of those studies.

4. RESULTS

By reviewing the literature and previous studies, analysing the social, psychological and economic indicators in Kuwaiti society during the period from 2015 to 2025, and by analysing the different statements in the previous model, it was found that violence against women is a multidimensional phenomenon that results from the interaction of a set of complex and interrelated causes, namely:

1. Cultural and social reasons

- Conservative norms and traditions are one of the most prominent feeders of the culture of silence and submission, as they give implicit legitimacy to male domination and control behaviors within the family.
- The persistence of some prevailing perceptions of 'marital obedience' and 'male superiority' reinforces society's acceptance of some forms of violence as a disciplinary tool or an expression of stewardship.
- The lack of sufficient human rights awareness among some women and the belief that resorting to the law is a "social scandal" contribute to the continuation of violence without deterrence.

2. Psychological and personal reasons:

- Some couples suffer from undiagnosed behavioural or psychological disorders, such as anger disorders, borderline personality, or narcissism, which may translate into violent behaviour within the marital relationship.

- Cruel childhood experiences, or growing up in a violent family environment, are among the most prominent factors that perpetuate violent behaviour later on, according to the theory of 'imitation or social learning'.
- Lack of emotional and communication skills in some couples leads to an inability to resolve conflicts peacefully.
- Some wives may suffer from psychological disorders such as Battered Women's Syndrome.

3. Economic and livelihood reasons:

- Unemployment and reduced income opportunities create a sense of frustration and inferiority for men, which may lead them to compensate for their lack of social power by exercising power within the home.
- Living pressures resulting from the excessive cost of living lead to constant tension within the marital relationship, increasing the likelihood of a violent explosion.
- Economic inequality or income disparity between spouses can lead to power struggles within the family.

4. Institutional and legislative reasons:

- Despite the existence of family protection laws in Kuwait, weak institutional coordination between the competent authorities (police, judiciary, social affairs) sometimes leads to a slow response, perpetuating the perception that there is no immediate protection for victims.
- The lack of qualified staff to deal with domestic violence cases and the lack of specialized training make some victims reluctant to file complaints or feel that support is insufficient.
- The absence of a clear and stable mechanism to report violence confidentially and safely prevents many women from taking serious steps to protect themselves.

5. Recommendations

Considering the findings of this survey on domestic violence in Kuwait during the period (2015-2025), the Author recommends the following:

1. Promote family and media awareness through ongoing campaigns aimed at changing negative attitudes and educating community members about the dangers of violence against wives and its impact on the stability of the family and society.
2. Establish a central monitoring and response unit to document cases of violence against wives and provide urgent support to victims in coordination with the concerned authorities.
3. Train police and social workers on methods of dealing with cases of violence against wives, with a focus on psychological, social, and human rights aspects.
4. Periodically review legislation to ensure that it keeps pace with societal developments and enhances the effectiveness of laws that deter domestic violence.
5. Supporting academic field research in the field of family violence, to provide an updated knowledge base that helps develop preventive and therapeutic policies.
6. Providing free psychological and counselling support services for wives affected by domestic violence.
7. Strengthening legal penalties against perpetrators of domestic violence, especially in cases of repeated violence, and facilitating and accelerating litigation procedures.

Limitations

I faced some limitations and challenges in accessing some official data related to cases of violence against wives at the Ministry of Justice, due to its sensitivity and lack of public availability, in addition to the lack of recent and extensive local studies on violence against wives in Kuwait during the period covered by the study, which reduced the opportunities for comparison and longitudinal analysis.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study revealed that the State of Kuwait has achieved remarkable progress at the legislative and institutional levels in addressing domestic violence issues through enacting laws and establishing mechanisms to deal with victims. However, domestic violence - especially violence against wives - remains a complex challenge that is rooted in the social and cultural structure, requiring an integrated intervention that goes beyond traditional legal frameworks.

The study highlighted that effective solutions are not limited to amending laws or establishing care centres but require building a comprehensive system that integrates official and popular efforts. This includes enhancing community awareness, activating the role of media and education, and supporting specialised field studies that contribute to diagnosing the phenomenon in depth and developing realistic strategies for prevention and treatment.

The study also emphasises the importance of investing in specialised professional training for police, social and legal personnel to ensure an effective response to cases of violence, in addition to establishing safe and accessible platforms for reporting and providing support.

In conclusion, confronting domestic violence in Kuwait requires a long-term national vision, based on a true partnership between state institutions and civil society, and integrating this issue into general social development policies, to ensure building a stable family and a cohesive and safe society.

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Declarations

Conflict of Interest: The author has no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

Ethics Approval: The study was in line with the ethical research guidelines. The data were analysed anonymously.

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