



The Women's Social problems, Contexts and the Strategies to Confront them : A Narrative analysis of Women in Sannadj

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Article Info	Extended Abstract
Article type: Research Article	Objective: The present study, drawing on the social constructionist approach and adopting an emic perspective, seeks to understand women's lifeworlds and to examine how women's lived experiences become (or fail to become) social problems from the standpoint of women themselves. Although objective indicators of gender inequality in economic, social, and political domains suggest that women's status in Iranian society—and particularly in the studied context—is problematic and harmful, from a constructionist viewpoint, the mere existence of objective conditions is not sufficient for a situation to be recognized as a social problem. What transforms a condition into a social problem is the interpretation, meaning-making, and shared understanding of social actors, along with a perceived need for change. Accordingly, the central concern of this study is how women in the city of Sanandaj interpret and make sense of their lived conditions, how they narrate the contexts and sources of their painful and distressing experiences, and what strategies they adopt to confront these situations. The study aims to explore whether women's experiences of suffering transcend the level of personal troubles and are articulated as collective concerns and social problems, or whether they remain individualized and privatized. Methodology: This research is qualitative in nature and was conducted within the framework of narrative analysis. Narrative analysis provides the opportunity to explore lived experiences and socially constructed meanings within their specific cultural and social contexts. The field of study was the city of Sanandaj, and the participants consisted of 30 women aged between 23 and 57 years, representing diverse social, economic, educational, and marital statuses. A purposive sampling strategy with maximum variation was employed in order to capture a wide range of lifestyles and social positions. The sample size was determined based on theoretical saturation, such that no new concepts or themes emerged after 30 interviews. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Concepts were initially extracted from the interviews and subsequently organized into sub-themes and overarching themes. The credibility of the findings was enhanced through repeated readings of the interviews, constant comparison of data, and careful attention to the diversity of participants' narratives.
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Findings: The findings indicate that the lifeworlds of participating women are profoundly shaped by experiences of pain, suffering, restriction, and marginalization. At the first analytical level, women identified a range of lived conditions as problematic, which were categorized into seven main themes: gender stereotypes, gendered coding of space, sexual objectification and commodification of the female body, humiliation, symbolic violence, denial of individual identity, and lack of institutional recognition. From the participants' perspectives, gender stereotypes that depict women as "weak," "irrational," and "in need of protection" reinforce women's subordinate positions and generate pervasive constraints in everyday life. Gendered coding of space—particularly in public and work environments—produces feelings of insecurity, spatial and temporal restrictions, and continuous surveillance of women's bodies and behaviors. The findings further reveal that women perceive their bodies as being reduced to sexual objects and commodities, with social value primarily attached to physical attractiveness. Recurrent experiences of humiliation, being taken unseriously, and exclusion from decision-making processes in family and society contribute to a deep sense of inferiority and powerlessness. Symbolic violence operates through cultural norms, patriarchal beliefs, and unequal laws, rendering gender inequalities natural, legitimate, and unquestionable. The denial of women's individual identity is manifested in the suspension of personal interests and the reduction of women's identities to marital and maternal roles. Finally, the lack of institutional recognition—expressed through structural discrimination, job insecurity, unemployment, and inadequate legal support—has intensified women's sense of exclusion and lack of future prospects. At the second level of analysis, participants identified four major sources underlying their distressing lifeworlds: gendered socialization, women's lack of organization and collective identity, institutional exclusion, and patriarchal culture. Gendered socialization, through the internalization of fear, learned helplessness, and negative self-perceptions, undermines women's agency. The absence of women's collective organization and shared identity prevents the transformation of individual suffering into collective claims. At the third level, women's strategies for confronting painful situations varied significantly according to age, social status, and access to cultural and social capital. Younger and socially advantaged women emphasized agency, self-awareness, empowerment, and structural change, whereas housewives, middle-aged and older women, and women with lower social status predominantly resorted to tolerance, silence, and despair.

Conclusion: The findings demonstrate that although women's lifeworlds in Sanandaj are deeply infused with pain and suffering, these experiences largely remain at the level of personal troubles and have not been collectively constructed as social problems. The absence of shared meanings, the lack of alignment in collective action, and the weakness of women's organization have prevented the painful



conditions from being articulated as public and political concerns. Consequently, women's lives have become characterized by individualized struggles, erosion of subjectivity, and the absence of life politics. By foregrounding women's narratives, this study highlights that without collective consciousness, institutional empowerment, and inclusive social structures, women's painful lifeworlds will persist and remain confined to the private sphere rather than emerging as social problems demanding collective action.

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