



Article

The Background Factors and Reality of Domestic Abuse Faced by High-Income Women: An Online Survey in Japan

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Abstract: This study aimed to examine the prevalence and factors influencing domestic abuse victimization among high-income women in Japan, including physical, psychological, economic, and sexual abuse. The background factors and reality of domestic abuse faced by high-income women have not been sufficiently addressed, although some academic studies contend that economically disadvantaged women are more susceptible to domestic abuse. This study collected data from 359 high-income women in Japan using an online questionnaire survey. Binary logistic regression analysis was used to investigate the contributing factors. Approximately one-fifth of high-income women had suffered physical, economic, and sexual domestic abuse, and approximately two-fifths had experienced psychological violence. Adverse childhood experiences, the degree of approval of traditional gender norms, quarrels over opposing views on traditional gender norms, and partners' education levels considerably influenced the prevalence of domestic abuse among high-income female victims. In contrast with the literature, the earnings gap between female victims and their partners did not yield meaningful results. This study examines the experiences of four types of domestic abuse among high-income women in East Asia and highlights the factors that contribute to it, as exemplified by Japan, which is a research direction that has not received sufficient attention. It also offers valuable insight into domestic abuse support policies that target low-income women in contemporary society.

Keywords: high-income women; domestic violence; domestic abuse; influencing factors



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1. Introduction

Domestic violence or domestic abuse, the most prevalent form of violence against women, poses a threat to the human rights of victims and their physical and mental well-being (WHO 2021; UN Women 2023). Women with low economic power (Sabri et al. 2014) and those residing in economically disadvantaged regions (WHO 2021) are disproportionately affected. Additionally, increased economic power has been linked to decreased experiences of domestic abuse (Kaukinen and Powers 2015). In contrast, some studies have pointed out that high-income women may encounter a higher risk of domestic abuse (Atkinson et al. 2005).

The results of a Japanese government survey support the possible risk of domestic abuse faced by women with a high income (with a JPY 10 million annual personal income or more) (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office 2018, 2021). However, the sample size of high-income women examined in the government survey was rather small (less than 10 women), and its findings cannot be blindly trusted. In addition, the background factors and reality of domestic abuse faced by high-income women have not been sufficiently elucidated. In particular, scarce research has been conducted on the domestic abuse experienced by East-Asian high-income women. As economic empowerment and gender equality activities continue to increase in Japan, it is necessary to understand the reality

and identify the risk factors of domestic abuse victimization among women who have considerable economic power.

Therefore, the aim of the present study was to investigate physical, psychological, economic, and sexual domestic abuse victimization among high-income Japanese women and the influencing background factors. This study enriches the research on domestic abuse and provides valuable recommendations for more well-rounded policies to support victims of domestic abuse.

1.1. Literature Review

1.1.1. Domestic Violence against Women: Definition and Prevalence

The term domestic abuse is defined in this article as violence committed by an intimate partner. It is a global issue that causes physical and mental health issues to victims and places an adverse burden on their families and society (WHO 2010). Although domestic abuse can be committed by individuals of any gender, women are the most frequent targets of such abuse. Approximately one-third of women worldwide reported having experienced domestic abuse (World Health Organization and Pan American Health Organization 2012). This study's classification of domestic abuse was based on research conducted by the Japanese Cabinet Office (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office 2021) and was divided into physical (e.g., hitting with hands, kicking, or hitting with objects that may cause harm to the body), psychological (e.g., threatening, ignoring, controlling behaviors, and verbal humiliation), economic (e.g., refusing to pay for necessary household expenses and preventing victims from engaging in occupational activities), and sexual violence (e.g., forcing sexual behavior and refusal to cooperate in the use of contraception). In this study, the term "high-income women" is specifically used to refer to those women who have an annual income of more than JPY 10 million, which is approximately 1.1% of Japanese society as a whole (National Tax Agency JAPAN 2021).

1.1.2. Risk Factors for Domestic Abuse Victimization

According to the ecological model, domestic abuse can be viewed as an outcome of the interactions of individual, interpersonal, social, cultural, and environmental elements. In terms of this point of view, the individual level is the smallest in scope, while the societal level is the largest. Elements of the relationship level mainly refer to relationships with peers, intimate partners, and family members, while social relationships are embedded at the community level, which encompasses a wider scope, such as schools and workplaces. Adverse personal histories or demographic factors, abusive relationships, undesirable communities, and societal environments that accept violence or maintain inequality are all considered risk factors for domestic abuse (Dahlberg and Krug 2002). The following conclusions were drawn from previous studies. At the individual level, adverse experiences, such as physical, sexual, or psychological abuse or witnessing violence perpetrated by older family members during childhood, increase the likelihood of victimization (Franklin and Kercher 2012; Vung and Krantz 2009; Whitfield et al. 2003; Sesar et al. 2015; Black et al. 2010) or perpetration (Murshid and Murshid 2018; Eriksson and Mazerolle 2015) of intimate partner violence in adulthood. Sociodemographic factors, including fewer educational qualifications (Boyle et al. 2009; Dalal et al. 2009), young age (Romans et al. 2007; Harwell and Spence 2000), unhealthy use of alcohol (Pan American Health Organization 2008; Xu et al. 2005), and acceptance of violence (Uthman et al. 2009; Okenwa-Emegwa et al. 2016), were identified as risk factors. At the relationship level, unsatisfactory marital status, disagreements about traditional gender roles and control in partnerships with income imbalances (WHO 2010), and a higher level of education (Ackerson et al. 2008) are common risk factors for women experiencing spousal violence. At the community and societal levels, adverse community circumstances, such as high levels of poverty or unemployment (Anderberg et al. 2013; Bhalotra et al. 2020; Rahman and Rahman 2021; Benson et al. 2003), fewer women with higher education (Marium 2014), inadequate laws regarding intimate partner violence or marriage (Rahman and Rahman 2021), and traditional gender norms

that accept violence ([Atkinson et al. 2005](#); [Koenig et al. 2003](#); [Rahman and Rahman 2021](#)), are influencing factors.

1.1.3. Economic Power and Its Relationship with Domestic Abuse

Despite the complexity of the factors influencing domestic abuse, this study specifically examined the connection between women's financial abilities and their experiences of victimization. Poor women experience domestic abuse disproportionately. Research has identified women's weak economic capacity and their husbands' controlling behaviors as factors of domestic abuse ([Sabri et al. 2014](#); [Dalal and Lindqvist 2012](#)). Higher economic power is widely used to reduce the rate of domestic abuse. For instance, one study showed that financial support outside their marriages can help women leave abusive relationships ([Kim et al. 2007](#)). Women's improved economic status, represented by higher earnings ([Aizer 2010](#); [Kaukinen and Powers 2015](#); [Gibson-Davis et al. 2005](#)) or improved employment status ([Chin 2012](#)), leads to a reduction in marital violence. In particular, for women with an education level higher than primary school, economic support programs considerably decrease the risk of experiencing psychological violence from their partners ([Hidrobo and Fernald 2013](#); [Hidrobo et al. 2016](#)).

Nevertheless, the narrowing of the wage disparity between couples occurring due to a rise in the wife's economic power may lead to backlash from the husband, ultimately increasing the risk of domestic abuse ([Rocca et al. 2009](#); [Krishnan et al. 2010](#)). Some women may be at risk of domestic abuse if they earn more than their partners ([Abramsky et al. 2019](#); [Melzer 2002](#); [Weitzman 2014](#); [Atkinson et al. 2005](#); [Kayaoglu 2022](#)). However, [Atkinson et al. \(2005\)](#) argued that this scenario occurs only when the husband holds a traditional view of the wife's employment. A study conducted in China indicated that women belonging to high-income brackets might encounter a similar risk of domestic abuse to women in lower-income brackets ([Wang and Sekiyama 2023](#)).

As previously noted, while community-level improvements in the economic environment surrounding women (e.g., rising employment status) are considered a protective factor, at the relationship level, women's economic power often interacts with other factors (e.g., their partner's traditional gender ideology regarding unsatisfactory marital status), ultimately having a more complex, and even negative, impact on their domestic abuse victimization. In other words, the influence of women's economic power on their experiences of domestic abuse is complex and lacks a fixed conclusion.

1.1.4. Traditional Gender Norms and Their Relationship with Domestic Abuse

Traditional gender norms in this study are ideas related to "what men should do and what women should do". The attitude toward traditional gender norms/ideologies, fights/quarrels between the couples due to different opinions on traditional gender norms, and norms that tolerate intimate partner violence are said to be related to domestic abuse victimization. First, women who hold challenging attitudes toward traditional gender ideologies are considered risky for experiencing domestic abuse. One survey conducted in Japan found that women who have innovative ideas about traditional gender norms and take actions contrary to the patterns of the patriarchal male-centric society were the most vulnerable ([Ishikawa 2004](#)). Women who have comparatively more resources, such as employment and educational attainment, which challenge traditional gender norms, may face a higher risk of intimate partner violence ([Hynes 2012](#); [Weitzman 2014](#)). Furthermore, men's conventional attitudes are found to be influential factors ([Logoz et al. 2023](#)). Compared with men who accept egalitarian gender thoughts, men with traditional gender thoughts that reinforce men's dominant role within the family are more likely to perpetrate violence ([Atkinson et al. 2005](#)). Second, disagreements about traditional gender roles between couples are regarded as a possible trigger ([WHO 2010](#)). [Abramsky et al. \(2019\)](#) pointed out that some women contribute more than their partner to the household and argue more over their partner's inability to provide, which challenges the norms that limit women's economic participation and may put those women in danger. The

mechanism could be also explained as something that is not allowed by traditional gender norms (Rahman and Rahman 2021). Third, traditional gender norms deeply embedded in society that accept violence are considered an influential factor for both men's perpetration and women's victimization (Rahman and Rahman 2021).

1.1.5. Domestic Abuse in Japan

In Japan, approximately 25% of women have experienced domestic abuse from their spouse/former spouse as of 2020 (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office 2021). Although the sample size of high-income women was small, the rate of domestic abuse victimization among high-income women was higher than that among women who earned less than JPY one million a year (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office 2018, 2021). Previous studies have reported on the various features of domestic abuse studies and highlighted that Japanese victims are different from those in Western societies.

First, it has been about 20 years since Japanese society began to attach importance to the problem of domestic abuse and began to take a series of actions, such as raising awareness of domestic abuse and introducing more comprehensive laws on domestic abuse (Hall 2012). Compared with other advanced societies, the research and statistics on domestic abuse in Japanese society are still relatively scarce (Hall 2012). Second, in Japanese society, domestic abuse is recognized as an act perpetrated by the abuser for the purpose of controlling the victim (Liem and Roberts 2009). Moreover, domestic abuse behaviors are promoted by Japanese cultural traditions, which discourage acts that might lead to shame (Yoshihama 2002).

Third, Japanese society is reluctant to report domestic abuse (Lukyantseva 2022). Fourth, Japanese female victims of domestic abuse bear unique cultural imprints. For example, self-blaming is the usual response when victims encounter domestic abuse (Yoshihama 2000). A Japanese woman who lacks the capacity to tolerate pain is considered inferior (Yamawaki et al. 2009). Finally, one study, which aimed to investigate the perceptions of rape among Japanese and American students, found that Japanese students are more likely to promote rape minimization and blame the victim than Americans (Yamawaki and Tschanz 2005).

It is important to consider the cultural background, such as traditional gender norms, when conducting studies on domestic abuse.

1.1.6. Research Gap

As stated above, the background factors and reality of domestic abuse faced by high-income women have not been sufficiently addressed, although some academic studies contend that economically disadvantaged women are more susceptible to domestic abuse. Additionally, empirical research about domestic abuse in Japan is still scarce, especially studies that utilize statistical methods to investigate and analyze the current situation and factors targeted at high-income women. Despite previous studies emphasizing the importance of taking traditional cultural attitudes/norms into account in research on domestic abuse, a lack of empirical research on the specific norms that may affect domestic abuse victimization is observed.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Online Questionnaire Survey

This study distributed and collected online questionnaires from September to October 2021 via the data platform of a Japanese online questionnaire company that has approximately 13 million reachable users and cooperates with universities in academic research. Survey participants were asked to read a text describing the research outline, voluntary nature of research cooperation, benefits and disadvantages of research cooperation, protection of personal information and handling of data after research cooperation, co-tabulation of research results, and contact information for inquiries. Only those who agreed to cooperate with the survey completed the questionnaire. They could withdraw their cooperation in

this study even after they had begun to respond to the questionnaire. This was communicated in writing at the beginning of the survey. The results of the survey were provided anonymously by the questionnaire company to the authors without revealing participants' personal information.

The Japanese Cabinet Office's questionnaire ([Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office 2021](#)) was used as a reference for classifying and describing domestic abuse behaviors. Items related to the four types of domestic abuse, along with the factors that influenced them, were included in the questionnaire. Regarding possible factors influencing exposure to domestic abuse, this study considered the results of previous research and built regression models.

The following aspects were included: having had any adverse childhood experiences, a degree of approval of traditional gender norms, frequent arguments on differences in opinions regarding traditional gender norms ([Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office 2012](#)), and wage disparity and its alterations between the participants and their current or previous spouse. For the questions related to frequency, including adverse childhood experiences and arguments due to different opinions on traditional gender norms, answers that contained "often", "frequently", or "very frequently" were considered "ever-experienced" by referencing previous studies ([Whitfield et al. 2003](#)). Regarding traditional gender norms, nine items were included, which were used in previous studies to investigate people's perceptions of gender norms in Japan ([Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office 2012](#); [Suzuki 1991, 1994](#); [Yamaguchi 2000](#)). These gender norms reinforce men/husbands' priorities while women/wives are treated as secondary roles. Only one norm, "women should also focus on their professional lives", was controversial and was used to investigate respondents' attitudes in an opposite direction. The agreement level of each norm was divided into five levels from "totally disagree" to "totally agree", and the higher the number of options, the higher the level of agreement. The code of the eighth item, "women should also focus on their professional lives", was reversed during the analysis process, since its measuring direction was in opposition to other items. The detailed contents of the nine traditional gender norms are provided in Supplementary Material Figure S1.

The sociodemographic characteristics of the participants, such as the number of children, education level, and spouse/ex-spouse's education level, were also included.

The survey was completed in two stages: a preliminary survey and a formal survey. Specifically, the preliminary survey, which included two questions, that is, (a) "Is your annual personal income over JPY 10 million?" and (b) "Have you ever been married?", was distributed to women with an annual household earning of at least JPY 10 million using the company's original survey system. The criterion of JPY 10 million per year is the same as that used in the Japanese Cabinet Office's questionnaire. According to Japan's National Tax Agency, the percentage of salaried workers in Japan earning more than JPY 10 million per year was 4.9% as of 2021. If a woman earned more than JPY 10 million annually (including asset income) and had a history of marriage (including common law marriage), she was defined as a high-income woman in this study and classified as a participant in the survey. A formal questionnaire was then distributed to these women using the same system in an equal manner. The contents of the questionnaire are presented in Supplementary Material Figure S1.

To ensure the reliability of the survey data, the online survey company uses licensed AI technology to detect and delete users who do not answer the questionnaire seriously. In terms of the reliability of the questionnaire, the Cronbach's alpha value was 0.845, which met the universal criterion ([Lance et al. 2006](#)).

2.2. Binary Logistic Regression Analysis for Influencing Factors of High-Income Women's Victimization

Binary logistic regression is widely used as a tool for the analysis of relationships between a categorical outcome variable and one or more categorical or continuous predictor variables ([Tukur and Usman 2016](#)). In this study, the outcome variable on whether the

women had experienced violence was dichotomous; therefore, binary logistic regression analysis was adopted.

The following input variables were included in the regression analysis: the respondents' own education level, the spouse/ex-spouse's education level, the number of children, the wage disparity and consequent changes in the relationship with the spouse/ex-spouse, whether respondents had any adverse childhood experiences, the extent to which respondents agreed with traditional gender norms, and whether they had any arguments with their spouse/ex-spouse owing to opposing views on those gender norms. The Hosmer–Lemeshow test was employed to evaluate the fitness of each regression model. If the *p*-value was greater than 0.05, it indicated that the model fit well (Zhou 2020). The significance level for the statistical analysis was set at 0.05.

We hypothesized that the higher the education level of both the respondent and their spouse/ex-spouse, the lower the likelihood of the respondent's exposure to domestic abuse. In contrast, adverse childhood experiences, arguments owing to opposing views on traditional gender norms, and a higher income than the spouse/ex-spouse would be risky. In terms of the degree of approval of traditional gender norms, respondents who held an unconventional attitude, which would challenge the husband's traditional views, may be at a greater risk of victimization.

3. Results

The preliminary survey collected data from 5000 women with an annual household income of JPY 10 million or more, of whom 384 met the criteria for the formal survey. The survey collected data from 360 women, with a recovery rate of 93.75%. One questionnaire was excluded as a respondent indicated that they were male. Therefore, valid data were obtained from 359 respondents. Table 1 presents the basic information of the sample.

Table 1. Participants' demographic details.

Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
Education Level of Respondents		
Junior high school	9	2.55
High school	49	13.88
Vocational school/various types of schools	31	8.78
Junior college/technical college	44	12.46
University (other than junior college)	175	49.58
Graduate school	45	12.75
Other	6	1.67
Education Level of Spouse/Ex-Spouse		
Junior high school	8	2.28
High school	50	14.25
Vocational school/various types of schools	17	4.84
Junior college/technical college	17	4.84
University (other than junior college)	191	54.42
Graduate school	68	19.37
Other	2	0.56
Not sure	6	1.67
Wage Disparity and Alterations		
Always lower or approximately the same ¹	166	46.24
Once lower or approximately the same, now higher	46	12.81
Once higher, now lower or approximately the same	50	13.93
Always higher	66	18.38
Not sure	31	8.64
Number of Children		
Zero	103	28.69
One or more than one	256	71.31

¹ "The same" means that the difference was within 10%.

3.1. Experiences of the Four Types of Domestic Violence

Among the respondents, 19.22%, 42.90%, 18.11%, and 20.06% had experienced physical, psychological, economic, and sexual violence, respectively (with a tolerance margin of 4–5.1%). Figure 1 shows the results of the four types of domestic abuse victimization.

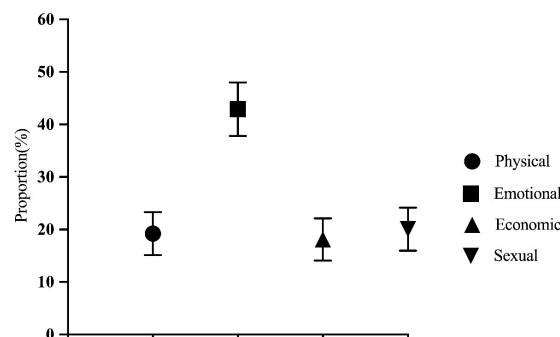
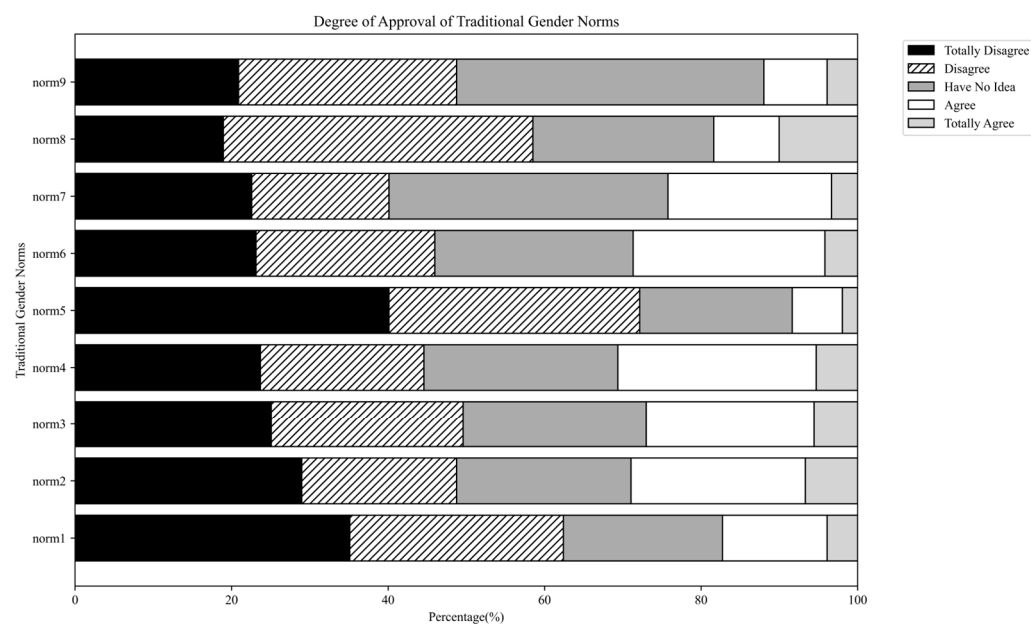


Figure 1. Error bar chart of domestic violence victimization.

3.2. Traditional Gender Norms: Approval Level and Quarrels

Figure 2 shows the results of the respondents' degrees of approval of traditional gender norms. The eighth item was reversely coded. Overall, the proportion of respondents who responded "totally disagree" and "disagree" to the nine norms was approximately 52.37% on average, while the proportion of respondents who chose the options "totally agree" and "agree" was approximately 21.73% on average.



Note.

norm1 = "A husband should take a job outside the home, and a wife should take care of the home"

norm2 = "The man is responsible for providing and protecting his family"

norm3 = "Women do not have to work if they are not economically disadvantaged"

norm4 = "In public, the wife should take the husband's viewpoint as a priority and act accordingly"

norm5 = "Husbands should decide important matters in marriage"

norm6 = "Women are better suited for housework and childcare than men"

norm7 = "Being a housewife is a socially meaningful job"

norm8 = "Women should also focus on their professional lives"

norm9 = "Housewives are better off in many ways than women who work outside the home".

Figure 2. Degrees of approval of traditional gender norms.

Regarding quarrels, Table 2 shows that 38.72% of the respondents "often" experienced arguments with their spouses/ex-spouses owing to differences in opinions on traditional gender norms.

Table 2. Results of frequency-related questions: adverse childhood experiences and arguments owing to traditional gender norms.

Questions	Frequency: <i>n</i> (%)				
	Never	Almost None	Often	Frequently	Very Frequently
ACE ¹ 1	191 (53.20)	50 (13.93)	71 (19.78)	23 (6.40)	24 (6.69)
ACE 2	250 (69.64)	38 (10.58)	43 (11.98)	12 (3.34)	16 (4.46)
ACE 3	236 (65.74)	46 (12.81)	40 (11.14)	22 (6.13)	15 (4.18)
Quarrels ²	117 (32.59)	103 (28.69)	87 (24.23)	28 (7.80)	24 (6.69)

¹ “ACE” refers to adverse childhood experiences: 1 = physical adverse childhood experiences; 2 = sexual adverse childhood experiences; and 3 = witnessing the mother’s experience of physical violence. ² “Quarrels” means arguments between respondents and their spouses/ex-spouses owing to opposing views on traditional gender norms.

3.3. Respondents’ Adverse Childhood Experiences

This study measured three types of adverse childhood experiences: physical abuse by a family member, sexual abuse by a family member, and witnessing their mother/stepmother experiencing physical violence. Table 2 shows the results of the adverse childhood experiences.

As Table 2 shows, 32.87%, 19.78%, and 21.45% of participants had experienced physical violence, faced sexual violence from an older family member, and witnessed physical violence against their mothers/stepmothers, respectively.

3.4. Influencing Factors for Victimization

The results of the binary logistic regression analysis for all categories of domestic abuse victimization are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Results of the binary logistic regression analysis.

Variable	Odds Ratio (95% CI)	<i>p</i> -Value
Physical		
ACE 2	2.187 (1.109, 4.311)	0.024
Quarrels	3.996 (2.152, 7.422)	0.000
A-belief ¹ 3	1.370 (1.007, 1.866)	0.045
Psychological		
ACE 1	2.001 (1.096, 3.652)	0.024
Quarrels	4.721 (2.907, 7.668)	0.000
Economic		
Quarrels	5.225 (2.746, 9.943)	0.000
A-belief 5	1.539 (1.091, 2.170)	0.014
Edu-spouse ² 1	14.168 (2.185, 91.853)	0.005
Edu-spouse 2	2.719 (1.131, 6.535)	0.025
Sexual		
ACE 1	2.519 (1.212, 5.235)	0.013
ACE 2	2.226 (1.112, 4.456)	0.024
Quarrels	7.150 (3.735, 13.687)	0.000
A-belief 4	0.671 (0.482, 0.933)	0.018

¹ “A-belief” refers to the degree of approval of traditional gender norms: 3 = “women are not obligated to work if they do not face economic disadvantages”; 5 = “important decisions in a marriage should be made by husbands”; and 4 = “in public settings, it is expected that the wife prioritizes her husband’s viewpoint and behaves accordingly”. ² “Edu-spouse” refers to the education level of the respondents’ spouse/ex-spouse: 1 = junior high school; 2 = high school.

3.4.1. Quarrels Owing to Opposing Views on Traditional Gender Norms

As Table 3 shows, among all four types of domestic abuse victimization, “quarrels between respondents and their spouses/ex-spouses owing to different opinions on traditional gender norms” was a significant influencing factor. Domestic violence was more likely to affect respondents who frequently argued with their spouses or ex-spouses. Physical violence was four times more likely to occur in the former group. The probabilities of psychological, economic, and sexual violence to occur were 4.7, 5.2, and 7.2 times more, respectively.

3.4.2. Degree of Approval of Traditional Gender Norms

The significance of respondents’ degree of approval of traditional gender norms was reflected in physical, economic, and sexual violence. For physical violence, the higher the level of respondents’ degree of approval of the traditional gender norm that “women are not obligated to work if they do not face economic disadvantages”, the higher their risk of experiencing physical violence. Those who were 1 unit higher in favor of this norm were 1.4 times more likely to experience physical violence than those who were 1 unit lower. Regarding economic violence, when respondents’ degree of approval of the idea that “important decisions in a marriage should be made by husbands” rose by 1 unit, the possibility of victimization was 1.5 times that before. Regarding sexual violence, when the degree of approval of the ideology that “in public settings, it is expected that the wife prioritizes her husband’s viewpoint and behaves accordingly” decreased by 1 unit, the possibility of respondents experiencing sexual violence was 1.5 times higher than before.

3.4.3. Adverse Childhood Experiences

Except for economic violence, adverse childhood experiences significantly influenced physical, psychological, and sexual violence victimization. Respondents who had these experiences were more likely to become victims than other respondents. In terms of physical violence, respondents who had experienced sexual violence during childhood were 2.2 times more likely to encounter physical violence during adulthood. Regarding psychological violence, respondents who had experienced adverse physical childhood experiences were 2.0 times more likely to experience psychological domestic abuse. Both adverse physical and sexual childhood experiences significantly influenced sexual violence. Respondents who had adverse physical and sexual childhood experiences were 2.5 and 2.2 times more likely to encounter domestic sexual violence, respectively.

3.4.4. Education Level of Spouse/Ex-Spouse

Compared with university-level respondents, those whose spouse/ex-spouse graduated from junior high school or high school faced a higher risk of experiencing economic violence. For respondents whose spouse/ex-spouse’s education level was junior high school, the likelihood of experiencing economic violence was 14.2 times higher compared with respondents whose spouse/ex-spouse graduated from university. For respondents whose spouse/ex-spouse’s educational level was high school, the experience of economic violence was 2.7 times more likely to occur.

4. Discussion

4.1. The Prevalence of Domestic Abuse among High-Income Women in Japan

According to the Japanese government, the prevalence of domestic abuse against Japanese women is approximately 25% ([Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office 2021](#)). Although women belonging to different personal income brackets, from no income to JPY 10 million annually or more, were included in the survey, the sample size of high-income women was extremely small. Moreover, empirical studies of domestic abuse in Japan are needed ([Hall 2012](#)). To obtain a deeper understanding of the issue of domestic abuse against women in Japanese society, this study examined the reality of domestic abuse experiences among high-income Japanese women with a history of marriage. The findings revealed that approximately one-fifth of the participants had experienced physical, economic, or

sexual domestic abuse, and two-fifths of them had experienced psychological domestic abuse. This implies that even women with a high economic capacity may not be free from the risk of domestic abuse, whereas women with low economic power may receive much more attention from both academia and domestic abuse support agencies in Japan. Furthermore, the most commonly reported type of domestic abuse was psychological abuse. This raises important theoretical (e.g., what is the “threshold” for defining that abuse has occurred relative to an interaction that may have produced a negative emotion but does not reasonably constitute domestic abuse, as it has generally been conceptualized in the literature?) and empirical questions (e.g., do different income-level women experience different forms of domestic abuse?).

4.2. *Impact Factors That Contributed to Victimization*

4.2.1. Similarities to Previous Studies

Although the studies referenced in this research were mostly conducted in non-East-Asian societies, the results of the binary logistic regression analysis yielded several factors consistent with those of previous studies. According to prior research, women who had experienced physical and sexual violence and witnessed adverse childhood experiences were twice as likely to experience intimate partner violence than those who did not (Whitfield et al. 2003). In addition, quarrels with spouses/ex-spouses owing to different views on traditional gender ideologies (Abramsky et al. 2019) or unsatisfactory married life (WHO 2010) were found to be significantly related to domestic abuse. In this study, adverse childhood experiences and quarrels were both common factors, while quarrels influenced all four types of domestic abuse victimization. This suggests that there are similarities in the impact factors between Japanese and other non-East-Asian female victims.

4.2.2. Education Levels of Respondents’ Spouse/Former Spouse and Themselves

Regarding the influence of education level, previous studies have pointed out that at the community level, a low proportion of women with high education levels are accompanied by higher domestic abuse cases (Marium 2014). At the individual level, a low education level poses a risk (Boyle et al. 2009; Dalal et al. 2009). At the relationship level, women having higher education levels compared with their husbands is considered to be a threat (Ackerson et al. 2008). In this study, compared with the university level, the lower education level of a spouse/ex-spouse was riskier for respondents. However, respondents’ education levels did not have a significant impact on any type of domestic abuse. This implies that a higher education level may fail to reduce the risk of domestic abuse among high-income women.

4.2.3. Attitude toward and Quarrels Regarding Traditional Gender Norms

Traditional gender norms closely connected to gender inequality may worsen the prevalence of domestic abuse (Atkinson et al. 2005; Koenig et al. 2003; Rahman and Rahman 2021). Traditional gender perceptions are thought to have an impact on domestic abuse victimization among women who have greater resources than their husbands (Hynes 2012; Weitzman 2014). Research shows that Japanese women who have novel attitudes toward and act in conflict with traditional patriarchal male-centric norms are the most vulnerable (Ishikawa 2004). However, exactly what type of traditional gender norms influence women’s experiences of domestic abuse victimization remains to be explored. This study examined high-income women’s attitudes toward traditional gender norms rooted in Japanese society. The findings indicate that respondents with conventional attitudes are at a higher risk of victimization. Particularly, higher agreement levels with norms, such as “women do not have to work if they are not economically disadvantaged” and “husbands should decide important matters in marriage”, are risky. This implies that women with supportive attitudes toward traditional gender norms that emphasize men’s priorities, even those who are economically independent, are at risk. However, respondents with a lower agreement level with the norm that “in public, the wife should consider the

husband's viewpoint as a priority and act accordingly" are more likely to experience sexual domestic abuse. Being economically capable does not mean that women are necessarily opposed to traditional attitudes nor does being supportive of traditional attitudes imply that women are safe from domestic abuse. These results show that a complex relationship exists between high-income women's attitudes toward traditional gender norms and their victimization. Further research that encompasses a more comprehensive range of traditional gender norms is needed to further explore this relationship.

Women arguing with their husbands is treated as unacceptable in some cultures; therefore, women may face physical abuse as a punishment or may tend to remain silent when they encounter domestic abuse (WHO 2010; Abramsky et al. 2019; Rahman and Rahman 2021; Ishikawa 2004). In this study, respondents who "often", "frequently", or "very frequently" quarreled with their intimate partners, which resulted from the different perspectives on the traditional gender norms mentioned in the questionnaires, faced a higher risk of experiencing domestic abuse. It is worth mentioning that specific differences in perspectives, such as respondents having completely opposite attitudes to those of their spouse/former spouse, both the respondents and their spouse/former spouse holding supportive/unsupportive attitudes but at different levels, or defining the gender norms in different ways, were not tested in this study. This study hints at a complex mechanism between high-income women's domestic abuse victimization, their approval attitudes toward traditional gender norms, and their experience of arguments with their spouse/former spouse over traditional gender norms. It may be possible that both high-income women who are traditional regarding gender norms and those who argue with their spouse/former spouse because of unconventional attitudes toward gender norms are at a risk of facing domestic violence. Moreover, it may not be necessarily true that only women who have unconventional gender ideologies argue with their spouse/former spouse. Further research is required to determine the specific mechanisms.

Despite the fact that an intricate connection exists between women's economic status and their exposure to domestic abuse, high-income women in this study reported a comparatively high proportion of victimization, with some impact factors mentioned in previous studies that did not yield statistical significance. On the one hand, women with limited economic capacity are at great risk of domestic abuse from their spouses (Anderberg et al. 2013; Rahman and Rahman 2021; Dalal and Lindqvist 2012). On the other hand, women with higher economic capacity are also at risk. This may be because a woman's relatively high economic power or status triggers resentment in her spouse, leading him to use violence to "control" her (Atkinson et al. 2005). In addition, backlash from men over women's increased economic power and accusations or pressure from wives with higher incomes are considered possible influencing factors (Chin 2012). In other words, the income gap between couples and its variation appears to be an important influencing factor (Atkinson et al. 2005; Abramsky et al. 2019; WHO 2010). Nevertheless, respondents' relative economic status within their intimate relationships did not yield significant results in this study. Is this difference due to the uniqueness of Japanese culture? Is it caused by the high-income women's situation (e.g., fixed ideas or attitudes on income disparity) that is distinct from that of "normal" women? Or is it only a one-time analysis result? Further studies are required to address these questions.

4.3. Limitations

This study has certain limitations. First, owing to the features of the online questionnaire survey, false answers could not be sufficiently determined. Additionally, this study used a pool of participants from a Japanese online survey company; therefore, individuals who lacked Internet access or were beyond the reach of the company's platform were excluded from the survey. Second, financial constraints prevented the collection of a larger quantity of questionnaire data and further development of the data. Third, although the Hosmer–Lemeshow test was used to test the fitness of the binary logistic analysis model, it could be possible that there was collinearity between reports of quarrels and reports of

psychological violence, which was not considered further. Finally, the main theoretical underpinning of this study was derived from previous studies conducted in non-East-Asian countries/regions, which may not comprehensively explain the findings of this research.

5. Conclusions

Studies investigating the factors that influence domestic abuse among high-income women in Japan remain scarce. This study conducted an online questionnaire survey targeting women with high earnings in Japan who are usually treated as “women with a high socioeconomic status” in society. The results show that no less than one-fifth of the respondents had experienced domestic abuse. Adverse childhood experiences, frequent quarrels with spouses/ex-spouses due to opposing views on traditional gender norms, the degree of approval of traditional gender norms, and the education levels of spouses/ex-spouses were identified as influencing factors. These findings also imply that existing domestic abuse support centers may not be able to adequately capture the domestic abuse victimization of high-income women, as the reality of victimization among high-income women has been insufficiently addressed. The characteristics of female domestic abuse victims identified in lower-income brackets may also apply to higher-income women. Although such complex issues need further investigation, attitudes toward Japanese traditional gender norms and arguments resulting from these norms between couples are influential.

Future research should be undertaken to not only eliminate the constraints mentioned above but also address the questions raised in this study. For example, it could have been better to construct a summary scale of the acceptance of traditional gender roles from the nine beliefs about traditional gender roles and to compare these summary results with experiences of different types of violence. Furthermore, it is crucial to consider the local cultural realities or backgrounds of domestic abuse in the research design phase. It is also essential to identify the differences in the factors impacting domestic abuse victimization in different countries or regions.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: <https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/socsci13010055/s1>, Figure S1: questionnaire.

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