

An Axiological Analysis Of The Relationship Between Gender-Based Violence And Human Dignity

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Abstract. The article offers an axiological analysis of the relationship between gender-based violence and human dignity. Its central thesis is that gender-based violence is not only a legal offence or a private conflict, but a value-destructive social practice: it transforms the person from an autonomous moral subject into an object of control, fear, humiliation, or dependency. The study relies on Uzbek and CIS scholarship in axiology, gender studies, legal studies, and social psychology, including the works of Q. Nazarov, D. B. Vafaeva, L. R. Shayusupova and I. R. Alizhonov, K. Aliyeva, G. A. Ishankhanova, M. A. Laktionova, S. E. Retsya and Z. V. Lukovtseva, and D. L. Faizova. The empirical and normative context is framed by Uzbekistan's 2019 laws on protection from harassment and violence and equal rights, the Gender Equality Strategy until 2030, and the 2023 amendments that introduced Article 126-1 on domestic violence. Using axiological-hermeneutic, comparative-legal, and qualitative synthesis methods, the article identifies four findings: dignity functions as the highest value criterion in evaluating violence; gender violence reproduces a hierarchy of unequal worth; local institutions such as the mahalla can either normalize harm or become channels of dignity-centered protection; and effective prevention requires harmonizing legal liability with value education, survivor-centered services, and transformation of gender stereotypes. The article concludes that a society that places *inson qadri*, human worth, at the center of reform must treat gender-based violence as a direct violation of the moral foundations of social life.

Keywords: Gender-based violence; human dignity; axiology; values; Uzbekistan; CIS scholarship; mahalla; human rights; gender equality.

Introduction. Gender-based violence is often described through legal, criminological, psychological, or medical concepts. These approaches are necessary, yet they do not exhaust the philosophical meaning of the phenomenon. Violence directed at a person because of gender, or sustained by gendered expectations of dominance and obedience, touches a deeper layer of social life: the layer of values. It raises the question of what a society considers worthy of protection, what it tolerates as 'ordinary' family or workplace behavior, and whether the dignity of each person is recognized as unconditional. From this perspective, the relationship between gender-based violence and human dignity is not accidental. Violence becomes possible where the victim's value is weakened, and dignity becomes socially real only when institutions, communities, and interpersonal relations reject humiliation as a permissible norm.

In the global human rights discourse, violence against women and girls is treated as a violation of rights and as a form of discrimination. The World Health Organization estimates that nearly one in three women worldwide have been subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner, non-partner, or both (World Health Organization [WHO], 2024). CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 conceptualizes gender-based violence against women as violence rooted in unequal power relations and as a barrier to substantive equality (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women [CEDAW Committee], 2017). These international positions are important for Uzbekistan and the wider CIS space because they shift the analysis from 'family conflict' to public responsibility, and from charitable assistance to enforceable dignity.

For Uzbek philosophical vocabulary, the concept of dignity is close to the idea of *qadr*, meaning worth, value, and social-moral significance. Q. Nazarov's work on the philosophy of values is important because it explains that axiological consciousness is formed through valuation, value feeling, value perception, and a worldview that regulates human relations (Nazarov, 2004). In this article, gender-based violence is interpreted as *qadrsizlanish*, a process of devaluation. The offender's domination does not only injure the body or psyche; it also denies the victim's status as a person whose will, voice, boundaries, labor, and future possess independent

worth. Therefore, an axiological analysis studies not only the external act of violence but also the value order that makes violence visible, invisible, justified, condemned, repeated, or prevented.

Uzbekistan has significantly changed its legal framework during the last decade. The 2019 Law on Protection of Women from Harassment and Violence regulates relations in protecting women from all forms of harassment and abuse, while the Law on Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men establishes guarantees of equality in political, economic, social, and other spheres (Republic of Uzbekistan, 2019a, 2019b). The Gender Equality Strategy until 2030 sets the goal of ensuring real equality of women and men and supporting equal participation in public life, work, education, science, and decision-making (Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2021). The 2023 amendments, especially Article 126-1 of the Criminal Code on domestic violence, moved the normative framework toward criminal recognition of harms that had often remained hidden behind reconciliation or cultural explanation (Republic of Uzbekistan, 2023; UNDP Uzbekistan, 2025).

Nevertheless, legal change does not automatically transform value consciousness. Vafaeva's research on domestic violence in modern Uzbekistan shows that women often seek help through mahalla structures and that many respondents do not recognize economic violence, sexual violence, slaps, pushes, or kicks as violence (Vafaeva, 2022). Retsya and Lukovtseva (2019) similarly discuss denial of gender violence as a psychological and social phenomenon in which observers or participants fail to identify the violent or gendered nature of a situation. These findings suggest that gender-based violence is sustained not only by offenders but also by interpretive habits: silence, shame, victim-blaming, fear of divorce, distrust of legal institutions, and the belief that endurance preserves family honor.

The objective of this article is to clarify how gender-based violence and human dignity are related from an axiological standpoint. The research question is: how can an axiological approach help reinterpret gender-based violence as a devaluation of human dignity and improve prevention, legal response, and social education in Uzbekistan? The article argues that dignity should function as a value criterion in three domains: first, in identifying violence without cultural relativization; second, in evaluating institutions by their capacity to protect the person rather than preserve appearances; and third, in orienting public policy toward equal worth, not merely formal equality.

2. Materials and Methods

The study is theoretical and qualitative. Its material base consists of four groups of sources. The first group includes international human rights and public health standards: CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35, WHO materials on violence against women, and UNFPA approaches to survivor-centered services. The second group includes national legal and strategic documents of Uzbekistan: the 2019 laws on protection from harassment and violence and on equal rights and opportunities, the Gender Equality Strategy until 2030, and the 2023 amendments to criminal and administrative legislation. The third group consists of Uzbek scholarship on values, gender equality, access to justice, mahalla practices, and legal reform. The fourth group includes CIS research on gender violence, denial of violence, and comparative criminalization.

The methodological core is axiological-hermeneutic analysis. 'Axiological' means that the object is interpreted through values, value hierarchies, value conflicts, and value degradation. 'Hermeneutic' means that legal norms, social practices, and scholarly positions are read as meaningful expressions of how dignity is understood. The article therefore treats violence not only as behavior but also as a message: an act that tells the victim, the family, and the community whose voice is valued and whose suffering can be ignored.

The second method is comparative-legal synthesis. It connects Uzbek legal developments with CIS discussions, especially research by Faizova (2025) comparing the criminalization of family violence in Uzbekistan and the Kyrgyz Republic. This method is not used to rank countries, but to understand how post-Soviet legal cultures negotiate similar tensions: protection versus reconciliation, public prosecution versus private complaint, and formal equality versus living social hierarchy. The third method is socio-philosophical interpretation of empirical observations. Vafaeva's findings on mahalla specialists and local perceptions of violence are read together with Retsya and Lukovtseva's analysis of denial, because both show how violence can be normalized at the level of everyday consciousness.

The article has limitations. It does not present new survey data and does not measure prevalence in Uzbekistan. Its contribution is conceptual: it develops an axiological model that may guide empirical research, legal education, and policy evaluation. The analysis also avoids the claim that tradition is inherently violent. Rather,

it distinguishes between living moral traditions that protect human worth and distorted customary practices that excuse domination. This distinction is essential for Uzbekistan, where mahalla, family solidarity, respect for elders, and community mediation are socially significant but must be aligned with the equal dignity of every person.

3. Results

3.1. Human dignity as the highest value criterion. The first result is the formulation of dignity as a value criterion. In a legal sense, dignity is a basis for rights; in an ethical sense, it is the recognition that a person cannot be reduced to a function, role, property, reproductive capacity, obedience, or family reputation. In an axiological sense, dignity is the measure by which social practices are evaluated. A practice is morally legitimate only if it protects the person as a bearer of independent worth. When applied to gender-based violence, this criterion reveals why some ordinary explanations are inadequate. To describe violence only as anger, jealousy, drunkenness, poverty, or misunderstanding misses its value dimension: the aggressor claims priority over the victim's body, time, mobility, sexuality, labor, emotional state, or public identity.

Nazarov's theory of axiological consciousness helps clarify this point. If value consciousness includes value perception and value feeling, then prevention must be directed at perception itself. A slap, threat, forced sexual relation, economic restriction, online humiliation, or workplace harassment must be perceived as a violation of worth, not as a disciplinary method, a sign of passion, or a family secret. This shift is philosophically important because law can punish after harm, but value consciousness prevents the social permission that precedes harm.

Dignity also changes the status of the survivor. A survivor-centered approach is sometimes misunderstood as emotional sympathy. In axiological terms, it is a restoration of agency. The victim is not a passive object of rescue, but a person whose interpretation, safety plan, material needs, legal choices, and future must be respected. UNFPA's support for coordinated and survivor-centered services in Uzbekistan reflects this logic at the institutional level (UNFPA Uzbekistan, 2025). When institutions ask first how to preserve the family image rather than how to secure the person, dignity becomes secondary. When they ask how to stop harm, prevent retaliation, provide legal and psychological assistance, and respect confidentiality, dignity becomes the organizing value.

3.2. Gender-based violence as a hierarchy of unequal worth. The second result is that gender-based violence operates as a hierarchy of unequal worth. It is not reducible to individual cruelty. Laktionova (2011) described gender violence as an interdisciplinary problem, and this remains accurate because the phenomenon combines social norms, psychological mechanisms, economic dependency, legal barriers, and cultural narratives. The victim is targeted or controlled within a gendered system of expectations: women must be patient, men must dominate, family reputation must be protected, divorce must be avoided at any cost, and authority must not be questioned. These expectations create a symbolic ladder. Those placed higher are allowed to decide, punish, monitor, and forgive themselves; those placed lower are expected to endure.

This hierarchy explains why some forms of violence remain invisible. Physical injury may be recognized more readily than economic deprivation, reproductive coercion, marital rape, stalking, digital surveillance, or workplace harassment. Yet all these acts share the same axiological structure: they deny the victim's equal worth. Ishankhanova's analysis of sexual harassment and workplace violence is useful here because she links harassment to gender discrimination and argues for stronger employer duties to protect victims and respond to guilty employees (Ishankhanova, 2022). The workplace is not separate from dignity; it is one of the spaces in which a person's social value, professional identity, and economic independence are either respected or attacked.

The hierarchy of unequal worth is also reproduced through speech. Phrases such as "it is a family matter", "she provoked him", "a good woman endures", or "reconciliation is best" are not neutral. They are value statements. They rank peace of appearance above safety, obedience above autonomy, and shame avoidance above truth. Retsya and Lukovtseva (2019) show that denial can be partial or complete: people may see harm but deny its gendered nature, or see a gendered situation but deny its danger. In both cases, the moral recognition needed for protection is interrupted.

3.3. *Uzbekistan between legal modernization and social normalization.*

The third result concerns Uzbekistan's current transformation. On the normative level, the country has moved from general declarations of equality toward more specific mechanisms of protection and accountability.

Shayusupova and Alizhonov (2021) examine the legal foundations of gender equality in Uzbekistan and connect national legislation with international human rights obligations. Aliyeva (2022) focuses on access to justice for women affected by domestic violence and highlights political, social, economic, and cultural obstacles. These studies indicate that the legal field has become more responsive, but also that formal norms meet resistance when social expectations remain unchanged.

The 2019 law on protection from harassment and violence is significant because it recognizes state responsibility for prevention, protection orders, social assistance, and interagency cooperation. The equal rights law is equally important because it connects gender justice with public participation, employment, access to resources, and protection from direct and indirect discrimination. The Gender Equality Strategy until 2030 moves the discussion beyond punishment and defines equality as a condition of participation in politics, economy, law, culture, education, science, and sport. Together, these documents show that dignity is not limited to physical safety. It also includes the ability to act, learn, work, lead, own property, speak, and participate in decisions.

The 2023 criminalization of domestic violence is a turning point because it gives legal language to harms that were previously minimized. UNDP Uzbekistan (2025) notes that Law No. 829 of April 11, 2023 supplemented the Criminal Code with Article 126-1 on domestic violence. The symbolic value of this step should not be underestimated. Criminal law does more than punish; it declares what a society refuses to tolerate. From an axiological perspective, Article 126-1 communicates that family proximity cannot cancel dignity and that the home cannot be outside the moral and legal order.

However, the value conflict remains visible in implementation. Vafaeva's study shows that many respondents did not classify economic and sexual violence, slaps, pushes, or kicks as violence, and that many believed mahalla committees could provide real help while legal institutions were less trusted (Vafaeva, 2022). This creates a dual situation. On the one hand, mahalla structures can identify risk early, mobilize social support, and prevent isolation. On the other hand, if mahalla specialists lack legal literacy or share stereotypes, they may pressure victims toward reconciliation and unintentionally reproduce danger. Therefore, the axiological task is not to weaken community institutions but to reorient them toward the unconditional dignity of the person.

3.4. Dignity-centered prevention model

The fourth result is a dignity-centered prevention model. It contains five interconnected levels. The first level is normative clarity. Laws, strategies, school materials, workplace policies, and mahalla guidelines must define physical, psychological, sexual, economic, and digital forms of violence in a way that ordinary people can understand. The second level is moral education. Citizens need not only information about penalties but also value language that explains why humiliation, coercion, and control are incompatible with *inson qadri*. The third level is institutional responsibility. Police officers, judges, prosecutors, social workers, employers, educators, and mahalla specialists must be trained to identify risk, avoid victim-blaming, respect confidentiality, and prioritize safety.

The fourth level is survivor-centered infrastructure. Protection orders, shelters, crisis centers, legal aid, health care, psychological support, and economic assistance must function as a single pathway rather than as fragmented services. The World Bank's 2024 Country Gender Assessment emphasizes that gender equality in Uzbekistan must be examined across social norms, economic activity, GBV protection, marriage, divorce, and public participation (World Bank, 2024). Axiologically, this means that dignity cannot be restored by one institution alone. A woman who receives a protection order but has no safe housing, income, child support, or trusted legal assistance remains vulnerable to coercion.

The fifth level is accountability with transformation. Punishment is necessary where rights are violated, but long-term prevention also requires work with perpetrators and with masculinities that associate manhood with control. This does not excuse offenders; it addresses the value roots of repetition. A dignity-centered model teaches that strength is not domination, honor is not silence, and family stability cannot be built on fear. In this model, every institution is evaluated by a simple criterion: does it increase or decrease the survivor's real capacity to live without humiliation?

4. Discussion

The axiological approach deepens existing legal and social analyses in several ways. First, it explains why underreporting and normalization persist even after legal reforms. A law can define violence, but the

community must learn to recognize violence as morally intolerable. When society treats endurance as virtue and complaint as shame, the victim faces not only the offender but also a value environment that demands silence. This is why public campaigns should not be limited to slogans. They must replace the moral vocabulary of patience-at-any-price with the vocabulary of dignity, responsibility, equality, and safety.

Second, the approach helps resolve the tension between family values and human rights. In some discussions, protection from gender-based violence is wrongly presented as hostility to family. Axiological analysis shows the opposite. The family is valuable only when it is a space of care, mutual respect, and moral development. A family relation that rests on fear has already lost its value content. Thus, protection from violence does not destroy the family; it protects the conditions under which family can have ethical meaning. This argument is important in Uzbekistan because public discourse often values family cohesion. The key philosophical distinction is between family as a moral community and family as a cover for domination.

Third, dignity clarifies the role of mahalla. Vafaeva's findings show that mahalla is a central point of first contact, but also that awareness of international and national legal standards among some specialists may be insufficient. Rather than opposing mahalla and law, the dignity-centered approach proposes a partnership. Mahalla can remain a culturally meaningful institution while becoming legally informed, gender-sensitive, and survivor-oriented. Training should include not only procedural rules but also ethical interpretation: reconciliation cannot be proposed where danger, coercion, repeated violence, or fear are present; family honor cannot outweigh bodily integrity; and community mediation must never replace access to justice.

Fourth, the approach expands the understanding of harm. Gender-based violence is not only injury. It can be isolation from relatives, control of phones, prohibition to study or work, ridicule, threats to take children, public shaming, forced forgiveness, sexual coercion, or economic deprivation. Each form damages the person's sense of being valued. This is why psychological and economic violence must be addressed with the same seriousness as physical violence, even when visible injuries are absent. The absence of bruises does not mean the presence of dignity.

Fifth, the approach indicates how to evaluate reforms. A reform is successful not only when the number of cases increases or decreases. An increase in reporting may initially indicate greater trust, not more violence. A decrease may indicate silence, not safety. Therefore, evaluation should include indicators of dignity: the speed and quality of protection orders; the availability of shelters outside large cities; the survivor's ability to access legal aid without pressure; the treatment of victims by police and courts; the prevention of secondary victimization; and the inclusion of men and boys in value education.

The CIS context confirms that Uzbekistan is not alone in facing these issues. Faizova's comparative study of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan shows that criminalization develops within broader legal cultures that must decide how to distinguish private conflict from socially dangerous violence. Similar debates in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Ukraine, and Russia reveal that post-Soviet societies often struggle with the boundary between family autonomy and state protection. The axiological answer is that autonomy belongs to persons, not to violent relations. The state should not intrude into intimate life as such, but it must intervene when intimacy becomes a structure of humiliation and fear.

A dignity-centered policy also requires attention to men and boys. Gender equality should not be communicated as a loss for men. It should be presented as liberation from destructive norms that demand emotional suppression, aggression, and authoritarian control. Educational programs can show that respect, consent, shared responsibility, and nonviolent conflict resolution are not foreign values but conditions of moral maturity. This is consistent with the broader Uzbek concept of ma'naviyat, because spiritual development cannot coexist with the humiliation of another human being.

Finally, the article's theoretical model has practical implications for academic research. Future studies can operationalize the category of qadrsizlanish by examining how victims, offenders, mahalla specialists, law enforcement officers, judges, teachers, and employers define dignity in concrete situations. Researchers can also study which messages change perception most effectively: legal information, survivor narratives, religious-ethical arguments, economic reasoning, or human rights language. The axiological approach does not replace sociology or law; it supplies the value grammar that connects them.

5. Conclusion

Gender-based violence and human dignity stand in direct opposition. Violence reduces the person to an object of control; dignity affirms the person as a bearer of equal and unconditional worth. The axiological analysis

developed in this article shows that gender-based violence is a process of devaluation: it devalues the victim's body, voice, freedom, labor, sexuality, emotions, and future. It also devalues society itself, because a community that tolerates humiliation weakens its own moral foundation.

Uzbekistan's recent reforms - the 2019 protective and equality laws, the Gender Equality Strategy until 2030, and the 2023 criminalization of domestic violence - provide a stronger normative basis for protecting women and children. Yet the deeper task is the transformation of value consciousness. Laws must be supported by mahalla training, school and university education, workplace prevention, survivor-centered services, legal aid, reliable data, and public narratives that connect family stability with respect rather than silence.

The article concludes that inson qadri should become the organizing principle of anti-violence policy. This means that every procedure, institution, and cultural practice must be assessed by whether it protects the person's dignity in real life. An axiological approach makes it possible to see gender-based violence not as an isolated event but as a crisis of values. Overcoming it requires not only punishment of offenders, but the renewal of moral perception: the ability to recognize the other person as valuable, inviolable, and free.

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