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Health of single women:
Sociological comparison of
sexual, social, and
psychological-medical needs
between Iranian and Spanish
women

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DOCTORAL THESIS

**HEALTH OF SINGLE WOMEN:
SOCIOLOGICAL COMPARISON
OF SEXUAL, SOCIAL, AND
PSYCHOLOGICAL-MEDICAL
NEEDS BETWEEN IRANIAN AND
SPANISH WOMEN**

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ABSTRACT

Toward the end of the last century, the phenomenon of globalization caused significant changes in social and cultural norms throughout the world in relationship to women and from an epistemic point of view of women studies and scientific women's knowledge. Among others, this phenomenon appeared to result in an increase in the proportion of single women. Although single women all over the world have from a very general broad point of view the same needs, society's approach to women's issues, as well as religion and culture, can affect these needs. These may vary specifically depending on individual circumstances, social norms, socioeconomic status, personal goals, values, political structure, and legislation. The main purpose of this study was sociological comparison of differences in social, sexual, psychological, and physical health needs of single never-married women in two countries (Iran and Spain). This study had two phases (Qualitative and quantitative). In the qualitative phases, we used conventional content analysis. For this purpose, we interviewed with 12 never-married women (six from Iran and six from Spain). The interviews were semi-structured. In the quantitative phase, we carried out a cross-sectional study using a questionnaire that was developed starting from the data obtained in the research group. For developing the questionnaire, we used the results of the qualitative phase of investigated Spanish women and a literature review. We applied the questionnaire to Spanish women. For data management in the qualitative phase, we used MAXQDA-10. For data analyzing in the quantitative phase, we used SPSS. In the quantitative phase, we extracted 367 codes, 15 subcategories, and four categories from interviews with Iranian women and also 345 codes, 15 subcategories, and four categories from the realized interviews with Spanish women in Galicia. For Iranian women, the results of qualitative phase was analyzed in four categories: 1. Social Needs (subcategories included: stigma of being single, stereotype thinking of people, including gender, failure to provide reproductive health services, need to set up partner-finding centers for singles, need for skills to live alone, need for financial support), 2. Psychological Needs (subcategories included: lack of emotional support, insecurity, more opportunity for life, acceptance of singleness, motherhood), 3. Sexual Needs (subcategories included: concern of meeting sexual needs, forced to ignore sexual needs), 4. Medical-biophysical Needs (subcategories included: fear of emerging disease, fear of disability without a supporter) in a broad sense. The results of qualitative phase for Spanish women was analyzed also in four categories: 1. Social Needs (subcategories included: gender equality of all people in the society, parent's expectations, need stable life, economic problems, patriarchal society, stereotype view), 2. Psychological Needs (subcategories included: motherhood, need to have partner, superiority of loneliness, independence, worries), 3. Sexual Needs (subcategories included: concerns and sexual needs), 4. Medical-biophysical Needs (subcategories included: fear of dependency in the future, keeping body healthy) in a broad sense. In the quantitative phase, we used Chi-Square test. There was not correlation between level of education and the agreed-upon responses in the questionnaire and there was not correlation between job position and the agreed-upon responses in the questionnaire. To sum it up, this study aimed to investigate the different epistemologically relevant dimensions of women's singleness in different societies from a view of women's and gender knowledge. In general, evidence indicated that never-married women in Spain lived in the better legal and social situation than Iranian never-married women and they were happier than Iranian counterpoises. On the other hand, Spanish women suffer however also from the patriarchal androcentric context of society and stigmatized view about their singleness. Understanding

more about this social-individual issue would be important from a women's and gender perspective. In this sense, the result of the present research will be a light for the people responsible for social policies and their administration to modify the rules by implementing strategies, actions, and social policies to achieve possible solutions and achieve greater empowerment and greater equality of women, rooted in a feminist epistemology and knowledge of women. All of this is especially important from an educational and human socialization perspective.

KEY WORDS

Women and Gender Research, Single Never-Married Women, Social Needs, Sexual Needs, Psychological Needs, Medical-biophysical Needs, Culture and Society

RESUMEN

A finales del siglo pasado, el fenómeno de la globalización provocó cambios significativos en las normas sociales y culturales en el mundo referente a las mujeres y desde el punto de vista epistémico de los estudios y el conocimiento científico de las mujeres. Entre otras cosas, este fenómeno pareció dar lugar a un aumento de la proporción de mujeres solteras. Aunque las mujeres solteras en todo el mundo tienen desde el punto de vista general amplio las mismas necesidades, la visión que la sociedad tiene de las mujeres, especialmente la religión y la cultura, puede afectar estas necesidades. Éstas pueden variar específicamente dependiendo de las circunstancias individuales, normas sociales, nivel socioeconómico, metas personales, valores, estructura política y legislación. El principal objetivo de la presente investigación es la comparación sociológica de las diferencias en las necesidades de salud social, sexual, psicológica y física de mujeres solteras nunca casadas en dos países (Irán y España). Este estudio tuvo dos fases (cualitativa y cuantitativa). En la fase cualitativa se utilizó el análisis de contenido convencional. Para ello, entrevistamos a 12 mujeres solteras (seis de Irán y seis de España). Las entrevistas han sido en profundidad y semiestructuradas. En la fase cuantitativa, realizamos un estudio utilizando un cuestionario desarrollado a partir de los datos obtenidos en el grupo de discusión de la investigación. Para elaborar el cuestionario se utilizaron los resultados de la fase cualitativa de las mujeres españolas investigadas y una revisión bibliográfica. Aplicamos el cuestionario a mujeres españolas. Para la gestión de los datos en la fase cualitativa utilizamos MAXQDA-10. Para el análisis de los datos en la fase cuantitativa utilizamos SPSS. En la fase cuantitativa extrajimos 367 códigos, 15 subcategorías y cuatro categorías de las entrevistas a mujeres iraníes y también 345 códigos, 15 subcategorías y cuatro categorías de las entrevistas realizadas a mujeres españolas de Galicia. Para las mujeres iraníes, los resultados de la fase cualitativa se analizaron en cuatro categorías: 1. Necesidades sociales (las subcategorías incluyen: estigma de ser soltera, estereotipos de pensamiento de las personas, inclusive de género, falta de prestación de servicios de salud reproductiva, necesidad de establecer centros de búsqueda de parejas para mujeres solteras, necesidad de habilidades para vivir sola, necesidad de apoyo financiero), 2. Necesidades psicológicas (subcategorías incluidas: falta de apoyo emocional, inseguridad, más oportunidades de vida, aceptación de la soltería, maternidad), 3. Necesidades sexuales (subcategorías incluidas: preocupación por satisfacer las necesidades sexuales, obligación a ignorar las necesidades sexuales), 4. Necesidades médico-biofísicas (subcategorías incluidas: miedo a enfermedades emergentes, miedo a sufrir una discapacidad sin apoyo) en un sentido amplio. Los resultados de la fase cualitativa de las mujeres españolas se analizaron también en cuatro categorías: 1. Necesidades sociales (subcategorías incluidas: igualdad de género de todas las personas en la sociedad, expectativas de los padres, necesidad de una vida estable, problemas económicos, sociedad patriarcal, visión estereotipada), 2. Necesidades psicológicas (subcategorías incluidas: maternidad, necesidad de tener pareja, superioridad del estado de soltería, independencia, preocupaciones), 3. Necesidades sexuales (subcategorías incluidas: preocupaciones y necesidades sexuales), 4. Necesidades médico-biofísicas (subcategorías incluidas: miedo a la dependencia en el futuro, mantener el cuerpo sano en un sentido amplio). En la fase cuantitativa se utilizó la prueba de Chi-cuadrado. No hubo correlación entre el nivel de educación y las respuestas obtenidas en el cuestionario y no hubo correlación entre el trabajo y las respuestas obtenidas en el cuestionario. En suma, este estudio tenía por objeto investigar las diferentes dimensiones epistemológicamente relevantes de la soltería de las mujeres en diferentes sociedades desde el punto de vista epistémico del conocimiento de las mujeres y de género. De forma global, se evidenció que las mujeres solteras en España viven en una mejor situación legal y social que las mujeres solteras iraníes y que son más felices que

las mujeres iraníes. Por otro lado, sin embargo, las mujeres españolas también sufren el contexto patriarcal androcéntrico de la sociedad y la visión estigmatizada de su soltería. Comprender más sobre esta cuestión social-individual es importante desde la perspectiva epistémica del conocimiento de las mujeres y de género. En este sentido, el resultado de la presente investigación arroja luz sobre la cuestión para que las y los responsables de las políticas sociales y de su administración puedan modificar las normativas implementando estrategias, acciones y políticas sociales con el fin de lograr posibles soluciones y conseguir un mayor empoderamiento y una mayor igualdad de las mujeres, basado en una epistemología feminista y del conocimiento de las mujeres. Todo ello es especialmente importante desde una perspectiva educativa y de socialización humana.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Investigaciones de las Mujeres y de Género, Mujeres solteras nunca casadas, Necesidades Sociales, Necesidades Sexuales, Necesidades Psicológicas, Necesidades médico-biofísicas, Cultura y Sociedad

RESUMO EN GALEGO

Introdución

A globalización e a industrialización a principios do século XX alteraron significativamente os estándares sociais e culturais en todo o mundo. A porcentaxe de mulleres solteiras que non están casadas parece aumentar como consecuencia destes fenómenos. Esta cuestión é importante desde o punto de vista epistemolóxico dos estudos e do coñecemento das mulleres. As principais razóns da soidade entre as mulleres solteiras inclúen cambios estruturais no contexto da modernidade, da urbanización, da industrialización, os cambios de valores e crenzas, a aceptación da singularidade nas diferentes sociedades e relixións, o individualismo e o acceso aos dereitos e servizos de saúde reprodutiva. Pero o motivo máis importante do aumento das mulleres solteiras está relacionado coa emancipación das mulleres, as reivindicacións da súa liberación, que se iniciaron no mundo occidental co movemento feminista e as vindicacións feministas históricas de grandes científicas e pensadoras ao longo da historia desde a idade media, até a incorporación do sexo feminino ao ensino universitario (sobre todo a principios do século XX e especialmente a partir da Primeira e a Segunda Guerra Mundial).

Aínda que as mulleres de todo o mundo teñen as mesmas necesidades desde un punto moxer, o enfoque da sociedade sobre os seus problemas, así como a relixión e a cultura, explican súa configuración concreta e poden modificalas. Os movementos de mulleres modernos que se tiveron lugar especialmente a partir de 1996 nas sociedades occidentais cambiaron as estruturas de países como España e deron lugar a numerosas liberdades. Nesta nova realidade, a soidade é coñecida como unha identidade con valor propio. Nas sociedades orientais como Irán, hai moitas regras que manteñen ás mulleres nos papeis tradicionais. O interesante é que aínda que a maioría das normas están escritas segundo o pensamento islámico e limitan os roles a ser esposa e nai, xa hai moitas mulleres que alcanzan un alto nivel de educación e non queren casar.

Dado que apenas existen investigación sobre as mulleres solteiras e non existe ningunha investigación que compare as necesidades e preocupacións das mulleres adultas solteiras en diferentes sociedades, de forma particular entre Iran e España, este estudo procurou comparar as súas necesidades de saúde sexual, social, psicolóxica e física. Comprender mellor esta cuestión con implicacións sociais e individuais é singularmente importante dende o punto de vista dos estudos das mulleres e de xénero, tendo un especial interese epistemolóxico con vistas a un maior empoderamento e unha maior igualdade das mulleres, así como a consecución de posibles solucións por parte da sociedade. Neste sentido, os obxectivos do estudo son os seguintes:

1. Análise dos aspectos epistemolóxicos e teóricos dos estudos das mulleres e xénero dende o punto de vista das diferentes necesidades sociais, psicolóxicas, sexuais e físico-médicas das mulleres solteiras.
2. Comparación das necesidades sociais das mulleres solteiras iranianas e españolas.
3. Comparación das necesidades sexuais das mulleres solteiras iranianas e españolas.
4. Comparación das necesidades psicolóxicas das solteiras iranianas e españolas.
5. Comparación das Necesidades médico-biofísicas de mulleres solteiras iranianas e españolas.

Metodoloxía

Esta investigación contou con dúas fases: cualitativa e cuantitativa. Na fase cualitativa, utilizamos a análise de contido convencional e entrevistas semiestruturadas. Para iso, participaron no estudo doce mulleres solteiras (seis de Irán e seis de España) de entre 38 e 57 anos. Os participantes nunca estiveran casados, nin formal nin relixiosamente. Elixíronse mediante escolla intencional e bola de neve para crear a máxima variedade en idade, nivel educativo e ocupación. Os participantes eran escollidas se non declaraban ter un trastorno mental. Foron seleccionados de Irán e España (Galicia), segundo orixes culturais diversas. Para obter unha visión ampla do fenómeno, a investigadora realizou entrevistas presenciais semiestruturadas e en diferentes momentos e lugares utilizando preguntas orientadoras como "Cal é a túa opinión sobre a situación das mulleres?", "Que opinión tes sobre as mulleres solteiras?", "Cal é a túa situación e as túas necesidades como muller solteira?", e "Na túa opinión, cales son as diferenzas entre as mulleres solteiras e os homes?". A investigadora usou preguntas para profundar mais durante a entrevista, como, por exemplo, "Podes explicar isto con máis detalle?" ou "podes poñer un exemplo?" Cada entrevista durou entre 45 e 60 minutos.

A obtención dos datos continuou ata a saturación dos datos. As entrevistas foron realizadas de forma persoal e en castelán, e todas foron gravadas. Utilizouse o software MAXQDA-10 para a xestión de datos. Nesta parte, cada entrevista foi transcrita e analizada directamente despois da entrevista, isto é, no día do encontro ou o día seguinte da gravación. Despois da transcripción completa, leuse o texto liña por liña, identificándose as unidades semánticas e recuperando os códigos. Finalmente, desenvolvéronse subcategorías e categorías.

Na fase cuantitativa, realizamos un estudo transversal mediante un cuestionario elaborado polo grupo de investigación. Para elaborar o cuestionario utilizáronse os resultados da fase cualitativa e unha ampla revisión da literatura. Nun primeiro momento, o cuestionario tiña 75 preguntas; nas reunións coa supervisora combináronse algunhas preguntas e elimináronse preguntas similares, polo que ao final obtivemos un cuestionario con 33 preguntas. Este cuestionario contiña sete categorías e 33 afirmacións. A primeira categoría foi "Asuntos sociais", que contiña tres afirmacións: 1. Non participo en cerimonia e eventos preocupado polo que din e pensan os demais; 2. Moléstame a visión patriarcal da sociedade; 3. Non me gusta que me pregunten sobre a miña situación de relación. A segunda categoría foi "Necesidades psicolóxicas", con 14 afirmacións, entre elas: 1. Creo que estaría máis completa e me sentiría máis realizada vivindo nun matrimonio ou nunha parella estable; 2. Debido á soidade, mantéñome ocupado cos demais; 3. Casaríame para saír da soidade; 4. Quero ter a quen querer e a quen me queira; 5. Na miña vellez non haberá ninguén que coide de min e podo ser unha carga para os demais; 6. Boto de menos a vida de casada e prometida; 7. Sempre penso no meu pasado; 8. Síntome máis soa a medida que envellezo; 9. A medida que pasa o tempo preocúpame pasar a menopausa sen ser nai; 10. Espero casar ou estar nunha relación estable no futuro; 11. Quedei máis soa despois de romper co meu mozo; 12. A miña vida volveuse monótona; 13. Necesito ter unha vida estable (emocional e financeira); 14. Teño pensado vivir cos meus amigos para superar a soidade no futuro. A terceira categoría foi "Aceptación da soltaría", con cinco afirmacións: 1. Síntome feliz e alegre; 2. Vivo cómodo porque non teño as preocupacións e problemas das persoas casadas e das que viven nunha relación estable; 3. Gozo da miña vida solteira porque teño familia e amigos; 4. Co paso do tempo, fun afeitada a vivir como muller solteira; 5. Refuxieime no meu traballo e na miña educación na miña vida. A cuarta categoría foi "Problemas sexuais", con catro afirmacións: 1. Síntome mal despois de masturbarme; 2. Póñoome nervioso por non poder satisfacer as miñas necesidades sexuais; 3. Preocúpame ter relacións sexuais; 4. A medida que pasa o tempo, é

fácil controlar as miñas necesidades sexuais. A quinta categoría foi “Necesidades biomédicas”, con tres afirmacións: 1. Sempre me gustaría ser nova e fermosa; 2. Coido a miña saúde física porque non quero ser muller enferma e dependente no futuro; 3. É fácil para min acudir a un médico para tratar unha enfermidade xinecolóxica. A sexta categoría foi “Cuestións económicas”, con dúas afirmacións: 1. Necesito axuda social para poder vivir; 2. Teño preocupacións económicas e financeiras. A sétima categoría foi “Motivos de soidade”, con dúas afirmacións: 1. Non puiden casar nin ter parella porque non atopei o meu amor; 2. Non estou casada e en parella estable porque teño un nivel de estudos e traballo máis alto que a maioría dos homes. Nesta fase participaron 100 mulleres españolas (galegas) maiores de 30 anos que nunca casaron. O noso cuestionario foi convertido nun formulario en liña e enviado por WhatsApp, Instagram ou correo electrónico a mulleres solteiras maiores de 30 anos, pedíndolles que o enchesen e o enviasen a outras mulleres que coñecesen. Nesta fase, os datos foron analizados mediante probas estatísticas descritivas e inferenciais como a media (desviación estándar) e a frecuencia (porcentaxe) utilizando o software SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) versión 21. As probas estatísticas inferenciais foron o Chi-Square. Os valores de p inferiores a 0,05 consideráronse significativos.

Resultados

Na fase cualitativa preséntanse os resultados para acadar o obxectivo xeral da investigación, "comparación sociolóxica de necesidades sexuais, sociais, psicolóxicas e biomédicas entre mulleres solteiras iranianas e españolas", baseada no método convencional de análise de contido.

En xeral, extraemos 367 códigos, 15 subcategorías e catro categorías das entrevistas con mulleres participantes iranianas e 345 códigos, 15 subcategorías e catro categorías das entrevistas con mulleres participantes galegas de España. Para as mulleres iranianas, os resultados da fase cualitativa resumíronse en catro categorías: 1. Necesidades sociais (subcategorías incluídas: estigma de ser solteira, estereotipos de pensamento das persoas, incluíndo de xénero, falta de prestación de servizos de saúde reprodutiva, necesidade de establecer centros de busca de parellas para mulleres solteiras, necesidade de habilidades para vivir sos, necesidade de apoio económico), 2. Necesidades psicolóxicas (subcategorías incluídas: falta de apoio emocional, inseguridade, máis oportunidades de vida, aceptación da soltaría, maternidade), 3. Necesidades sexuais (subcategorías incluídas: preocupación por satisfacer as necesidades sexuais, obrigación a ignorar as necesidades sexuais), 4. Necesidades médico-biofísicas (subcategorías incluídas: medo á enfermidade emerxente, medo á discapacidade sen apoio) en un sentido amplío. Os resultados da fase cualitativa das mulleres españolas resumíronse tamén en catro categorías: 1. Necesidades sociais (subcategorías incluídas: igualdade de xénero de todas as persoas na sociedade, expectativas dos pais, necesidade de vida estable, problemas económicos, sociedade patriarcal, visión estereotipada), 2. Necesidades psicolóxicas (subcategorías incluídas: maternidade, necesidade de ter parella, superioridade do estado da soltaría, independencia, preocupacións), 3. Necesidades Sexuais (subcategorías incluídas: preocupacións e necesidades sexuais), 4. Necesidades médico-biofísicas (subcategorías incluídas: medo á dependencia no futuro, manter o corpo saudable) en un sentido médico amplío.

Na fase cuantitativa do estudo, a idade máxima dos participantes foi de 58 anos e a mínima de 30 anos. A idade media (desviación estándar) dos participantes foi de 40,7 (6,7). A maioría dos participantes (64%) vivían en cidades pequenas, o 84% tiñan estudos universitarios, a maioría (48%) tiñan emprego e tiñan ingresos medios (56%) e a maioría (81%) vivían sos. Utilizamos o test Chi-Square de Pearson para avaliar a correlación entre o nivel de estudos e

as respostas acordadas ás preguntas do cuestionario. Houbo diferenzas significativas entre as preguntas 12, 30 e educación, que foron 0,048 e 0,007, respectivamente, pero a correlación entre estas preguntas e o nivel educativo foi feble (0,040 e 0,193, respectivamente). Tamén utilizamos o test Chi-Square de Pearson para medir a correlación entre o posto de traballo e as respostas acordadas ás preguntas do cuestionario. Existen diferenzas significativas entre as preguntas 4, 6, 14, 15, 24, 30, 31, 32 e o posto de traballo (0,001, 0,002, 0,003, 0,000, 0,001, 0,000, 0,000, 0,0043, respectivamente). A correlación entre as preguntas 4, 6, 14, 15, 24 e 32 e o posto de traballo foi feble (0,201, 0,224, 0,303, 0,207, 0,261 e 0,229, respectivamente). Se encontrou unha correlación moderada entre as afirmacións 30 e 31 e o posto de traballo (0,692 e 0,461, respectivamente).

Conclusiones

Esta investigación comezou cunha discusión sobre o concepto moderno de ciencia e a súa crítica, desde posicións epistemolóxicas da teoría crítica, como é o caso da visión dos estudos feministas, das mulleres e de xénero. Existe unha importante discusión sobre este problema epistemolóxico dende a moito tempo nos ámbitos filosófico-sociolóxico-social e social que comeza coa discusión hermenéutica, crítico-hermenéutica e fenomenolóxica nas ciencias sociais, que pon no seu centro de debate a cuestión da neutralidade axiolóxica da ciencia moderna.

O obxecto principal do estudo foi a comparación de mulleres solteiras, nunca casadas, españolas e iranianas dende a perspectiva das súas diferentes necesidades sociais, psicolóxicas, sexuais e médico-físicas partindo dunha óptica epistemolóxica do coñecemento das mulleres e de xénero. Ao investigar as dimensións epistemolóxicas da soidade, a investigación buscou comprender a situación das mulleres investigadas e os mecanismos subxacentes que impulsan a construción de crenzas e actitudes cara ás mulleres solteiras nas diferentes sociedades. As mulleres solteiras, como tamén as casadas, teñen necesidades e preocupacións; non obstante, o importante é que aínda que todas as mulleres solteiras do mundo teñen de unha visión moito xeral as mesmas necesidades, as respostas a estas necesidades e as súas experiencias varían dependendo das circunstancias sociais, culturais e individuais, isto é, varían segundo as normas sociais, do estatus socioeconómico, dos obxectivos persoais, das crenzas relixiosas, das tradicións, dos valores, contextos culturais, estrutura política e lexislación governamental.

As normas sociais son dinámicas e suxeitas a cambios co paso do tempo, influenciadas por factores como a globalización, a urbanización e a educación. As normas sociais en torno ao matrimonio e as estruturas familiares fixéronse máis diversas. Ademais, os factores culturais e relixiosos adoitan desempeñar un papel importante na configuración das actitudes cara á soltaría. En moitas culturas occidentais, xeralmente hai unha maior aceptación da soltaría. As mulleres solteiras adoitan ter a liberdade de buscar educación, carreira e intereses persoais. Nos países de Oriente Medio, as actitudes culturais cara ás mulleres solteiras se ven especialmente influenciadas polas crenzas relixiosas e os valores tradicionais. As experiencias das mulleres solteiras en los diferentes contextos socio-relixiosos tamén poden variar significativamente, xa que as crenzas e prácticas relixiosas inflúen nas normas e expectativas sociais. No cristianismo tradicional (a relixión da maioría dos españois), o matrimonio foi moi valorado, pero as actitudes e conceptos de parella varían. As sociedades islámicas tradicionais como Irán adoitan poñer un gran énfase na familia tradicional e o matrimonio. Por iso, comparar as experiencias das mulleres solteiras en Irán e España pasa por considerar os múltiples factores culturais, sociais e legais que configuran as súas vidas.

Desde o punto de vista social, aínda que as mulleres solteiras de ambos países mencionaron preocupacións similares como opinións estereotipadas en función do xénero e problemas económicos, o punto decisivo do estudo foron as diferenzas culturais e xurídicas entre ambos os dous países. España ten marcos legais máis progresistas. Aínda que as mulleres en España teñen igualdade legal, os participantes españois afirmaron que a desigualdade provén da visión patriarcal da sociedade. Isto é moi importante dende o punto de vista epistemolóxico do coñecemento das mulleres e dos estudos de xénero. A pesar dos cambios lexislativos en materia de igualdade das mulleres e aínda que existen moitas normativas que benefician ás mulleres nos países occidentais para conseguir a súa igualdade, e así tamén acontece na España, as mulleres confirmaron en boa medida a percepción da existencia de desigualdade e estigmatización nas relacións cos homes ou homes solteiros. Aínda que en España houbo moitos intentos desde os dereitos das mulleres e por considerar a soltaría como unha opción de identidade, as solteiras teñen moitos problemas, sobre todo dende a perspectiva tradicional da sociedade que existe neste momento. Os datos das mulleres españolas solteiras non casadas ou con parella estable insisten na necesidade de cambiar a construción social e a visión tradicional das persoas. Esta cuestión foi silenciada nas declaracións das mulleres iranianas. De feito, as mulleres iranianas non vían o comportamento patriarcal da sociedade; quizais a razón se deba ás leis de Irán que non recoñecen os dereitos para as mulleres solteiras, elas teñen que loitar polos seus dereitos máis básicos, como vivir de forma independente e facerse exames xinecolóxicos. Polo tanto, loitan por conseguir os seus dereitos básicos e non teñen a oportunidade de berrar contra a cultura patriarcal. De feito, trátase dunha internalización dos estereotipos sociais de xénero por parte dos individuos sobre si mesmos e as súas situacións específicas. Parece que nas sociedades profundamente patriarcais, as mulleres son moitas veces menos criticadas por aceptar a sociedade patriarcal e seguir comportamentos tradicionais.

Por outra banda, nunha sociedade conservadora onde as familias o deciden todo, as mulleres iranianas enfróntanse ás expectativas dos seus pais relacionadas co matrimonio e as normas sociais. Consideran o matrimonio como unha forma de acabar con esta situación, e tamén piden centros de procura de marido. Aínda que a familia segue sendo importante en España, parece que moitas veces existe máis autonomía nas decisións persoais. As mulleres solteiras en España poden experimentar un maior grao de independencia na configuración das súas vidas e na toma de decisións persoais.

En termos psicolóxicos, as mulleres dos dous países mostraban as mesmas necesidades xerais, como a necesidade de ter unha parella estable (marido para as mulleres iranianas e noivo ou marido para as españolas) e a maternidade. Ambos grupos de mulleres mencionaron os beneficios da soltaría, como pasar todo o tempo soas, a independencia e non ter que ter a responsabilidade da vida matrimonial, o que amosa un importante grao de empoderamento das mulleres de ambos países. Porén, a felicidade e satisfacción das mulleres españolas era superior á das iranianas. Nunha sociedade na que ser muller se considera un déficit e ser muller significa ser muller e nai, as mulleres iranianas que se atopan afastadas das normas da sociedade viven a súa situación con dor. En cambio, vivir en familia quitaríalles oportunidades de independencia e de gozar das oportunidades da vida solitaria. De feito, mentres a soltaría, é un estilo de vida moderno para as mulleres españolas, as iranianas vense obrigadas a aceptar este modo de vida.

As mulleres iranianas expresaron preocupacións como o medo a ser violadas, a preocupación pola saúde da familia e posibles problemas mentais no futuro, así como sentimentos de culpa e remordementos por non seguir as ordes de Deus en materia de matrimonio e de familia.

Desde o punto de vista sexual, aínda que as necesidades de todas as mulleres eran as mesmas, o contexto social e as crenzas relixiosas influíron na resposta do mesmo xeito. As mulleres e solteiras iranianas sufrían por súas necesidades sexuais. Aínda que sentiron a necesidade, non puideron responder a ela. No Islam, ter calquera tipo de sexo fóra do matrimonio considérase un pecado grave que debería levar a un castigo. A situación legal iranianana está influenciada pola lei islámica. Aínda que a maior preocupación das mulleres españolas era o seu medo ao embarazo ou a ter relacións con persoas sen educación, para as mulleres iranianas ter relacións sexuais era unha gran preocupación. Esta cuestión pódese considerar desde a perspectiva da violencia contra as mulleres; as mulleres deben descoidar as súas necesidades sexuais porque teñen que manter o himen intacto só para os seus maridos, e no caso de non poder casar, nunca teñen dereito a satisfacer as súas necesidades sexuais.

Ademais, as mulleres solteiras de ambos países queren manter a súa saúde física, especialmente na vellez. Están facendo moitas cousas para manter o seu corpo san, como deixar de beber alcohol ou fumar. Dado que fumar é un tabú para as mulleres en Irán e o consumo de alcohol é ilegal, as mulleres iranianas teñen un estilo de vida máis saudable. Non obstante, as mulleres iranianas gastan moito tempo e diñeiro nos salóns de beleza para parecer máis atractivas e máis novas, mentres que a aparencia non é un desafío para as mulleres españolas.

Polo tanto, os resultados do presente estudo poden axudar a comprender mellor a situación específica das mulleres solteiras. En xeral, as experiencias das mulleres solteiras en Irán e España están influenciadas por unha combinación de factores culturais, legais e sociais. Ata o momento, as investigacións centráronse no tema das mulleres solteiras de forma esencial nun contexto especial cun enfoque maioritariamente cualitativo, pero este estudo foi o primeiro en comparar mulleres adultas solteiras e nunca casadas en dous contextos socioculturais diferentes e avaliou o aspecto das diferencias culturais, relixiosas e legislativas sobre as necesidades e preocupacións das mulleres solteiras. É particularmente importante comprender esta cuestión social-individual desde a perspectiva do coñecemento das mulleres e de xénero. Ao aplicar estratexias para aumentar o empoderamento e a igualdade das mulleres, así como orientar a reacción da sociedade para dar resolucións a este fenómeno da situación das mulleres solteiras desde unha óptica da epistemoloxía feminista e dos estudos das mulleres e de xénero, é posible desafiar os estigmas sociais aos que se enfrontan as mulleres solteiras. En concreto, sería posible así promover a emancipación a través da educación, fomentar o apoio das comunidades e avogar por cambios en las políticas públicas para que promovan a equidade de xénero e a inclusión. Estes esforzos teñen como obxectivo crear unha sociedade máis equitativa na que as mulleres solteiras sexan valoradas, respectadas e empoderadas para vivir unha vida plena sen discriminación. Mais aló deste aspecto, este estudo pode albiscar o grupo das mulleres solteiras como colectivo con necesidades e preocupacións especiais que a maioría das veces son desatendidas en todas as sociedades, xa que as mulleres solteiras non só loitan co problema relacionado coa súa condición de xénero, senón que tamén padecen as discriminacións que proveñen das perspectivas sociais e culturais referente a súa situación de soltaría.

Neste sentido, o resultado do presente estudo baseado na epistemoloxía feminista e do coñecemento das mulleres e procedente das fases cualitativas e cuantitativas, pode arrojar luz para que as e os responsables das políticas públicas sociais e súa administración poidan modificar as normativas implementando estratexias, cambios legislativos (especialmente nos países musulmáns orientais), accións e políticas sociais para lograr solucións e un empoderamento, así como unha maior igualdade das mulleres. Todo elo é especialmente relevante dende unha perspectiva educativa e de socialización e formación humana.

PALABRAS CHAVE

Investigacións das Mulleres e de Xénero, Mulleres Solteiras nunca casadas, Necesidades Sociais, Necesidades Sexuais, Necesidades Psicolóxicas, Necesidades médico-biofísicas, Cultura e Sociedade

ACRONYMS

OEDC	-----	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
UN	-----	United Nation
AIDWA	-----	All India Democratic Women's Association
DSD	-----	Disorders of Sex Development
CAIS	-----	Complete Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome
WHO	-----	World Health Organization
MAXQDA	-----	Max weber Qualitative Data Analysis
WEF	-----	World Economic Forum
SDT	-----	Second Demographic Transition
AHR	-----	Adjusted Hazard Ratio
HPV	-----	Human Papilloma Virus
ICT	-----	Information and Communication Technology
INE	-----	Instituto Nacional de Estadística

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INTRODUCTION

Globalization and industrialization at the turn of the 20th century significantly altered social and cultural standards all across the world from an epistemic viewpoint of women studies and women's knowledge, especially in relationship of female and male gender roles. The percentage of single, never-married women appears to have increased as a result of this phenomena (Traister, 2016). Estimates indicate a rise in the number of unmarried women, all over the world (UN, 2010). Between 1980 and 2010, the proportion of American women over 35 who were never married rose by around 10% (Elliott et al., 2010). According to estimates, by 2025, between 9% and 16% of males and over 10% of women 65 years of age or older will not be married in various nations, including South Africa, Singapore, and Brazil (Hermalin et al., 2007). In Malaysia, the number of never-married women over the age of 30 rose from 3.1% in 1960 to nearly 23.3% in 2000 (Ibrahim & Hassan, 2009). According to the most recent censuses conducted in Iran, the proportion of never-married to married women was 0.005 in 1986; it had increased to 0.024 in 2016; On the other hand, the number of never-married women over 35 in Iran increased by about 8.8% between the years 1986 to 2016 (*Statistics of Women*, 2016). In Spain, the number of never-married women in 2001 were 4831900 while it has increased to 6867000; on the other hand, the ratio of never-married women to married women in 2001 were 0.48 and this ratio increased to 0.69 in 2023 (INE, 2022).

In various populations, the age at which people marry is rising concurrently ("Iran Statistical Yearbook [Internet] Statistical Center of Iran. 2017. Available from: [https://www.amarorgir/english/Iran-Statistical-Yearbook . ,](https://www.amarorgir/english/Iran-Statistical-Yearbook)"). Marriage postponement has been linked to a number of characteristics, including financial chances, self-sufficiency, and social autonomy (Sadeghi et al., 2007). Economic, structural, socio-cultural and individual factors are the most important contributors to explain the increasing rates of singleness. Main reasons for singleness among never-married women include structural changes such as modernity, urbanization, industrialization, changes in values and beliefs, acceptance of singleness in different societies and religions, individualism, advancements to social support, health care service accessibility, and accessing to sexual and reproductive rights, gender imbalance at the age of marriage, trauma of the war¹, a decreased males' tendency to marry, idealism, higher education, preferring to work outside instead of being a mother, being wealthy, acceptance of singleness by different cultural and religious, a decline in the proportion of employed and well-off males, a larger tendency for people in higher socioeconomic classes to stay single, postponing marriage in young ages and inevitable singleness in older ages, decreased stigma of singleness and its acceptance in society as a new lifestyle, strict requirements set on marriage by families², the fear of being divorced due to the rise in divorce rates, preventive attitudes among females (for example, marriage is only for satisfying men's needs, doing household chores, and bearing children), access to reproductive rights and reproductive health services, and intellectual immaturity (T. Band-Winterstein & C. Manchik-Rimon, 2014; Ibrahim & Hassan, 2009; Jones, 2009; Qaderzadeh et al., 2017a; Shahanavaz & Azadeh, 2019; Zarean, 2017). A study that was done on Iran showed that

¹ One example for this issue is the war happened between Iran and Iraq about forty years ago. So, the population ratio between women and men was distributed. Usually, Iranian women prefer to marry with men that are older than them, in the war most of young men had died and after some years the women did not access to enough men that were older than them to marry, and resulting in the quantity of single women would increase.

² This is the case in some Eastern countries such as Iran, Turkey, Arab regions, the marriage supervise by family and the girls have to get their father's permission to marry.

parents' indifference to their children's marriage, parents' negative attitude toward girls' education, and parental illiteracy cause women to overlook marriage courses and postpone women marriage (Nosratinejad et al., 2017). Legal concerns can be effective as well. For instance, according to Iran and some other Islamic constitutions, the right to continue education or employment after marriage is subject to the permission of the husband; thus, continuing education and employment may be a way to be free of marriage constraints. So, women in such societies are harmed by an emotional duality: Despite their desire for marriage, they refuse it due to fear of being deprived of education and job, delaying their marriage, and, in some cases, never get married (Alirezanejad et al., 2013). This issue is very different in Spanish society and legal situation where women can decide about having education and job. Jones contended that two significant elements contributing to a shift in marital practices—basically, a delay in marriage age—were having a job and having a higher degree of education. In Spain the most reason for being single is that women want to be free and liberty. On the other hand, singleness is an accepted life style and single women live happy in recent decades while in 18 and 19 centuries the norm of Spanish families was especially nuclear family, this kind of living was not acceptable (Brands, 1976). Other factors contributing to delayed marriage in Southeast Asian nations include increased divorce rates, discouragements to have children, and marriage (Jones, 2009). In general, the most important reason of increased single women in actual societies related with women's emancipation, it means the vindications of women's their liberation and emancipation, which began in the Western world with the feminist movement and the historical feminist vindications of great scientists and thinkers throughout history since the Middle Ages, and especially, the incorporation of women in university education (especially at the beginning of the century XX and especially since the First and Second World Wars) how we will show further on in chapter 1.1.

Feminist approaches bring a critical and contextual perspective to the study of singleness. It problematizes the categorization of singleness and highlights that singlehood is often constructed as an identity and social category that has a sense of otherness (Hester & Eglin, 1997). Reynolds and Wetherell (2003) argued that the supposed dysfunction and categorization of single women should not be the focus of research, but the spotlight should rather fall on the experiences of single women in order to recognize the dilemmas of self-representation with which women have to deal (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003).

The main objective of women's studies is to establish and maintain "the educational strategy of a breakthrough in consciousness and knowledge" in order to transform people. This is more concretely in the words of Radl Philipp (Philipp, 2012):

“The particular epistemological situation of knowledge of women and gender since the beginning of its constitution is characterized by an epistemic conception that connects social practice with knowledge. It arises from the political movement for women's rights that had as its objective the transformation of the social situation, for which reason knowledge also incorporates by definition this interest in the transformation of social structures that prevent women from having equal living conditions” (Radl-Philipp, 2012, p. 31).

This transformative strategy aims to question established conventions, empower individuals, and build a more equitable community by addressing topics such as gender equality, social justice, and women's liberation. In this sense, analyzing the techniques that single women

employ to deal with the repercussions of singleness is critical from the epistemological standpoint of women's studies, as these tactics contribute to empowering single women.

OBJECTIVES

In this regards the present research analyzed the phenomena of singleness of never-married women under the perspective of the different social, psychological, sexual, and physical-medical needs from a women's and gender studies perspective and in this sense our objectives are:

1. Analysis of epistemological and theoretical aspects of women's and gender studies from the point of view of the different social, psychological, sexual, and physical-medical needs of single women.
2. Comparison of social needs between Iranian and Spanish single women, in certain social empirical contexts.
3. Comparison of sexual needs between Iranian and Spanish single women in certain social empirical contexts.
4. Comparison of psychological needs between Iranian and Spanish single women in certain social empirical contexts.
5. Comparison of medical-biophysical needs between Iranian and Spanish single women in specific social empirical settings.

In this sense, we try in chapter one of theoretical and epistemological part, explain the concept of feminist studies and feminist movement and compare feminist movement in Eastern and Western communities. Our general work hypothesis is that the different aspects of needs, that refers to health in a broad sense of the word, of single women in Iran indicates poorer than the different needs, and so the different aspects of health, of single women in Spain. Theoretical part follows by discussion about concept of identity and different types of identity as well as single women's identity. Also, this chapter argues about various theoretical aspect such as feminist theories and its relationship with singleness. In the following, we try to explain general aspects of singleness in addition to literature reviews in two countries of Iran and Spain.

**PART I:
EPISTEMOLOGICAL
AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION**

1. EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF WOMEN'S, FEMINIST, AND GENDER KNOWLEDGE

1.1. FEMINIST STUDIES AND FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

In this part, we elaborate on the theoretical and epistemological bases, beginning with the elucidation of the connection between women's, feminist, and gender knowledge and the movement for women's rights. The study of feminist epistemology and philosophy of science examines how gender affects our ideas about knowledge, knowers, and inquiry and reasoning processes. It aims to change prevailing ideas and practices of knowledge attribution, acquisition, and justification in order to better serve the interests of women and other marginalized groups (Anderson, 1995). Several feminist epistemologists and scientific philosophers contend that women are disadvantaged by dominant knowledge practices because they are:

- Kept out of research
- Denied epistemic power
- Demeaning "feminine" cognitive patterns
- Developing beliefs about women that portray them as inadequate or important only insofar as they support the interests of men
- Developing theories of social phenomena that obscure the interests and activities of women or gendered power relations
- Creating information that is inapplicable to those in subordinate social positions or that perpetuates gender and other social hierarchies

Feminist epistemologists trace these failures to flawed conceptions of knowledge, knowers, objectivity, and scientific methodology. They offer diverse accounts of how to overcome these failures.

Many individuals refer to feminist epistemology as the study of feminine "ways of knowing". However, it is more correct to define feminist epistemology as the branch of naturalized social epistemology that investigates how gendered norms, gender conceptions, gendered interests, and gender experiences influence knowledge generation. This understanding assists in steering clear of problematic assumptions regarding the cognitive differences of women and permits feminist research across a number of disciplines to provide deep internal critiques of mainstream research (Anderson, 1995).

The basic concept of feminist epistemology is situated knowledge: knowledge that reflects the knower's specific viewpoints. Feminist philosophers investigate how gender positions knowing. They have developed three distinct approaches to this subject: "feminist standpoint theory, feminist postmodernism, and feminist empiricism" which have converged over time. Feminist approaches to the main issues facing the field are also informed by conceptions of how gender situates knowers: establishing the appropriate roles for social and political values in inquiry, critiquing ideals of objectivity, and redefining practices of epistemic virtue and authority. (Anderson, 2020).

There is an important theoretical and epistemological discussion about the conception of women's studies and, especially about the relationship between women's studies and modern science. From an epistemological point of view, Radl Philipp said (Philipp, 2013):

"Women's Studies began, in the strict epistemological sense, still timidly, in the last third of the 20th century, and began to diversify and specialize as scientific

studies in a singular way starting in the 1980s in the European and North American context - certainly still a very short time ago - in the field of Social Sciences, a moment from which its cognitive scope increasingly takes shape and a new denomination appears "gender studies". However, it is a fact that this knowledge that analyzes the singularities and characteristics that affect the behavior and social relationships of women and men, their social, labor, political, economic situation and its multiple social and scientific meaning is not thinkable without the movement of political-social vindications for women's rights" (Radl Philipp, 2013, p. 42-43).

The most important aspect is, definitively, the question of objectivity or axiological neutrality of knowledge. Or in the words of Radl Philipp (Philipp, 2013):

"The development of knowledge of women and gender draws attention once again to the epistemological status of knowledge that separates knowledge from interests" (Radl Philipp, 2013, p. 51).

This means, that women's studies epistemologically reopen the debate on the link between interests and knowledge, which in the case of women's and gender studies indicate an interest in transforming the social situation of women and the political-practical vindication of the women's rights movement.

To put it briefly, women's studies essentially propose an empowerment-focused degree or field of study for feminist knowledge. It has two directions at all times. One is in the fields where critics have occasionally claimed that males are gendered entities as well. For example, men's pro-women's politics, which started to emerge in the 1980s. A corpus of information and theories that define men as men. As a result, in the 1990s, publications about men and masculinity became widely available, establishing men's studies as a specialized field of study.

Second, lots of people believe that gender studies have expanded the area of women's studies beyond its roots in the politics of the women's liberation movement (Haque, 2019).

The feminist movement's objective involves functioning as a counter-narrative against the dominant masculine culture's purportedly patriarchal components. While the waves differ, it is a movement that seeks to question the political framework, authority owners, and cultural ideas or practices.

In an etymological sense, "Femin-" originates from the Latin root word "femina," which means "woman". The suffix "-ism" is derived from the Greek "ismós" and transforms the preceding noun into a verb, signifying an opinion, practice, or worldview. The word was first used in English in 1851, but it simply meant "the state of being feminine". The term "féminisme" was coined in 1837 by French philosopher and utopian socialist Charles Fourier.

"Which explicitly pronounced in favor of an emancipation of women outside the family and bourgeois marriage" (Radl Philipp, 2012, p. 24).

Although the political vindications in a strict sense began with the "Declaration of Rights of Women" by Olympe de Gouges (Mari Gouze) in 1791, Feminism has been a continuous movement in areas of Western society since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Throughout its history, feminism has had four peak points known as waves. Voting and equal political representation, training, the right to property, managerial positions, and marital freedoms were all central to first-wave feminism, which was centered on middle- and upper-class white women (Gamble, 2001). Second-wave feminism aimed to address additional

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social and cultural injustices. Although the first wave of feminism primarily featured middle-class white women, the second wave included women from every socioeconomic class, women with different body color, and women from other developing countries seeking solidarity (Mambrol, 2017). Third-wave feminism kept working on women's economic, social, and cultural inequities in business and at home, as well as renewed lobbying for greater female political and media dominance. Feminists have had to keep a focus on women's reproductive rights, including the right to abortion, in response to political action (Mambrol, 29 October 2017). Fourth-wave feminism investigates the interconnected power systems that have led to the social division of historically excluded populations, in addition to the world associated with them (Mohajan, 2022).

It is crucial to have debates regarding women's studies and the women's rights movement. Women's studies and the women's rights movement are united in their commitment to questioning established hierarchies of power, elevating underrepresented perspectives, and rethinking the methods by which knowledge is produced. They support the ongoing fight for social justice and gender equality by adopting a critical understanding of knowledge and facing the limitations of objectivity and axiological neutrality. Traditional knowledge systems have been created within patriarchal frameworks that prioritize male viewpoints while marginalizing or erasing the experiences of women as well as single women, who have unique experiences and face challenges that are shaped by their marital status and are interested in gender equality. Criticism of objectivity and axiological neutrality in contemporary science emphasizes the necessity of dismantling and analyzing preexisting power systems.

The debates revolve around the question of the status of knowledge and objectivity. According to women's studies academics (Philipp, 1996b, 2010), it is a great complex problem that is related to epistemological interests and the androcentric perspective of modern science. In other words, it is impossible to achieve because researchers will always bring their own viewpoints, prejudices, and values to their work. Women's studies seek to make space for a variety of voices and experiences to be heard and validated by recognizing and challenging these biases.

Next, we will try to specify our argumentation for the feminist movement in different societies with different cultures and religions.

1.2. FEMINIST MOVEMENTS IN WESTERN SOCIETIES

Some authors have classified feminism in the United States, Canada, and a number of Western European nations into three waves: first, second, and third-wave feminism (Humm, 1990; Rebecca, 1992). Other authors indicate that there may be a fourth wave identified, in particular, by contemporary media platforms (Baumgardner, 2011; Phillips & Cree, 2014).

The concept of feminism arose in the 18th century and is described as women's discourse for equality and independence. Feminism, or the women's movement, describes how each has evolved their understanding of feminism over time. The impact of industrialization and ideological changes has been the primary reason for this shift. First-wave feminists make up the feminist movement, which emphasizes gender equality within the framework of gender. The second wave of feminists, often known as liberal feminism, focused on sexuality and biological (Dikici, 2016). The third wave feminists concentrated, in a wide sense, about sexual harassment and position of power.

The historical and classic Seneca Falls Convention for Women's Rights in 1848 marked the start of the American women's movement in a modern political sense. The movement aimed to bring about gender equality through a wide range of social, religious, cultural, and political

reforms, as articulated by the convention's "Declaration of Sentiments". After the Civil War, feminists' resources and energies were fully devoted to the cause of women's suffrage, and the movement began to resemble a single-issue movement. The goal of granting women the ability to vote was to enable them to get the range of rights that were first outlined in 1848. Many women saw the vote as the solution to all of society's problems and the solution to women's place in it because of extravagant forecasts about the power of suffrage. The women's movement broke up and stagnated when the majority of women's lives did not significantly change as a result of the vote. The very contentious "Equal Rights Amendment", proposed in 1922, further strained ties between the various factions of American feminism. The women's movement was fragmented and disjointed by 1930 and would stay that way until the 1960s. However, it had also developed and become a stable element of the political and cultural environment in America, and the main motivation behind the lives of American feminists remained the pursuit of social justice and gender equality (Sweeten, 1994). In 1978, an article that was published by Crystal Eastman in the *Birth Control Review* argued that access to birth control is essential for women to exercise their fundamental right to participate fully in contemporary society. In short, if feminism, aware, brave, and clever, leads the demand, it will be supported by all women's secret desire to control the number of their children, and a suffrage state should make quick work of removing these antiquated laws that impede birth control. Eastman mentioned (Eastman, 1978):

"I don't believe there is one woman within the confines of this state who does not believe in birth control!" (Crystal Eastman, 1978, p.47)

From a wide perspective, because it was not a uniform movement, the feminist movement witnessed a shift in perspective during the 1980s and 1990s, which led to the expression "Grrl Feminism or Riot Grrl Feminism" (Kroløkke & Sørensen, 2006). With the rise of the Riot Grrl feminist punk subculture in Olympia, Washington, in the first decade of the 1990s (Kroløkke, 2000; Wrye, 2009). The goal of this generation of feminists was to reinterpret their perspectives on what it meant to be a feminist. They worked to eradicate conformity, supported independence and variation, and also introduced new feminist theoretical approaches. In Spain, the feminist movement has been outstretched since 1976 (Scanlon, 2022). The circumstances in Spain following over forty years of dictatorship shaped the feminist movement's initiatives. There are numerous vindications, such as a new family structure or the abolition of all laws that discriminate against women. A few major campaigns aimed to abolish the punishment for alleged female adultery, legalize abortion and contraceptives, get the constitution's recognition and affirmation of women's and men's equality, accept a new sexuality model, and ensure that divorce laws do not discriminate against women (Muñoz, 2017).

In 1965–1979, the founding and early development of the "Spanish family planning movement" happened. There were two branches to this movement: the feminist branch and the medical branch. The interests of the two branches were complimentary, notwithstanding their disparate foundations. Between 1976 and 1979, they collaborated on the introduction of contraception and sexual education, the creation and unification of both public and private family planning facilities, and the advancement of a new, more equal patient-physician dynamic. The movement's ultimate success came in 1978, when family planning was included in the "public health care system" in Spain and the sale and advertising of contraception were made lawful (Ortiz-Gómez & Ignaciuk, 2016).

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In general, the “Spanish women's movement” is also multiform and complex and represents many features that clearly place it in the “family” of “European women's movements”, and it is a women's empowerment movement. The movement is still continuing. In 2013, those who have stood up against sexual harassment in colleges led the MeToo University movement in the USA and Spain, following in their footsteps since the 1990s. The movement has made significant strides in academic settings, including legislation isolating gender violence, the requirement for all colleges to have policies in place for handling allegations of sexual harassment or gender violence, and the increasing number of people coming forward to share their stories (Joanpere et al., 2022).

As a result, concentration on the modern world makes it clear that achieving gender equality is a major problem. Women continue to need to advocate for their rights. In the 21st century, gender research has gained especially significant relevance. There are now movements, organizations, faculties, and even institutions dedicated to solving this issue. It should be mentioned that the current world has made the subject of women's political participation particularly pertinent, which has characterized interest in gender history.

There is debate that gender research and gender knowledge have an inherently symbiotic and mutually constitutive relationship, with each area influencing and growing the other. By emphasizing women's experiences and voices, women's studies—which sprang from feminist movements—fundamentally challenge the epistemology of modern science and propose to construct knowledge that recognizes a starting epistemological status for the practical experience of women (Philipp, 2001). Thus, it is especially important to emphasize, how we explain here, (Philipp, 2012) that:

“The particular epistemological situation of knowledge of women and gender since the beginning of its constitution is characterized by an epistemic conception that connects social practice with knowledge. It arises from the political movement for women's rights....” (Radl Philipp, 2012, p.31).

This precision of Radl Philipp explains how this knowledge is an axiologically non-neutral knowledge, committed to the transformation of the social situation of women.

Besides, this knowledge established academic fields and opens the door to a more thorough examination of gender as a category of analysis studying how women have been constructed historically and culturally, it also critically analyzes the power relationships and structural injustices that these constructions have engendered. In an epistemic sense, the later conceptualization of gender knowledge,

“...broadens certainly the epistemic vision of women's studies insisting on a perspective that understands that the conceptualization of the female gender role cannot be understood without the interrelationship with the male gender.....” (Radl Philipp, 2012, p. 28).

So, later and currently, gender studies also include the various and intersectional interpretations of gender identities, expressions, and relationships from an epistemic point of view.

1.3. FEMINIST MOVEMENT IN EASTERN SOCIETIES: IN CHINA AND IRAN

Starting from the context of our research, in this section we want to focus on the special meaning of the feminist movement in the Eastern countries, China and Iran, to illustrate the feminist movements and challenges that happened in these countries, and they still continue while, until now, women could not reach real rights.

Women in China were viewed as fundamentally distinct from men at the turn of the twentieth century (Hershatter, 2007). Following the Chinese Revolution of 1911, feminist thought emerged in China during the course of the twentieth century (Lin, 2006). Some analysts contend that the party's interests are prioritized over the interests of women, and they feel that this close link is detrimental to Chinese feminism (Walter, 2001).

The fight for women's liberation in patriarchal societies aims to pass legislation that ensures women's complete equality with respect to race, sex, property, and marriage. It is gradually necessary to achieve gender equality in politics, the economy, social, and family aspects in order to further eradicate the legacy of the class society of patriarchal women (drowning of babies, corsets, binding of feet, etc.), prejudice, activities, mutilating women's traditional discrimination, and habitual forces on the basis of the development of productive forces.

In the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, women had unleashed a tsunami of their own power before the modernization and changes (1851–1864). On the other hand, the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom had an excessive number of women with lower social status. Eliminating the possibility of being used was not easy. Feminism essentially began when women with greater understanding assumed a leading role in the struggle for women's rights until the fall of the Qing Dynasty. Feminism and advocating for women's freedom were introduced to China. Before the female feminists, there were male feminists in China who were responsible for igniting and advancing the feminist movement (Shen, 2018).

Essential male feminists in China in the nineties and twenties centuries were Liang Qichao, Ma Junwu and Jin Tianhe. Liang Qichao argued for the outlawing of foot binding in 1897 and promoted women's participation in the labor sector, politics, and academia. China had long practiced the foot-binding costume, which involved binding women's feet into incredibly small shoes with elaborate ornamentation to showcase their beauty and social standing (Xu & Bae, 2015). Liang Qichao advocated for the act's repeal due to had concerns about women's health in her role as devoted mothers and wives. In order to help the country achieve greater wealth and prosperity, he also suggested reducing the number of female dependents in families and encouraging women to pursue their rights to study and a career. The feminists Ma Junwu and Jin Tianhe favored women's equality with men as well as their valid and equal rights, including the ability to pursue political office. Jin Tianhe made the important claim that women are the nation's mothers. These opinions, held by male feminists during the early stages of feminism in China, reflected men's conceptions of the perfect woman (Shen, 2018).

The main female feminists in China in the nineties and twenties were Lin Zongsu, He Zhen, Chen Xiefen, and Qiu Jin. Early Chinese female feminists were more concerned with how women should liberate themselves and behave in order to obtain equal rights and autonomy. He Zhen argued that the interests of the country should not be linked to the freedom of women. She identified three motivations for male feminists, including high-quality reproduction, conforming to Western trends, and easing their financial responsibilities. Furthermore, Li Zongsu advocated for women to fight for their civil liberties, which go beyond the ideas of male feminists and include calling for their own rights over men, the Qing Court, and worldwide recognition (Shen, 2018).

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During the Qing Dynasty, there were two aspects to the topic of feminism: the goal of women's emancipation and the sex distinctions between men and women, including the responsibilities of mothers, the duties of women, and societal inequalities between both sexes. Diverse viewpoints were held by feminists: some thought feminism was good for the country, while others connected it to women's personal growth and the advancement of their rights and welfare (Shen, 2018).

Using class struggle theories to address gender quality, the Marxist concept of women and feminism was brought to China in the 1970s and eventually became the fundamental premise of the Chinese feminism movement. More female scholars became familiar with Western feminism in the 1990s, and they published, translated, and conducted research on global feminism, including feminism in China, as part of their efforts to increase public concern and awareness of gender equality challenges (Shen, 2018).

The Iranian Women's Movement is a feminist social movement for accessing their rights. After the Iranian Constitutional Revolution in 1910, the first women's magazine was produced by women, the movement arose in political and social aspects³. The movement persisted until 1933, when Reza Shah Pahlavi's administration disbanded the last women's organization. Following the Iranian Revolution in 1979, it rose once more. The Iranian Women's Movement had successes between 1962 and 1978, including the 1963 White Revolution of Mohammad Reza Shah, which gave women the right to vote. Women were permitted to run for public office. In 1975, the Family Protection Law gave women additional rights, such as less polygamy and increased rights in divorce and custody.

Iranian women have made significant strides in education, science, literature, and the arts during the course of their more than a century-long history of explicit collective activity, as well as modest progress in economic production and sociopolitical engagement. But they haven't been able to achieve equal rights in many domains, especially within the family (custody, marriage, separation, and inheriting). Many Iranian institutions underwent rapid modernization in the Pahlavi dynasty (from the 1930s to the 1970s), notably the justice and public education systems. These institutions also underwent secularization⁴. However, the ancient sharia (Islamic law) continued to be the exclusive basis for individual status, marriage, and family law (Tohidi, 2016).

Following the expansion of Islamism and the creation of the theocratic Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, clerics have gained direct control over many laws and policies in both the public and private spheres, increasing the degree of gender discrimination in favor of men. For instance, women's rights have been curtailed since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, with various restrictions, including the requirement for women to wear headscarves and a dress code for the public. Just 6% of Iranian parliamentarians were female in 2016 (Mohammadi, 2007), whereas the average worldwide was about 15%. Family law and the penal code deteriorated to its pre-1930s and pre-1940s state following the repeal of a few major progressive reforms implemented in the 1960s and 1970s under the auspices of the Family Protection Law (under the second Pahlavi) (Kar, 2008). However, because women objected and because no new legislation was created, the Family Protection Law continued to be used as a guide for matters not specifically covered by sharia, which led to a later reversal of some of the original regressions (Mir-Hosseini, 2002). In summary, women in nearly every area of life lost many rights following the Islamic Republic of Iran's adoption of sharia-based governance. A

³ Sediqeh Dolatabadi (1340-1261) was an Iranian journalist and an activist of the constitutional revolution and the women's movement in Iran. She was one of the first activists of women's rights in Iran and published the magazine "Language of Women" in the issues of the women's rights.

⁴ For example in this time, the first formal and public school for girls be opened

woman is essentially regarded as sub-human under the Islamic Republic's regulations of Hudud (punishments, such as stoning) and Qisas (retaliation, eye for an eye), which are derived from pre-modern tribal civilizations. A female's Diyeh, or blood money or compensation rate, in the event of murder, for example, is worth half that of a male. Certain male body parts, such as his testicles, are valued more than a female person's entire body in circumstances of bodily damage (Tohidi, 2016).

As a result, the Iranian women's movement has stayed mostly rights-oriented, with its primary aim being the legal system, which is riddled with discriminatory laws against any gender, ethnic, or religious group other than Shi'i males (Khorasan, 2010). The desire for changes in legislation and the role of attorneys has grown stronger than ever in practically all women's organizations. One of the women's movement's key slogans has been "change for equal status," with a concentration on legal reforms, civil and political rights, resulting in various actions opposing discriminatory laws, policies, and violent or repressive cultural rituals. Many feminists⁵ have contended that discriminatory regulations and procedures such as marriage between children, unequal inheritance, revengeful laws, stoning, a husband's right to forbid his wife from working, male-biased rights to divorce, custody of children, polygamy, and sighe (short-term marriages, legally permitted for even long-term married men), and forced hijab perpetuate violence, insecurity, and humiliation against women of all walks of life, and should therefore be prohibited (Dehghan, 2015; Ebadi, 1994; Javaheri, 2015; Kar; Khorasani, 2010). Some argue that while other social movements may and do address concerns pertaining to women's economic and working-class experiences alongside those of men, only the women's movement and feminists concentrate on matters specifically linked to gender and sexuality.

Iranian women's rights activists were working to implement changes, especially through the "One Million Signatures Campaign" to end discrimination against women, but until now, they could not do anything because of Islamic laws. On September 16, 2022, with the death of 22-year-old women in Iran by morality police because of her incomplete hijab, people went to the street and wanted to finish the dress code for women; this demonstration that lasted for some months resulted in many deaths, and the government could suppress the demonstration. Regarding the women's rights movement in Iran following 1979, Iranian feminists often divide into two groups. Some people think that women have been more "marginalized" as a result of Islamization. Some argue that Iran has developed a distinct feminist consciousness under the rules of the Sharia, or dynamic, Islamic law. These two points of view have faced criticism (Rostami Povey, 2001).

As we saw at this point, there was also a very important feminist movement in Iran that could also have epistemological implications from the point of view of knowledge of women, but currently this is not the case because the actual situation of women in Iran is not possible to separate from religion. This issue is related to the religion of Iranians, which was Islam many years ago, even before Reza Shah Pahlavi. But the important thing is the interpretation of Islamic thought that can be changed⁶ according to the beneficiaries of a small group of people or government.

1.4. FEMINISM AND SINGLE WOMEN

Just now, at this point, we need to ask how feminism, or the movement for women's rights, and how the issue of single women is approached from the knowledge of women and gender, or the knowledge of women and gender, deals with the problem of single women. In other

⁵ Women such as Sharin Ebadi (Lawyer) and Narges Mohamadi (Journalist)

⁶ For example, in the "Quran", there is no words such as "compulsory black hijab for all women"

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words, we need to clarify what the feminist movement and its connection with the knowledge of women contribute to the explanation and treatment of the theme of single women, specifically of never-married single women.

Even in the early centuries, women continued to be unmarried, although in small numbers. Women's economic dependence on men has decreased as a result of rising rates of labor force participation, expansion in employment options, and increases in educational attainment. The independence model combines a structural and an attitude explanation for why people don't get married. Due to their greater economic dependence, women were historically thought to want marriage more than men, but thanks to greater economic opportunities, they can choose not to get married (Anderson, 1995).

Transforming the family structure is another indisputable reality; this change is one of the key markers of modernization in current societies (Dominguez-Folgueras & Castro-Martin, 2013). The second feminist movement and democratic political structure caused many changes in family formation, very important from the perspective of equality of women and so from the epistemic vision of women's and gender studies. In this period, transition in family and social life, secularization of society framework, increasing high-educated women, increasing women that participated in labor, and sexual freedom were the consequences that changed the family and social life for women (Castro-Martín, 2010). Nowadays, living alone among adults is an essential component of the Second Demographic Transition, which is linked to the younger generation's diminishing preference for family-based housing (Lesthaeghe, 2014).

It can be mentioned that increasing in the number of single people as well as single never-married women (Esteve et al., 2020; UN, 2010) is related to second-wave feminism, changing in individual standards and expectations, changing personal and marital realities, divorce facilitators, increase in the life expectancy, and altering the work contexts are among the major consequences (Lesthaeghe, 2014; Lodge & Umberson, 2012).

Single women in western countries were not the issue of the women's movement, while in some eastern countries, such as India, there are some institutions about single women. For example, in India, there is an association called "The All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA)", the biggest autonomous women's organization in India, created in 1981 from the women's divisions of two of India's communist parties. One significant result is the establishment of seven committees to look into and make recommendations for solutions to the issues that they deem most urgent, such as those affecting "single women". In India, unmarried single women are viewed as sexual prey and are particularly susceptible to harassment and sexual assault. Nevertheless, there is no word in Hinduism that has the same negative, asexual implications as the word spinster in English.

Western civilization has a unique ability to create a special place and respect for women who choose to abstain from sexual and marital responsibilities. In Western society, the word "voluntary" is rarely associated with a spinster, and especially not with respect or great authority. Given these differences in culture, campaigners in the United States would have to actively challenge the unfavorable cultural image of middle-aged single women to make this a feminist problem. Second-wave feminism was the polar opposite. The two most well-known American feminists, Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem, both separated themselves from spinsters with no offering an alternate model for living as a mature, single woman.

Friedan's book "The Feminine Mystique" (Friedan, 1963) advocated for women to have it all: marriage, family life, and a job. Paradoxically, this expression of everything included the disparaging opinions of both the single, professional woman and the full-time housewife. The fullness of life that is now available to women in terms of both love and employment, as it never was before, was something they perceived as being missed in both "half-lives" that they

saw. Steinem demonstrated that a woman could be both beautiful and an activist for women's freedom. Followed in the footsteps of Friedan and Steinem in the line of the theoretical vision of the position of equality feminism, developed and introduced especially by Simone de Beauvoir in 1949, which is its classical representative, the liberal wing of the feminist movement in the United States emphasized the value of employment and work outside the home, allowing women to be self-sufficient and gain independence. This resulted in an increase in the number of never-married and divorced women. A cultural trend influenced by feminism legitimized young women deferring marriage. Though second wave feminism recognized self-supporting women in their thirties who chose to be "single mothers by choice", older, childless single women, as well as teenage and destitute single mothers, were excluded from feminism's welcome. Therefore, it is certainly possible to say that the American women's movement has generated class and age disparities among single women, which is the exact opposite of what happened in India (Trimberger, 2008).

In summary, in this chapter, we analyzed feminist studies and feminist movements and discussed different feminist movements in Western and Eastern countries from a special epistemic point of view. In addition, we evaluated the impact of feminist movements on changing the family structure and increasing single people as well as single, never-married women. It can be concluded that since the first movements, there have been huge social and political changes for the benefit of women and their empowerment, but these challenges are continuing. Also, our interest was in the particular conception of women's studies and what contributes to social and political changes for women through knowledge; theory is related to practice and pursues a critical epistemological interest (Philipp, 1996b, 2010).

In the next chapter, we will discuss the identity formation and identity of single women.

2. IDENTITY, GENDER, CULTURAL, AND RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF WOMEN IDENTITY

2.1. THE CONCEPT OF IDENTITY, GENDER, GENDER IDENTITY, SOCIAL AND PERSONAL IDENTITY

2.1.1. The Concept of Identity

The term “Identity” refers to an individual's mental image of themselves, it indicates a certain similarity to others. Every person may identify with multiple identities, including national, religious, or ethnic identities (Kroger, 2007).

Beyond the commencement of adolescence, the process of identity formation remains an ongoing one. Youth is a time when identity development becomes more and more prominent because it is during this phase that a person develops their own independent values and opinions that are different from those of their parents, background, and assigned gender roles, while still being aware of them.

Identity is a social keyword referring to current society and a central focus of social psychological and sociological theorizing and investigation. With various meanings, this was not a challenge earlier in history; when communities were more stable, identity was assigned rather than selected or accepted. However, in today's world, the identity bears the full weight of the requirement for a sense of who a person is, combined with the often overwhelming pace of change in surrounding social settings shifts in the groups and connections in which people and their identities are ingrained societal frameworks and procedures in which those networks are themselves social cognition and symbolic interaction, two of the current trends in sociological and social psychology provide. The theoretical underpinnings under the approach has gained traction in recent decades, both within sociology and in other areas of study (Howard, 2000). So, we can distinguish three notions of identity: the internalization of self-structure, the social and cultural impact, and collective identity (Owens et al., 2010).

Starting from these significances of identity, gender identity means identity referred to gender the belonging of the subject as a sexual subject like women or men. We want to clear it more in the next section.

But in general, there are some explanatory theories interesting for our context. From a theoretic classical point of view, there is the Freud's psychanalytic theory about gender identity, Parson's social theory, but also the social psychological of Erikson or the interactionist's theories about identity. Especially important are the different approaches of feminist theories to understand gender identity. In this regard, Rita Radl said (Philipp, 1996a):

“... The meaning of gender is complex in the context of human socialization, and is subordinated to an interactive-communicative dynamic, which is clearly delimited by the socio-historical conditions of the cultural environment in which they are inserted” (Radl Philipp, 1996a, p.15)

Women are becoming more assertive about how they desire to describe themselves within the existing societal parameters; the process of self-assertion corresponds with the building of the identity of a woman. The process of forming one's identity is the most significant endeavor any woman can do. Development of female identity is important for women because how they define themselves and what they base their sense of self will

ultimately serve as the foundation for their lives. The experiences of young women highlight the relationship between civilization and female identity formation at each stage of growth, from adolescence to adulthood (Marcelin, 2012).

“A perspective that focuses on gender identities, which is framed in the scientific-social and sociological line, must clearly start from a broad, multidimensional view of identity; first of all, considering the gender role as a cross-sectional entity present in all social roles; in addition to being composed by aspects coming from the people themselves—from their traits of “personal identity,” or in Mead’s words, “I”, on the one hand, from the structural and systemic definitions—features of “social identity” or “Me” in median terminology” (Radl Philipp, 2016, p. 127).

The cross-sectional entity of gender identity is a very important aspect also for our research. Gender identity cannot be separated from the identity of the person, or more clearly (Philipp & Medeiros, 2016),

“... the various aspects of the person’s identity are not separable from their gender identity, this represents, in short, always a “sexuated identity” (Irigaray, 1992)” (Radl Philipp & Santos Medeiros, 2016, p. 127).

Which means identity is always *sexuated identity*.

Numerous academic works and research projects have examined the various facets of women’s identity formation. Ruthellen Josselson (1987) offers an in-depth evaluation of the stages of identity formation that women experience. Josselson delves into the lives of 12 women, first as college students and then as adults dealing with the consequences of their decisions. As a result, she compares and examines the beliefs of these women as college students with their perceptions of their identity years afterward. The author emphasizes the significance of environment and time in shaping women’s identities (Josselson, 1987).

The well-known sociologist Talcott Parsons developed a family theory about family socialization. He held that distinct gender roles play complementary roles in families and society to a great extent, with men functioning as the family’s breadwinners, managers, and leaders and women taking care of the family’s needs for comfort and feeding. They preserve the family’s psychological well-being. This is how the Parsonian classification is known, which, on the flip side, has been commonly believed either implicitly or explicitly in the best-known social theoretical approaches, and which grants the mother an expressive function and the father an instrumental function in the context of the bourgeois nuclear familial system. These functions complement each other, constituting the primary support of modern socializing and educational conditions, although Parsons himself already highlights the existence of a certain degree of reversibility in these functions⁷ (Parsons & Bales, 1955). This is more concretely in the words of Radl Philipp (Philipp, 2003):

“... Are the specific conditions for learning the gender roles of women and men in modern societies? It is no coincidence that modern social theories, those dealing with human socialization, refer to basic differential functions, values, and

⁷ In his later writings, the American author expressly admits the professional function, that is, extra-domestic work for women, but he still fundamentally maintains his model on the different functions of the father and mother in the family structure and for human socialization.

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aspects for male and female genders and their personal identities. Thus is known the Parsonian classification, which, on the other hand, has been implicitly or explicitly widely assumed in the most well-known social theoretical approaches, which grants the mother an expressive role and the father an instrumental role in the context of the bourgeois nuclear family structure. These functions are complemented by forming the primary support of modern socializing and educational conditions, although Parsons himself emphasizes the existence of a certain degree of reversibility in these functions: "The role of the father is, in relation to the other roles, high in power and 'instrumentality' but low in expressiveness. The role of the mother is high in power and 'expressiveness', and therefore low in instrumentality." The aforementioned reversibility, however, is hardly considered in its real dimension when it comes to the duties of the father and mother within the family." (Radl Philipp, 2003, p.191-192)

Parsons' theory has been criticized, especially from feminist and gender perspectives. His theory is comprehended that the separation of gender roles is necessary and universal, and this is the only model that can meet the needs of people in the family and society, has been questioned. Parsons' theory is said to focus more on the positive aspects of the traditional family model. This model is based more on stability, harmony and performance of the modern social structure and ignores change, conflict and dysfunction (Philipp, 1996b). Parsons' theory also tends to reinforce stereotyped male and female behaviors and pays more attention to differences.

Today, more than ever, it is accepted that both sexes can be successful in a range of roles (both at home and at work), women can be independent, strong, logical and committed to work. Men can be emotional, cooperative, caring and nurturing and sensitive to details. However, men and women can learn from each other: men can learn from women to be more sensitive and caring role, and women can learn from men the value of independence, both can learn from each other how to work and interdependence (Bales & Parsons, 1955)

From the general point of view, we differentiate between social identity and personal identity (Goffman, 1963). In the conservative societies like Iran identity is enforced by society and people accept here social roles, especially the sex roles. In a qualitative study that was done in Iran, one of participant mentioned that although in Iran especially in small city women are limited to doing anything by men, this is a wright thing because freedom is not good for women (Qaderzadeh et al., 2017a).

In the following, we will discuss about different identities such as gender identity as well as personal and social identity in general and its relationship with single women.

2.1.2. Gender and Gender Identity

Currently there is a great theoretical and real discussion about means of gender, also in relationship with the significance of sex and gender. According to Radl Philipp (Philipp, 2010):

"Gender behavior - feminine and masculine behavior as a social role - corresponds to a process of social construction and as such points to the characteristics, that is, to the "psychological, social and cultural differences between men and women"...." (Radl Philipp, 2010, p.138).

The mentioned author echoing the idea from Giddens (1994) indicates that gender refers to the cultural meanings assigned to male and female social categories, but also the social and psychological meanings. Gender becomes a fundamental component of people's identities

because they assimilate the social and cultural connotations into their own psyches. Furthermore (Philipp & Medeiros, 2016):

"We understand that the various aspects of the person's identity are not separable from their gender identity, this represents, in short, always a "sexted identity" (Radl Philipp & Santos Medeiros, 2016, p. 127).

This is a very important assumption, identities are all the time sexted identities like showed Radl Philipp & Santos Medeiros, and individuals interpret themselves generally in connection to the culturally feminine and masculine meanings linked to males and females through their gender identities, and they may think and act in accordance with these gendered facets of themselves (Wood & Eagly, 2010; Wood & Eagly, 2012).

Differential use of sex and gender concepts are used into the women's studies field, this terminological differentiation was introduced by Stoller and Money (Philipp, 2010).

Radl Philipp said literally:

Already in the 60s, Robert Stoller and John Money, in the field of medical-psychological therapies, noticed an important differentiation in relation to their patients with sexual identity problems in terms of their sex belonging and their real feelings in relation to this, belonging, that is, the identity self-conception does not have to be that corresponding to the biological-corporal classification of the subject. From this moment on, Money proposes to dissociate the identity of the subject as a person - their gender role - from their sex belonging - their sex role. This author already goes so far as to affirm that gender identity corresponds to a process of social elaboration, while identification based on biological-hormonal differences classifies us as people belonging to one sex or another (Radl Philipp, 2010, p. 137).

Also, with a view of the definition of the concept of sex, Radl Philipp highlighted:

"The concept of sex, even though it represents an ambiguous term, allows for both a biological-deterministic and a more anthropological-cultural one; it refers restrictively to a biological category. In this sense it alludes to the anatomical-physiological variations between men and women. However, there is a clear biological-physiological basis for the differences that certainly remain over time. In the effective behaviors of women and men, apart from the strictly individual aspects, specific cultural and historical social elements also explicitly intervene. It should be noted that, however, there have been many critical voices with this conceptual differentiation" (Radl Philipp, 2010, p. 137-138).

This question about the differentiation of sex and gender seems important for our research context. In this sense, we understand with the mentioned author:

"In sociological terms, the conceptual constructs "Sex-Gender" point to an essential analytical contrast, absolutely important to face the explanation of the social transformation procedure, which is that of a biological-physiological construction versus a sociocultural construction. Gender differences are supported by biological, anatomical and physiological differences. Specifically, they emerge from the participation, experiences and active social experiences of the individuals based on sexual differences, and from a sociological point of view,

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they include the social, cultural and psychological experiences of the people” (Radl Philipp, 2010, p.138).

The complexity and diversity of gender identity and gender issues have drawn more attention and criticism in the literature in recent decades (Fausto-Sterling, 2000), especially regarding the binomial and heterosexual vision of gender and sex involved in the mentioned differentiation. There is a claim that people with gender issues don't always require medical assistance or even experience a fully transgender identity (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Lee, 2001). According to Bockting (2008), a person's gender identity might encompass a wide range of designations, such as "shemale," "third gender," "pan-/poly-/or Omni gendered," and "gender fluid", as opposed to only male and female or even transsexual (Bockting, 2008). These kind of people might or might not be distressed, and they might or might not wish to live as "the other gender" (Cohen-Kettenis et al., 2011).

In our research context, we understand that:

“The gender differences are supported by biological, anatomical and physiological differences, that is, sexual differences, but they always go beyond the latter” (Radl Philipp, 2010, p. 138).

So, the most important aspect is:

“...they include the social, cultural and psychological experiences by the subjects...” (Radl Philipp, 2010, p. 138).

From an vision center in our research, we contemplate also gender identity aspects of belongingness and positive affect toward one's gender group which capture the positive effect of gender identity on well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Branscombe et al., 1999). Also, the relation between well-being and the centrality and salience of gender in person's identity may depend on the social situation of the gender, as suggested by the reflected appraisals model (Gentile et al., 2009), social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979b), and the discounting model (Major et al., 2002). Then, a high gender centrality and salience would be correlated with a lower level of wellbeing for women (the underprivileged group) and a higher level of wellbeing for men (the privileged group). However, the perspective that sees manhood as precarious raises the prospect that men's well-being may be negatively impacted by salient male gender identity since it highlights the expectations of men regarding their masculinity and the vulnerability of their privileged status if these expectations are not satisfied (Vandello & Bosson, 2013).

When it came to people's attitudes toward their gender as well as their sense of integration and belonging to their gender group, gender identification was a strong predictor of pleasure. People's well-being increased with how confident they felt about their gender and how well they fit into their gender group. On the other hand, there was a negative correlation between people's well-being and the centrality and importance of gender in their identities, with higher centrality and importance predicted lower well-being (Zitelny et al., 2022).

2.1.3. Social Identity and Personal Identity

In our research context, the concepts of social and personal identity are especially relevant, first of all Erving Goffman's classic definition from 1965.

“This theorist argues that the term "personal identity", which he coined, refers to the vertical dimension of time that encompasses singular biographical experiences, as well as a combination of exclusive properties of the individual (such as phenotypic and psychological traits).” (Radl Philipp, 1996, p. 110).

On the other hand,

“...the concept of "social identity", which points to the horizontal dimension that includes all the roles that an individual plays explicitly at a given moment, contemplating at the same time their participation in different interaction systems” (Radl Philipp, 1996, p. 111).

Therefore, we see that the subject combines these various aspects in all his interactions and social participations, an important question in our research about single never married women. In this sense, in more recent debates, in social psychology, social identity refers to the aspects of people's identity that are shaped by their membership in various social groups, such as their gender, race, nationality, or occupation (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2001). While personal identity refers to the unique characteristics, traits, and experiences that, make an individual who they are as an individual person. It encompasses a person's beliefs, values, interests, and personal choices that may not necessarily be connected to any specific social group. On the other hands, some authors understand that social identity is often influenced by external factors and expectations, but personal identity is more subjective and self-defined. J. C. Turner's theory of identity recognizes the influence of social institutions on identity formation. Institutions such as family, education, and media play a significant role in socializing individuals and shaping their identities. They provide frameworks and socialization processes that guide individuals' understanding of themselves and their place in society (Turner & Reynolds, 2010).

It should be noted that social and personal identities are not mutually exclusive but rather interrelated. An individual's social identity can influence their personal identity, as they may internalize societal expectations and norms associated with their social group. Likewise, personal identity can also shape an individual's social identity, as their unique characteristics and choices may influence the groups they choose to belong to or associate with.

According to theories that emphasize the importance of group membership in a person's social identity, individuals of low-status groups have worse well-being the more their group is a prominent and central element of their identity. In accordance to the reflected appraisals model, individuals create self-concepts, an important peculiar concept in our research about single never married women, based on the attitudes and perceptions of others toward the group in which they participate. This idea is comparable to that of social identity theory (Ralph Turners, 1979). A person's social identity may contribute to a poor self-perception if their group is marginalized or stigmatized. These models make it conceivable that women for whom gender is a fundamental component of identity could take on the stigma and stereotypes associated with womanhood. The discounting model proposed by Major and colleagues adds to the likelihood of a negative relationship between social identification and well-being among members of low-status groups (Eccleston & Major, 2006; Major et al., 2002; McCoy & Major, 2003). Given their disadvantage, women are frequently judged

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through the lens of derogatory stereotypes and sexist (Rudman & Glick, 2012). However, a persistent emphasis on coupledom in laws and policies leads to prejudice against and marginalization of single individuals as well as single never-married women (De Paulo, 2011; Wilkinson, 2013); this prioritizing can have effects on identity.

Nonetheless, there have been major shifts in gender relations over the last decades, with more educational and job possibilities for women across Western countries, as well as diversity in family structures. These shifts may have led to a significant transformation in what it means to be a single woman (G. Dunne, 1999).

The presentation of a positive solo identity reflects the emergence of increasingly diversified subjectivities for women and reveals a decline in partnership as a major feature of women identity. According to Byrne, claiming identities outside of the customary range creates the possibility of new types of social identities, especially for women (Byrne, 2003).

According to various studies, heteronormative discourses of romantic quest remain to have a key role in the identity creation of single women (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003; Sandfield & Percy, 2003b). Assumptions about the importance of relationship in normative identities risk singleness being perceived as a deficiency identity, even among single never-married women. However, study on single women has revealed the growth of new opposing voices in the shape of online blogs and certain types of self-help publications (K. Lahad, 2014; Taylor, 2012); these firsthand narratives use feminist frames to express singlehood from a bold and unapologetic standpoint, including being pleasantly single. In these accounts singlehood is figured as a “legitimate and stable identity” (K. Lahad, 2014).

Another point of view is that single women use personal experience to develop a positive identity by defining singleness as a positive element of self-identity, including one in which singleness can be explained in terms of its positive dimensions for women (Simpson, 2015a).

In general, the personal identity of single, never-married women is linked to their experiences with autonomy, self-discovery, and perseverance. On the other hand, unmarried, never-married women frequently face a variety of preconceptions and prejudices. They might be referred to as "spinsters" or "old maids," reinforcing the perception that their worth declines with lack of marital commitment. These women, freed from the constraints of conventional gender roles inside marriage, now have greater autonomy to pursue their passions, job objectives, and personal progress. They make genuine connections, form supportive groups, and develop a sense of self-worth that goes beyond traditional standards. In essence, the social and personal identities of single, never-married women reflect the ongoing struggle for gender equality and self-determination. Through a feminist perspective, their stories are not just alterations from the standard, but vital parts of a larger movement for freedom and empowerment.

2.1.4. Singlehood and Identity Formation Framework

Although most research has concentrated on the reasons and consequences of singlehood, nowadays, singlehood is considering as a social category and, in a singular way, as identity. The word “social identity” is not used only as a positive evaluation of individual’s self-concept, but also as a negative one (Blanz et al., 1998); Social identities are dynamic, according to Blanz, who also emphasizes how people manage and negotiate their identities in a variety of social circumstances. Based on Blanz, social identity is a complex interplay of various identities that can change in salience based on social interactions and situational circumstances, rather than just being a static connection with a particular group. A sophisticated understanding of how people create and reassemble their social identities in reaction to individual and group experiences is offered by Blanz's idea of social identity.

It is conceptualized as the part of an individual's self-concept constructed from a social group's membership with the positive or negative value and emotional important connection to that membership. Positive or negative self-concept is extracted from one's individual stance as well as one's social and political setting (Hogg & Smith, 2007). Therefore, social identity is not fixed or static and it can be changed and alter over time (Turner & Onorato, 2014).

Many singles do not accept their status as singles or experience conflictive society. Many of them hold a peripheral identity of singlehood and want to have partner. Other singles whose identification level with singlehood is high are various cases, an understudied and undertheorized sub-group. In opposite to identities developed with low conflict, these single people feel that they have to fight over their right to be single for the long haul (Fisher & Sakaluk, 2020).

If singles feel pressure from societal demands or if they are not living up to their families' expectations of what their lives must look like, can experience conflict or dissatisfaction related to their single status. Being single can make a feeling of isolation or loneliness for these kinds of people, particularly if they are in contact with many couples (Fisher & Sakaluk, 2020). This can be annoying and difficult experience and may lead to feelings of frustration and inadequacy (Y. U. Girme et al., 2022).

In a study was done on Spain the data shows a high rate of mortality for various causes of death in single people than in married ones. The authors of study declared that the lower rate of death in married people comes from the beneficial impact of marriage as social support's source (Burgoa et al., 1998) for the both sexes, men and women. The psychological theories offer that physiological mechanisms by which any system of social support like marriage, number of friends, group membership put an effect on health, can be explained by the way in which humans respond to anxiety. Marriage, as a source of social support can be considered as a probable explanation for these findings; also, it can act as a protector that means social support that provided by the partner (House et al., 1988; Hu & Goldman, 1990).

2.1.5. Gender Inequality and Stigma

Social inequities involve disparities within different social groups, including women that arise from an unequal social, economic and political power, although women are inclusive a little be more like the 50% of population. In this sense women inequality is a transversal phenomenon, affect all the women's groups beyond the belonging of class, ethnicity, race etc.⁸. Social inequities involve a violation of human rights as different communities and populations are unequally deprived from exercising their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights (Krieger, 2014; WHO, 2018a).

Health inequalities are defined as differences in health status or in the distribution of health determinants between different populations. In contrast, inequities refer to unnecessary, avoidable, and unjust access to health. Inequities are often the result of health inequalities (WHO, 2018b). Health inequities refer to preventable differences between social groups, to access resources to improve and maintain health and health outcomes. These differences are

⁸ Gender mainstreaming is the public policy concept of assessing the implications for people of different genders of a planned policy action, including legislation and programs, introduced in the "Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing" in 1995. Mainstreaming offers a pluralistic approach that values the diversity among people of different genders.

Most definitions of gender mainstreaming conform to the UN Economic and Social Council formally defined concept: Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.

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also evident in the disparities in the quality of health and healthcare access across different populations or communities (WHO, 2018a) and in a especial way according to gender. Both social inequities and health inequities are, at their core, a violation of human rights.

One powerful source of health inequities is stigma. Stigma has a variety of negative effects on people's health, both mental and physical, access to medical care, general well-being, psychological strain, social isolation, and restricted availability of medical resources. These factors intensify health inequalities among marginalized groups by generating a cycle of disadvantage. People who are stigmatized usually feel excluded from their communities and social networks and are socially isolated. One important factor that determines health is social support, which is diminished by this isolation. In a study that was done on Iran, never-married women were judged when they search health services for their gynecological issues and usually were avoided to do annual gynecological check-up (Abedian & Shahhosseini, 2014b).

Initial theoretical understandings of stigma were developed by Erving Goffman, who defined stigma as a 'mark' of an attribute that was socially devalued (Goffman, 1963). According to Goffman, stigma should be understood as a 'language of relationships, not attributes'. Stigma results from the dichotomy between socially devalued and socially valued attributes, and maintains social inequities by segregating individuals into stigmatized and non-stigmatized groups (Earnshaw & Chaudoir, 2009). More recent conceptualizations of stigma have critiqued definitions which overlook the experiences of stigmatized individuals, and taken an individualistic approach (Deacon, 2006; Link & Phelan, 2014). These approaches have defined stigma as a social process shaped by the social context and the contingencies of social, economic and political power (Deacon, 2006; Joffe, 1999; Link & Phelan, 2014). When people assign labels to human differences, dominant cultural beliefs and social norms give meaning and value to these labels (Link & Phelan, 2001). Stigma can also be considered as a form of symbolic power, as social power might be gained through stigmatizing other individuals and/or social groups (Bourdieu, 1987; Link & Phelan, 2014; Link & Phelan, 2001). So, stigma is defined as 'a social process involving the segregation of individuals and social groups, based on socially valued and devalued attributes that are contingent on inequities in social, economic and political power'. The term "stigma" will be used generically to refer to any experience of stigma, whereas the use of the plural term "stigmas" will be used when referring to the experience of multiple and distinct stigmas. Particular terms will be used for specific types of stigma.

Health needs and their outcomes have traditionally been approached at the individual level, but health and well-being are not excluded from the influence of social and structural elements (Jetten et al., 2012; Johnson & Acabchuk, 2018). Intersectionality approaches have been a central tenet of feminist research in the last few decades, and it has engendered activist science to inform policy towards addressing social and health inequities. Intersectionality goes beyond individual-level factors to explore social and structural elements of social (and health) issues (e.g., gender-based violence) (Hancock, 2007; Shields, 2008; Warner, 2008). Social identity approaches such as Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979a) and the Self-Categorization Theory (Turner et al., 1987), can provide an explanation on how intersectional stigma may be related to women's sexual health. According to social identity approaches, individuals form a sense of self through their belonging to distinct social groups. Intersectional stigma, and the associated socio-structural neglect, may shape women's identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979b).

In this sense, we understand for our research that identity is formed in cooperation with other elements of society and in this regard single women who have new identity in a

conventional society can be subjected of stigma in the social context. So, they can face negative marks, discriminated identities, social isolation and limited access to social services in relationship with their marital status.

2.2. DIVERS THEORETICAL APPROACHES

In this section, our interesting is to discuss the different theoretical approaches to explain Identity, Gender, Cultural and Religious Aspects of Women Identity, and more concretely Identity, Gender Aspects, Social Identity, and Personal Identity about the vision of our research. For this reason, we try to explain Social-Psychological theories with emphasis on Goffman's theory and Feminist theories.

2.2.1. Social Psychological Theories (Goffman's Theory)

Social psychology utilizes a wide range of specific theories for various kinds of social and cognitive phenomena. In our context is especially important the Goffman's Theory. According to Erving Goffman, social norms, particularly those derived from social interaction, affect an individual's sense of self. He highlights the fact that people who engage in social contact manage their impressions. When examining how social norms affect identity, his concept of stigma (1963/1990b) is helpful; people who don't fit into the framework of normative expectations are at risk of being seen as abnormal, which leads them to use a variety of impression-management techniques to deal with real or imagined stigma (Goffman, 1963/1990b). Goffman classically defined stigma as a feature that is extremely discreditable. A discredited attribute could be readily discernable, such as one's skin color or body size, or could be hidden but nonetheless discreditable if revealed, such as one's criminal record or struggles with mental illness. For Goffman, stigma is a general aspect of social life that complicates everyday micro-level interactions.

A number of incidents demonstrated the frequency of stigmatized social identities among unmarried women, suggesting a persistent "othering" of single women due to their placement in socially excluded categories; these social categories, however, may contradict individual identifications, and the narratives depicted participants negotiating the subject positions available in dominant discourses (Simpson, 2015b). The stigmatized may be wary of engaging with those who do not share their stigma, and those without a certain stigma may disparage, overcompensate for, or attempt to ignore stigmatized individuals

Goffman (1963) argued that most people experience the role of being stigmatized "at least in some connections and in some phases of life". Indeed, Goffman's broad definition of stigma incorporates many contemporary discredited attributes, including what he defined as "tribal stigmas" (e.g., race, ethnicity, and religion), "physical deformities" (e.g., deafness, blindness, and leprosy), and "blemishes of character" (e.g., homosexuality, addiction, and mental illness). Goffman articulated stigma as a general social process, focusing on how stigmatized individuals often face similar constraints in the management of social interactions, regardless of the particular type of stigma they face (Goffman, 1963). However, such stigmatization causes mental and social problems in the individual (Meyer, 2003). The stigmatization can sometimes overwhelm a person to accept her/his social marginalization (Ezabadi et al., 2013).

Drawing on Goffman but incorporating a broader concern for the operation of power in society, Link and Phelan define stigma as the co-occurrence of four processes: (1) labeling human differences; (2) stereotyping such differences; (3) separating those labeled from "us"; and (4) status loss and discrimination against those labeled. By incorporating the role of power and discrimination in their definition of stigma, Link and Phelan articulated an

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approach to stigma that would enable sociologists to consider how stigma related to fundamental sociological questions, namely those relating to the social creation, reproduction, and consequences of social inequalities (Link & Jo, 2001).

Goffman's Stigma Theory is useful to understand the dynamics of single women among a social system and their psychosocial, but also social, consequences. It claims that single people do not satisfy the societies' expectations of bringing the next generation of the society further; thus, single people are not complete; as a result, people not fitting in the "plan" of society and they are psychosocially discriminated against and stigmatized (M. Kianpour, 2007). However, such stigmatization causes mental and social problems in the individual (Meyer, 2003). The stigmatization can sometimes overwhelm a person to accept her/his social marginalization (Ezabadi et al., 2013). The study by Roona (2015) shows a cultural expectation of the priority of coupledness, which may place single women on the margins (Simpson, 2015b). Other research (Byrne, 2000) identifies the exclusion of single women from coupled society in numerous situations.

Even with changing social identities, single women may still be positioned as the "other" in ways that hinder social connection. According to Gordon (2002), people who live in family households may be reluctant to welcome single women to their homes or parties due to stereotypes about the glamorous lifestyle of the "city single" and how they are considered to contrast with the routine of family life (Gordon, 2002). According to Reynolds Single women are (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003):

"... Expected to have an explanation for her condition, while paired women are rarely asked to justify their situation" (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003, p. 490).

According to Goffman's (1963/1990b) explanation of stigma, those who are stigmatized react to the identity values of mainstream society by managing their stigma in order to reduce stressful circumstances (Goffman, 1963/1990b). However, single women compared to married people experience a feeling of separation and rejection from the family and society (Shahanavaz & Azadeh, 2019).

2.2.2. Feminist Theories and Single Never-Married Women

There is an extensive debate about how explain identity, identity of women and gender differences from the angle of women knowledge and so from the perspective of feminist theories. The traditional types of feminist theory investigated deepened gradually during three periods roughly comparable to the three decades of current feminism, including sexist, patriarchal, and phallogocentric. In sexist ideology, women are relegated to one of two roles in knowledge: wife and sexual object or mother and reproduction. According to patriarchal theory, even if sexism were eradicated and both sexes behaved identically, their actions would not have the same significance and value. The third hypothesis can be considered as contributing to phallogocentric types of oppression, which involve the oppression of women through a system of representation that collapses the two sexes into a single universal model that is only compatible with the masculine. When the two sexes are portrayed in the same model, the particular of the feminine is always depicted in male or masculine words (Grosz, 2006).

Feminist postmodernist views are used to counter beliefs that seek to legitimize sexist actions, most notably ideologies that assert that observed disparities between male and female are natural and necessary, or that women have a nature that explains and justifies their subordination. According to feminist postmodernism views, gender is socially or discursively

produced (Butler, 1990). From these perspectives categories like race, gender, and class are not present as "essences". And as a result, postmodern feminist theories rediscover or give special attention a variety of women, including Caucasian, African American, working-class, lower class and lesbian women, as well as a variety within each group. These theories understand that they introduce a new perspective in the epistemic discussion on gender identities, although the questioning of essences and the construction and deconstruction of gender identity already has a long tradition in the field of feminist thought, as is known (Radl Philipp, 2022). We only remember in the modern epistemology context of women's studies the important critics of Simone de Beauvoir and the line of thought of the equality feminist thought and here famous statement that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir, 1949, p. 283). Here we understand, and in this sense, we like to understand the contribution of feminist postmodern theories to our special object of knowledge, that one of these variety women groups are the single women who their number increase worldwide in recent decades.

Here I want to discuss the situation of women as well as single never-married single in a special way with the thesis defends by Simone de Beauvoir in her book named "the second sex", aforesaid. This book is considered probably one of the most important classical works of feminist theory. Although when she defends the classic position about equality, her ideas lead to big discussions from the sixties and also gives rise to a broad theoretical overview with great variations in the field of feminist theory, and also a variation of theoretical classifications. Beauvoir's writing was groundbreaking in many ways, including thorough descriptions of women's chores, puberty, pregnancy, menopause, and the lived experience of being a teenage or an elderly lady at home or on the society. Numerous women learn to appraise themselves accordingly. Furthermore, women may need to understand that masculinity has historically been connected with a "normal" human's abilities, skills, and work. If this is the case, the woman learns that she is the "other" rather than the norm.

"She is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her" (de Beauvoir, 1949, p. 6).

Do the dissenting opinions (Simmons, 1996)—especially those of purposefully single heterosexual women who decide against getting pregnant—be heard by the world community as a whole? The time has come to reconfigure feminist theory to include the dissenting opinions (Simmons 1996, p. 155) of heterosexual women who "go against the grain" and the very fabric of what has historically contributed to the foundation of societies: conception, marriage, and parenting. This is because the variety of feminist theories recognize and support the experiences, independence, and perspectives of women. Feminist theories are a whole new kind of epistemology theories that explain and support such nonconformity. These theories, freedom of choice is essential. In the context of this theoretical paradigm, heterosexual women who choose to remain single on purpose are free to live meaningful lives free from the constraints and social conventions that define the married-with-children position. Women who choose to remain single on purpose are urged to make their own decisions about their views on parenthood, marriage, and conception.

Intentionally single heterosexual women are a part of something far bigger than themselves as members of a global civilization. In this greater whole, purposefully single heterosexual women can explore the depths of meaning that define life, as well as personal significance and career success; however, to acknowledge this as true on both a collective and

2. IDENTITY, GENDER, CULTURAL, AND RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF WOMEN IDENTITY

personal level calls for bravery, a strong sense of self, and an unwavering resolve to live one's life as one chooses. In simple terms, choosing to stay single consciously takes a great deal of strength (Gordon, 2003). In this sense, the feminist point of view supports straight women who are brave, self-assured, and self-aware enough to deliberately choose to live single lives and remain unaffected by the criticism of those who would rather see them follow traditional norms.

In the book "The Second Sex" (de Beauvoir, 1949) the author investigated situations in which one may not be able to will one's own freedom. Beauvoir agreed that our freedom is reflected in the different ways we can assume our birth or sex.

“Even though it has left traces on all the currents of feminism, although the evaluations particulars contain a whole range of diverse positions, corresponds par excellence to the theoretical vision of equality feminism” (Radl Philipp, 2008, p. 12).

However, the societal implications of sexual difference can raise the hesitation with which we choose to act. Women's choices may be limited by the cultural definition of femininity. Her view in child development influenced her perspectives on these issues significantly. She stressed how a young girl's spontaneity might be hindered from an early age. Thus, she creates an explanation of freedom as being strongly fostered or repressed by others, particularly during one's formative years.

“It is a strange experience ... to be revealed to [oneself] as alterity. That is what happens to the little girl when, learning about the world, she grasps herself as a woman in it. The sphere she belongs to is closed everywhere ... as high as she climbs ... there will always be a ceiling over her head, walls that block her path” (de Beauvoir, 1949, p. 311).

Throughout history, many women have attempted to break down these barriers and gain their rights. According to Ensslen et al., (2013), never-married female teachers broke through the “glass ceiling” into what had previously been male-dominated fields in the profession of being a teacher. Despite the discourse that portrayed men as the ideal teachers, there were unmarried women who chose a career in teaching at a time when women were expected to leave at marriage. These career-oriented women endured over years of teaching in one-room schools and staying with their students' parents to gain work in city school boards. They had saved from their second-class incomes to complete their degrees. By the time married women began to teach regularly, single career oriented women had prepared the way for women to become professional educators. These successes were made feasible by the women's ability to continue teaching while remaining single. They represented the desirable attributes of the perfect teacher: permanence, talent, advanced education, and dedication. (Ensslen & Corman, 2013).

Both men and women failed to act in ways that increased, rather than limited, each other's liberty. Beauvoir was particularly concerned because women were frequently participants in their own subjugation (Deutscher, 2013). As we see this issue in today's societies which some never-married women in Iran believe that complete freedom for women is not good for them and it is better to suppress by other men (Ezabadi et al., 2015); although Beauvoir contented that lots of men were not fully benefited by the subordination of women.

According to Fischer et al. (1993), the liberal feminist tradition, what means the equality approaches of feminist theories certainly introduced in an epistemological sense by Simone de

Beauvoir, dates back to the early days of feminism in the 19th and 20th centuries and advocates for social reform in order to provide women with equal status and opportunities as men. The essential assumption of liberal theory is that men and women are equal, and that individual rights are based on rationality rather than sex. It underlines the presence of prejudiced obstacles and systematic biases affecting women (such as limited utilization of resources, education, and professional experience) that should be eradicated (Fischer et al., 1993). Liberal feminism evolved from political ideas about equality, entitlement, and individual rights. This viewpoint has served as the foundation for numerous legislative initiatives aimed at achieving more equality for women. Discussions about this matter can be had in the female job positions. For example the culturally masculine practice of entrepreneurship as growth-oriented activity is associated with distinct types of masculinity (Ali, 2018). According to Hisrich and Brush (1986), women-owned businesses differ from men-owned businesses. There are disparities in their professional backgrounds, administrative and entrepreneurial talents, problem-solving techniques, and reasons for launching their businesses. The most notable distinction is that female entrepreneurs may have distinct domestic roles in addition to their entrepreneurial endeavors. In spite of their position as entrepreneurs and business owners, they are more likely to be “the primary parent, emotional nurturer and housekeeper” (Unger and Crawford, 1992, p.474). Therefore, in the majority of cultures, being an entrepreneur does not absolve one from one's domestic responsibilities (Goffee & Scase, 1985). Mitchell (2004) conducted research on stimulus female entrepreneurs and found that launching a business requires a substantial investment of risk and energy from the entrepreneur. However, women are more at threat since they must deal with issues pertaining to their businesses in addition to the challenges of being a woman in a culture where men predominate. Studies on women-owned firms indicate that women entrepreneurs purposefully decide to keep their companies small (Mitchelle, 2004). Feminist theories that provide some insights on these variations assert that these observed differences do not mean that women will be less effective in business than males. According to the liberal feminist perspective, discrimination against women entrepreneurs should end since they may choose to take various routes since they lack financial resources, educational backgrounds, and business expertise. Liberal feminist perspective on women's entrepreneurship asserts that women would act in a similar way if they had equal access to the resources, employment prospects, and educational opportunities that are available to males (Unger & Crawford, 1992).

As a result, it seems all feminist activities, try to maintain equality for all people (women and men) in the society. Regarding this, nowadays, women as well as single women can live freely without traditional pressure of society to being household mother, though there is a long distant to reach the complete equal rights.

So, in this chapter, we discussed about the concept of identity and some theories as well as feminist theories in relation with single never-married women, although the topic of single women will be analyzed in the next point.

3. STATISTICS AND WOMEN SURVEYS IN BOTH COUNTRIES (IRAN AND SPAIN)

3.1. GENERAL ASPECTS OF SINGLE WOMEN

Singleness as a socially created category has culturally diverse meanings: while singleness as a civil status denotes never-married, it is increasingly used to refer to being currently single. Demographic trends including marriage postponement and decline, as well as a rise in divorce and separation, have resulted in more men and women enduring periods of singleness (Simpson, 2015c). While many studies have treated all unmarried people (widowed, divorced, and never-married) as a single category, Cwikel et al. took a life course approach to human development and believed that an important event, like marriage, earlier in life may have an impact on the people's function later in life; thus, never-married people might be different from others in their personal and social experiences (Cwikel et al., 2006). Whereas other marital status groups are able to rely on their spouse and children for assistance, never-married elderly persons may be a vulnerable population, subject to isolation and loneliness (Fengler et al., 1982; Wenger et al., 1996). A never-married woman was defined as one who does not marry before, has more than 30 and does not live with a man and also does not have a child (Byrne, 2000). Another study characterized a never-married woman as a "old maid" who could not attract a man because she is unattractive, disabled, or incompetent, or a city woman who does not want a mate because she is well educated, ambitious, single-minded, resolute, energetic, or of high social class (A. Situmorang, 2007).

Some feminist scholars have focused on the issue called by them "compulsory heterosexuality" (Rich, 1980) in the formation of normative gender identities (Jackson, 1996). For women, in particular, singleness has long been regarded as not normal: acceptable femininity, entwined with marriage and motherhood, has historically resulted in single women being seen as inadequate or defective (Simpson, 2009). However, recent material and cultural transformations represent a potential challenge to single women's long-standing marginalization. Several scholars assert the advent of the single women that appeared newly (Trimberger, 2005), as well as the single professional woman's global reach (Berg-Cross et al., 2004).

Taylor (2012) stated that during the mid-1990s, the "hypervisibility" of single women in Western popular culture has been perceived as evidence of a broad cultural endorsement and celebration of women's singleness (Taylor, 2012). Nonetheless, although the discursive change in media representations from "the spinster" to "the singleton" apparently reveals a new subjectivity, prolonged singleness of women is nevertheless rarely constituted as a viable ontology among them. However, certain forms of feminine subjectivity are culturally legitimized over others; single women are rarely depicted as reconciled with their singleness; and the most obvious depiction of single women is their ambition to "unsingle" themselves (De Paulo, 2006). So, Taylor discusses, the research on single women in popular culture reveals limits to the various stories that are being told about single women (Taylor, 2012). De Paulo and Morris (2005) identify as the "yawning chasm" between the actual life of single people and common view of their lives (De Paulo & Morris, 2005). These studies not only capture the experience aspects of single women's life, but they also show that single women are conscious of the long-standing prejudices that portray single women as pitiful or guilty.

According to some research, heteronormative discourses about romanticism continue to play a major role in the identity formation of single women (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003; Sandfield & Percy, 2003a). It is possible for single women to interpret being single as a deficit identity

if they believe that partnerships are essential to normative gender identities. Nevertheless, recent studies on single women revealed the emergence of new oppositional voices in the form of online blogs and certain genres of self-help books (K. Lahad, 2014; Taylor, 2012). These first-hand tales effectively use feminist frames to discuss being pleasantly single as well as singlehood from a confident and unapologetic stance. These narratives "figure singlehood as a legitimate and stable identity" (K. Lahad, 2014). However, a persistent emphasis on coupledness in laws and policies leads to prejudice against and marginalization of single individuals (De Paulo, 2011; Wilkinson, 2013). Identity may also be affected by this prioritizing. However, there have been significant shifts in the way that gender roles are perceived in the last few years, with women in Western countries having more access to work and education, as well as a wider variety of family structures. One could argue that these modifications have led to a fundamental transformation in the definition of womanhood (G. Dunne, 1999), possibly resulting in a decrease in the importance of being in a partnership. Taylor (1998) makes a helpful distinction between ontological and categorical identity, explaining that the latter refers to a cohesive sense of self while the former includes social categories (Taylor, 1998). However, the former must be stated in order to formulate the latter, since people can only become distinct selves by creating and participating in social categories. This idea takes into account the political importance of identification, which is a process that doesn't happen in a neutral setting. Instead, social relations of power that define identity categories as dominating or subordinate are the context in which identity creation occurs (Taylor, 1998). Singleness has historically been seen as the inferior alternative to marriage when examining partnership status as a social category, particularly for women.

3.2. SOME STATISTIC DATA ABOUT SITUATION OF SINGLE WOMEN IN IRAN

Globally, the proportion of single women has increased recently, despite the expectations placed on them in collectivistic society. There is very difficult to keep statistic data because the site is specific and accessing to all data is not possible. Iran is no exception to this rule. Specially in the last few decades the proportion single women rise in Iran, sharply. Additionally, statistics show that Iranian women's marriage rate declines after the age of 30 (*Statistics of Women*, 2016).

3. STATISTICS AND WOMEN SURVEYS IN BOTH COUNTRIES (IRAN AND SPAIN)

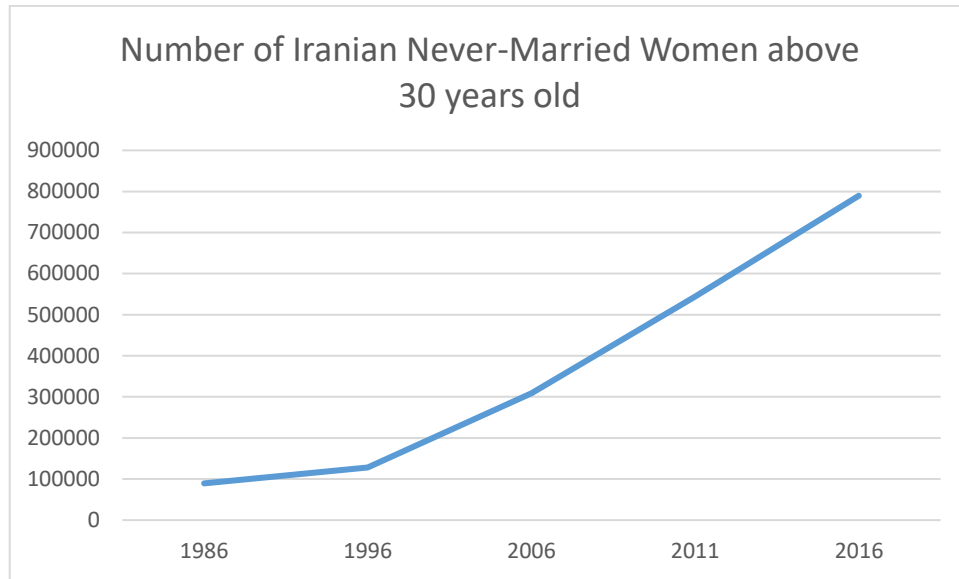


Figure 1: The number of never-married women above 30 in Iran

Origin/bibliography: Statistical Center of Iran's website (<https://www.amar.org.ir/>)

This figure shows the number of never-married Iranian women over 30 years old. This figure is drawn according to five censuses that were happened in years 1986, 1996, 2006, 2011 and 2016 in Iran. According to the figure, the number of never-married women in 1986 were about 100,000 while it was increased gradually during the years and in the year 2016 it was reached to 800,000, approximately.

3.3. SOME STATISTIC DATA ABOUT SITUATION OF SINGLE WOMEN IN SPAIN

Like in other European countries, in recent decades, the number of single women as well as single mother is increased in Spain (INE (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística*), 2022). According to Spanish statistics, the proportion of single persons increased from 13.3% in 1991 to 25.5% in 2018 (INE, 2022). Additionally, Spain's non-marital birth rate is increased from 2% in 1975 to 30.2% in 2007, while the percentage of births to mothers over 30 who are not married rose from 19.9% in 1980 to 46.2% in 2007 (Castro-Martín, 2010).

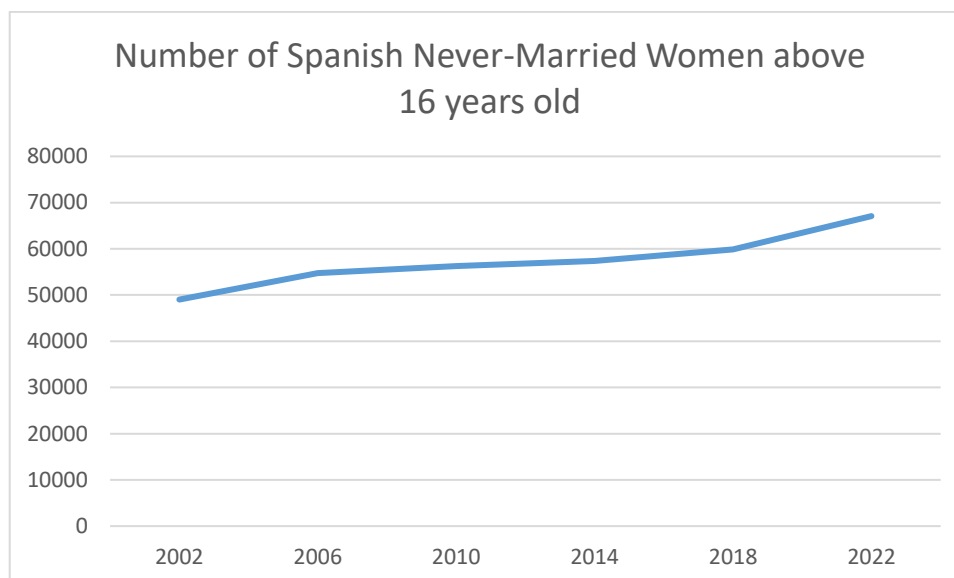


Figure 2: The number of never-married women above 16 in Spain

Origin/bibliography: INE (Instituto Nacional de Estadística) website
https://www.ine.es/dyngs/INEbase/es/categoria.htm?c=Estadistica_P&cid=1254735572981

This figure shows the number of never-married Spanish women over 16 years old. This figure is drawn according to six censuses that were happened in the years 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018, and 2022 in Spain. According to figure, the number of never-married women over 16 was about 50000 in the year 2002, while it was increased to nearly 70000 in 2022.

3.4. SURVEYS ABOUT WOMEN SINGLENESS IN IRAN

Most of Iranian surveys that were done on single or never-married women showed the impact of social and religion on the construction of women believes and identity. The terms “single” and “never-married” women in Iran is different, not only by the status of marriage but also from the view point of virginity. Never-married women are the women that never have sex at any ages. In Islam (the religion of 95% of Iranian) having sex before marriage is “Haram” (major and unforgivable sin) for all people. But the important issue is that in the patriarchal society of Iran, the hymen is the proving evidence of virginity and usually in the time of marriage the girls are under the hymen examination and if their hymen would be ruptured, the men refuse to marry with them. Apart from the fact that hymenorrhaphy is a big business, the never-married women, even at the time of masturbation are not relax and take care of their intact hymen.

In the study that was done in 2023 in Iran on never-married women, Taghizadeh et al. worked to find the coping strategies of these women with singleness. In this qualitative study 18 never-married women older than 35 participated. Researcher found that this women for coping with sexual needs, tried to ignore sexual needs, but this was very difficult for them and all times they suffered from not having husband to have sex. Also, when they masturbated, they had worse feeling because masturbation is known as a major sin in Islam. Some women that were more religious mentioned that being single is a God’s destiny and they have to accept it and do not think about singleness and sex. In this study, among 18 participant, just one woman had sex with her boyfriend. Participants mentioned that for compatibility with

3. STATISTICS AND WOMEN SURVEYS IN BOTH COUNTRIES (IRAN AND SPAIN)

single life usually absorbed in education and work or did exercise or spent lots of time in beauty salons and keep in close friendship with their friend (Shahrak et al., 2023b).

Intact hymen have such a value for women in the time of marriage that there is written law in the Iran's legislation about it. According to Article 150 of the law of the Diyat in Iran, if somebody intentionally or unintentionally injured a women's hymen has to pay fine (*How much is the price of hymen and tearing unintentionally?*, 2022). In an unintentional incident such as a car accident or a doctor's examination, the girl's dignity has not been violated, and the payment of moral damages is not justified in this regard, and in these cases, a certificate of virginity is issued for unintentional removal. Therefore, it is better to consider the payment of "Arsh al-Baqara" (amount of money that determined by court) only to compensate for damages in the case of unintentional virginity removal (*What is the punishment for hurting virginity?*). In this situation, doctors refuse to vaginal examination of never-married women, even for doing pap-smear. In the condition of gynecological crisis, the written permission of girl's father is needed, If the girl do not have father, her father's father can give written permission the doctor to do surgery, and if the grandfather is not alive, the judge should permit the doctor to do any medical intervention on vagina of never-married women.

Another issue is the stigmatized view of society to never-married women. A qualitative study conducted by Mohammadi et al. in 2016 in Iran, regarding the stigma of using services of the reproductive health for never-married women. In this study, targeted sampling was conducted on 16 single women aged 27 to 53 in "Isfahan" a city in the south of Iran. In this study, sampling was done among all age groups, educational degree, economical and social situation of women. The interviews were deep and semi-structured. The participants were asked "when they received reproductive health services, what obstacles they had when receiving services, and what experiences they had in using reproductive health services". In this study, the analysis of data leaded into four main categories: "stereotyped thinking patterns in society", "fear of being judged and labeled by others", "discrimination", and "feelings of shame". Single women mentioned that one of their most important problems is the fear of being stigmatized for having sex, and they also mentioned that they were afraid that if they tell their problem, they will be stigmatized as being inadequate women. In this study, it was mentioned that when women tried to solve their gynecological problems and seek reproductive health services, they faced opposition from their families, or even these women themselves were embarrassed when receiving reproductive health services and in the center hid their singleness. Some single women stated that they hid their problem so much that their problem became more acute. (Mohammadi et al., 2016a).

The stigmatized view and marginalization of never-married women is obvious in the study of Qaderzadeh. In 2017, Qaderzadeh et al. conducted a study titled "Semantic reconstruction of girls' lived experience of singleness" in Iran. In this qualitative research, 28 never married women with different socio-economic levels who were 25 to 47 years old were interviewed. In the interviews, women stated that because the public is dominated by men and they received different reactions from different people in the community, they experienced a kind of social rejection. But the interesting thing was that these girls expressed their satisfaction with the restrictions that were applied to them in every aspect of life. The women mentioned that they suppress by men because this is an absolute fact that women are weak and they need support of men. Although these women could be very strong in the society and in the work environment, but due to the fear of losing their honor, they always restricted themselves from being in the social and this behavior caused to dominant of men in the society. So, most of women were more willing to work at home. These women usually saw religious places like mosques as a safe place for them where they could easily attend and relax. Turning to the

virtual space was another solution to overcome this issue, so that the girls had their own space of friendship and stayed away (safely) from the public space of the society. The participants were even more exposed to psychological violence such as street bullies than married women. (Qaderzadeh et al., 2017a).

In 2020, Hamedanchi et al conducted a review study to categorize the findings of numerous studies on the characteristics of never-married elderly individuals and to identify existing gaps using a holistic approach. In this study, data collection lasted from February 2019 to August 2019, and researchers included all qualitative and quantitative articles in English. The keywords used in this study included "never-married", "elderly", "seniors" and "old". A total of 40 qualitative, quantitative and mixed method studies were included in the study. The findings were classified into three categories: "as good as others", "celibacy as an advantage" and "negative points". This study showed that although single people have advantages such as high education and high income (especially in the case of women), they also have more disadvantages such as social isolation. Also, they realized that it is not possible to provide a fixed model for the life and personality of single people. The phenomenon of celibacy is multifactorial and based on culture and depends on time, place and interpersonal relationships in that society. For example, some studies showed that single people are lonely and far from society, while other studies showed vitality and being in society, especially for women. The researchers concluded that communication with friends and participation in voluntary activities are the most important predictors of happiness in never-married people. Also, many studies were conducted on the level of education and occupation of single people; The researchers said that Single people have a greater degree of education and a better work position than their married counterparts, and one of the reasons for trying to get a high-income job was that single women were not under the financial support of their husbands. On the other hand, people who are more interested in education and a good job were more inclined to remain single. Also, the research showed the effect of celibacy stigma for women in the workplace and that single women received lower salaries than men. Regarding the effects of mortality and celibacy, the researchers concluded that marriage has a preventive effect on mortality. In some studies, it was mentioned that single people were healthier than married people, while in other studies, this effect was completely opposite. But in general, single people who have illness or disability had less social support. The researchers showed that the culture and the place of life of people have an effect on the status of celibacy and marriage of people, this cultural and geographical difference is also effective on the quality and satisfaction of people's lives (Hamedanchi et al., 2020).

3.5. SURVEYS ABOUT WOMEN SINGLENESS IN SPAIN

During the past decades the position of women in Spanish society has greatly improved. Most of studies that was done on single women in Spain focused on issue of equality. The year 2019 will be remembered for the massive marches of the feminist movement, which struggle has been largely inspired by Spanish women. Now, Spain has made it into the top 10 of the World Economic Forum (WEF)'s Global Gender Gap Report 2020, establishing its leadership in fighting gender discrimination in the social, political, and economic spheres (*Global Gender Gap Report 2020*). In this situation, Spanish women have more liberty in decision about family life and having child.

Against the backdrop of other European nations, Cámara (2020) discussed Spain's rapid and intense rise in singleness in the study "Sociodemographic analysis of an accelerated transition: the rise of solo living in Spain," citing demographic, socioeconomic, and cultural transformations as the main drivers. The researcher also emphasizes how complicated these

3. STATISTICS AND WOMEN SURVEYS IN BOTH COUNTRIES (IRAN AND SPAIN)

changes in living arrangements are and how much more study is necessary to fully comprehend them and the effects they have on society. The study also highlights the significance of social programs, such as cheap housing and healthcare, that are specifically designed to meet the requirements of single people in order to lessen possible problems like social isolation and economic fragility. According to the study's findings, the number of single people in Spain has increased dramatically, accounting for almost 25% of all households. This increase has been attributed to a number of variables, including socioeconomic shifts and the Second Demographic Transition. The trend points to a rise in single living across generations and a more varied single life demography, especially among younger persons and the oldest elderly. The odds of living alone are higher for women, those with more education, and older age groups, particularly those in the 80–84 age range. On the other hand, women who are jobless or divorced are less likely to live alone. Younger generations in Spain have seen a noticeable increase in living alone despite delays in leaving the family home; this trend may be related to cultural developments that value autonomy, privacy, and personal life (Cámara et al., 2020).

Like other European women, family formation is a problem for single women in Spain. The Spanish family has evolved in the last century, and the majority of people do not wish to marry in the traditional way of previous generations. The majority of single people chose to reside in cohabitation. Marta et al. (2013) assessed cohabitation and family formation in Spain. The study offers a comprehensive analysis of the dynamics of cohabitation in Spain, acknowledging that it is no longer a marginal living arrangement but rather a common form of partnership among younger generations. It focuses on the features and correlates of cohabiting relationships, as well as their length, patterns of breakdown, and the sociodemographic factors affecting the decision to go from marriage to cohabitation. The paper finds a greater prevalence of cohabitation among younger people using official data sources from 1900 to 2007, with the trend being particularly noticeable among young women who are employed, educated, and live in cities. The trend toward non-traditional family structures is further shown by the drop in first marriage rates and rise in rates of separation. The results showed that education, religious beliefs, political ideologies, and childhood living situations all played a significant role in predicting the decision to live together. Factors that supported women's cohabitation over marriage included employment, secularism, left-leaning politics, parental divorce, previous independent living, and pre-union childbirth. The survey also shows how cohabitation is changing in Spain, with a greater percentage of births occurring inside cohabiting couples and a lower percentage of cohabitations ending in marriage. Additionally, the study explored how economic downturns affect union formation and speculated about how Spain's present economic crisis would affect future rates of cohabitation. In addition, it discussed how institutional acceptance of cohabiting couples varies between regions and how this affects legal systems. According to the report, there is a shift towards more diverse familial and relationship arrangements in Spain due to the rising prevalence of cohabitation, which is in line with a wider trend in Europe (Dominguez-Folgueras & Castro-Martin, 2013). Another problem in the lives of solo women was psychological repercussions. A significant concern in the lives of unmarried women is loneliness as they age. Women that choose single life in young ages, have to live alone later and accept the consequences of singleness in the old ages. In order to determine the prevalence of loneliness and the factors influencing loneliness in this group of women, Monica (2017) conducted a study on single women in Spain who were over 60. It was a quantitative cross-sectional study. Using a private telecare service, 267 single women who lived alone participated in the study. The participants' average age was 82.76 years (SD = 4.74). A questionnaire was employed by the researchers to gather

information. According to the study, women are more likely than older men to live alone for a longer period of time as they age. In order to assess the existence and degree of loneliness, the “de Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale” was employed. It has been demonstrated that psychosocial factors were more significant in explaining the variation in loneliness than sociodemographic traits. It has been established that there are strong correlations between health, social network size, family contact frequency, and life satisfaction and loneliness. Thus, it can be said that these are the main factors that influence to increased and decrease feelings of loneliness in older women living alone (Donio-Bellegarde, 2017).

Marital status even can affect the physical health of people. In this regard, in a study that was done on single and married people in Spain, researchers wanted to evaluate the effect of matrimony status on death among people. Participants in this study were people above 25 years old that died in 1991 in Spain. The results of study showed that the rate of death in never-married people were high than married one. However, the mortality rate among divorced and separated women was lower than in married women. With the exception of a non-statistically significant mortality from diabetes mellitus and cirrhosis of the liver among single women, the study found that the mortality rate was greater in single and widowed individuals compared to married ones for both men and women. The researched concluded that marriage has a protective effect for death in never-married women (Burgoa et al., 1998).

José et al (2011) carried out a study to evaluate sexual function, satisfaction, and psychological well-being on Spanish never-married women. This research was done on 157 university students in Madrid. All participants had sexual relationship. The mean age of participants was 22 years old. In this study, researchers used questionnaire for collecting data. Independent variables were various dimensions of sexual functioning including orgasm likelihood, sexual assertiveness, physical and sexual attractiveness, sexual anxiety, sexual motivation, sexual esteem, and cognitive distraction during sex. According to the study, several factors played a role in the sexual satisfaction of women, such as performance anxiety, sexual motivation, and sexual assertiveness. However, variables such as perceived physical attractiveness and frequency of masturbation had no significant relationship with sexual satisfaction. To sum it up, the result of this study shows the importance of sexual satisfaction and positive evaluation of the body on psychological and mental well-being of these women (Carrobes et al., 2011).

**PART II:
METHODOLOGY OF
EMPRICAL RESEARCH**

1. METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF RESEARCH

1.1. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Starting from our theoretical investigation we need to decide the methodology for our empirical research, that's it, how we will go about doing it. Our methodology approach will be determined by our theoretical and epistemological bases deductively (Radl Philipp, 1996), how we approach our problem theoretically starting also from our basic statements developed in the theoretical part about never-married single women framed in the field of feminist, women's and gender studies. In this sense, we need to make the methodological choice in relationship with our general and singular hypothesis with eyes to the fact that the results are believable to others and us in our field⁹. Our methodological approach is based on the theoretical vision of epistemological considerations of feminist, gender and women's studies which want to elaborate knowledge to change women's social situation and leads us to ask certain questions and use appropriate methods and procedures to systematic inquiry

⁹ Every researcher has a unique perspective on what constitutes truth and knowledge. These perspectives shape our thinking, ideas, and assumptions about society and ourselves, and they structure how we perceive the world around us, which social scientists refer to as a paradigm Schwandt, T. A. (2001). *Dictionary of qualitative inquiry*. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

1.2. STUDY DESIGN

A) Qualitative Phase

We used conventional content analysis and inductive reasoning in the qualitative study considering there is currently little research on never-married women in the Iranian and Spanish context.

B) Quantitative Phase

In the quantitative phase, we carried out a cross-sectional study with using a researchers developed questionnaire for Spanish never-married women which contained seven categories such as social issues, psychological needs, acceptance of singleness, sexual issues, bio-medical needs, economic issues and reasons of singleness. This questionnaire was made starting by the data obtained in the qualitative research for Spanish never-married women and also a vast literature review. At first, the questionnaire had 75 questions that in the meeting sessions with supervisor, some questions combined and the similar questions deleted, so at the end, we had a questionnaire with 33 questions

1.3. PARTICIPANTS

A) Qualitative Phase

In this phase, twelve never-married women (six from Iran and six from Spain) ranging in age from 38 to 57 took part in the study. Participants had never married, either formally or religiously. They were chosen through purposeful and snowball sampling to create maximum variety in age, level of education, and occupation. Participants were eligible for inclusion if they did not self-report having a mental disease. They were chosen from Iran and Spain (Galicia) illustrating various cultural backgrounds.

For useful reasons and in another form, it was more complicated; to start the sampling, the researcher identified and invited the never-married women with inclusion criteria who worked at the university to participate in the study (purposeful sampling). After that, we continued to contact other people through these first participants to introduce other never-married women among their acquaintances and relatives in order to gain access to more individuals with greater maximum variation (snowball sampling). Also, the researcher began seeking for never-married women through her own group contacts with women's groups and associations (purposeful sampling).

B) Quantitative Phase

Participants in this phase were 100 never-married Spanish (Galician) women above 30 years old that was chosen by online questionnaire. In this phase, sampling was purposeful and snowball. For this manner, at first, the researcher sent the online questionnaire in the WhatsApp groups and Instagram and asked women who met the inclusion criteria to filled it out, also researcher asked women to put the questionnaire in the other groups that they had membership. Researcher started to search never-married women in the university and the student's residence that she was living there and asked women to answer to the questionnaire. In addition, researcher sent the questionnaire by email to the clerks of university and her friends and asked them to fill it out (if met the inclusion criteria) and sent the questionnaire to the never-married women that they knew.

1.4. DATA COLLECTION

A) Qualitative Phase

In this part of the study, we conducted twelve semi-structured interviews with never-married women (six from Iran and six from Spain). Prior to the interview, the researcher explained the study's objectives and told participants of the confidentiality of information and

data (see footnote 10). The researcher also stressed the importance of voluntary involvement and the freedom to leave the interview at any time. The interviews began after participants provided informed consent.¹⁰ The place of conduct of the interview was chosen based on the preferences of the participants, like their office, institution, or park. Data was obtained between March 2023 and May 2023. To get a rich picture of the phenomena, researchers carried out in semi-structured, and face-to-face interviews at various times and places using guiding questions including “What is your opinion about women situation?”, “What is your opinion about single women?”, “As a single women, how is your situation and needs?”, and “In your idea, what is differences between single women and single men?”. The researcher touched on exploratory questions during the interview, like "Can you explain this in more detail?" or "Can you give an example?" The interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes. In this investigation, sampling was continued until data saturation was reached. When no new data or categories emerged from interviews, a saturation point was achieved. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in Persian and Spanish, and they were all taped.

B) Quantitative Phase

In this part, we converted researcher developed questionnaire to online form (see attachment part of the thesis) and sent it by WhatsApp, Instagram or email to never-married women over 30 years old and asked them to fill it out and send it to other never-married women that they know. This questionnaire was constructed from seven categories and 33 questions, as follows:

1) Category of “social issues” that contained three items including: 1. I refuse to participate in ceremonies and events due to concern for the words and views of others; 2. Patriarchal view of society are annoying for me; and 3. I do not like that people ask about my partnership situation.

2) Category of “Psychological needs” that contained fourteen items including: 1. I think, I will be more complete and more full-fledged with marriage; 2. Because of loneliness, I keep myself busy with others; 3. I get married to get rid of loneliness; 4. I want to have someone to love and he loves me; 5. There will no one in old age to support me and I may be a burden to others; 6. I miss married life; 7. I always think about my past; 8. I get lonelier as I get older; 9. With passing of time, I am worried about going through menopause without being a mother; 10. I hope to get married in the future; 11. I have become lonelier after breaking up with my boyfriend; 12. My life has become monotonous; 13. I need to have stable life (emotionally and economically); and 14. I have planned to live with my friends for overcoming loneliness in the future.

3) Category of “Acceptance of singleness” that contained five statements including: 1. I feel happy and cheerful; 2. I live comfortably because I do not have the worries and problems of married people; 3. I enjoy my single life because of having family and friend; 4. Over time, I have accustomed to celibacy and loneliness; and 5. I have taken refuge in my job and education in my life.

4) Category of “Sexual issues” that contained four items including: 1. I feel bad after masturbating; 2. I get nervous about not being able to meet my sexual needs; 3. I am worried about having sex; and 4. With passing time, it is easy for me to control my sexual needs.

5) Category of “Bio-medical needs” that contained three items including: 1. I always like to look young and beautiful; 2. I save my physical health because I do not want to be a disable and dependent women in the future; and 3. It is easy for me to go by a doctor to treat gynecological disease.

¹⁰ The document is available in the attachment part: “Consent Document for Participation in Research” with Ethics Committee Code: “USC 34/2023”

6) Category of “Economic issues” that contained two items including: 1. I need government support to provide the living expenses; and 2. I have economic and financial worries.

7) Category of “Reasons of singleness” that contained two items including: 1. I could not marry because I did not find my love; and 2. I did not marry because I am at a higher level in education and job than the most men.

In this part, data collecting lasted four months from September 2024 to December 2023. For answering the questionnaire, participants filled out the informed consents and signed it which was prior to fill out the questionnaire. (Available in the attachment part of the thesis). The questionnaire had a five Likert rating range (Completely agree, Agree, No idea, Disagree, Completely disagree). It is necessary to mentioned that because the questionnaire was in online form and if a participant did not answer one of the statements, the “send” button at the end of questionnaire did not be active, so we did not have any missing data in this research.

1.5. DATA ANALYSIS

A) Qualitative Phase

For data management, the MAXQDA-10 software was employed. The Graneheim and Lundman (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004) approach was used to analyze data. When knowledge about a phenomenon is minimal, conventional content analysis is frequently applied. Instead of utilizing theory-based codes, the researchers in this case allowed the generation of codes and categories to evolve from the actual research data. In this study, each interview was transcribed and analyzed as soon as feasible after the interview, for instance, the day of the interview or the day after recording. The text was read line by line after full transcription, semantic units were identified, and codes were retrieved. Finally, subcategories and categories were developed based on our theoretical epistemic considerations.

B) Quantitative Phase

In this phase, data were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistical tests such as mean (Standard Deviation) and frequency (Percentage) by using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Science) version 21 software. Inferential statistical tests were Chi-Square test. P-value less than 0.05 were considered significant.

1.6. Rigor

We employed the Guba and Lincoln (1994) method with the core criteria of credibility, dependability, transferability, and conformability to ensure the data's trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). To ensure the research's credibility, the codes were reviewed, and participants confirmed their accuracy. The study's dependability was confirmed by an external supervisor. Other single women who were not involved in the study verified the results' transferability. A coding methodology as well as peer evaluations confirmed the conformability.

Data triangulation also improves data rigor. It attained by collecting data at various times and locations, as well as utilizing various sample procedures. In the current study, data triangulation was achieved by the use of two data gathering strategies (purposeful sampling and snowball sampling).

2. RESEARCH CATEGORIES AND CENTRAL HYPOTHESES

2.1. CATEGORY OF “SEXUAL NEEDS” IN SINGLE NEVER-MARRIED WOMEN

WHO¹¹ defines the sexual health as “A state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity”. Sexual health needs a positive and respectful attitude toward sexuality and sexual relationships, and also the ability to have joyful and safe sexual encounters that are free of compulsion, prejudice, and violence. To achieve and maintain sexual health, all people's sexual rights must be acknowledged, protected, and fulfilled (WHO).

In this sense this category includes all aspects relating to physical, emotional, psychological and social well-being in relation to sexuality of the researched women. In this frame it is also important to contemplate the sexual experiences, the questions of coercion, of discrimination and violence related to the sexual experience of women.

Sexuality and reproduction are key components of human interaction and communities all over the world. In addition, "sexual restriction" is one of the cultural universals shared by all human communities (Cleaveland et al., 1979; Murdock, 1945). Religious beliefs, social and environmental situations, or all of these can influence a society's sexual norms and standards of sexual conduct (C. Meston & D.M. Buss, 2010). Majority of the religions have perceived the necessity to address the issue of sexuality's "proper" role. Religious codes of sexual morality differ in how they control sexual activity or assign normative values to specific sexually charged actions or concepts. Each main religion has established a moral code that addresses themes such as human sexuality, morality, ethics, and so on. These moral codes strive to govern situations that may arouse sexual curiosity as well as impact people's sexual activities and behaviors.

The Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, as well as its conventional interpretations in Judaism and Christianity (the religion of the majority of Western people), it seems that have typically validated and supported a patriarchal and heteronormative view to human sexuality (Leeming & Carey, 2003) and preferring exclusively vaginal intercourse between men and women within the boundaries of marriage at any age, over all other forms of human sexual activity (Mbuwayesango, 2016), including autoeroticism, masturbation, oral sex, non-penetrative and non-heterosexual sexual intercourse (all of which have been labeled as "sodomy" multiple times) (Sauer, 2015), believing and instructing that such behaviors are forbidden because they are considered as a sin (Mbuwayesango, 2016), and then compared to or derived from the purported population of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gnuse, 2015).

Now, despite the religious influence described this view about sexuality certainly has been changing at least since the 1960s due to many factors in the western world. Among them we especially mention the possibilities of birth control (contraceptives, the pill) that influence what is known as the sexual revolution/liberation of the sixties, an issue that also show the investigations and the data of the known Kinsey report (Kinsey et al., 1948, 1953) in relationship with human sex behavior of men and women. Another important factor is the feminist's vindications postwar.

In Islam, sexual views and legislation are mostly based on the Quran, Muhammad's sayings (hadith), and religious authorities' decisions (fatwa), which limit sexual behavior to marital partnerships between men and women (Kecia, 2016).

¹¹ World Health Organization

Considering that culture (particularly Islamic culture) pervades many parts of people's lives (including values and marriage), unmarried women in Western countries have different attitudes, values, and concerns than Muslim single women (Saili & Shanat, 2018c). Marriage is highly valued in Iranian culture and is considered a societal norm currently, (Shahanvaz et al., 2020). Having an intact hymen at the time of marriage is also beneficial to the females and their families. So, in Iran, marriage is the only way to have sex, have an intimate connection, and become a mother (Farahani et al., 2011a). As a result, never-married women face needs such as sexual desire with beliefs in religion, and social norms. The issue of never-married women in social areas with stronger religious and cultural norms (so-called collectivistic societies) gets apparent, when comparing their status with the context of never-married women living in so-called individualistic societies (Kitayama & Cohen, 2007). Also, single women in non-Muslim communities can easily cohabit and satisfy their sexual needs, whereas in Muslim communities' response to sexual needs is prohibited. Furthermore, single women in Western countries are more socially engaged than single women in Eastern communities (Hosseini & Izadi, 2016).

The most significant thing is that sexual morality has shifted very much throughout time and between cultures. With passing the time, people' religious beliefs change or limit and especially new generations never wait to marry for having sexual relationship. On the other hand, the age of marriage increases, and the number of single people increase with steep slope in all societies and sometimes people never marry in their lifetime.

Although wearing the hijab is part of a woman's identity in most Islamic countries, including Iran, at the time of marriage, Iranian never-married women have to prove their identity as virgins. This is a new phenomenon that appear in recent decades in Iran. This issue is proven with the virginity test. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iran, Jordan, Palestine, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Turkey, and Uganda are among the countries where this practice has been documented (Olson & García-Moreno, 2017). Through the prejudiced premise that holds women primarily responsible for all sexual activity and transgression, virginity testing promotes these damaging stereotypes (McKeon; & Claudia, 2015), and it is forbidden in international declares (*Egyptians decry 'virginity tests' on protesters. Archived at the Wayback Machine AP*, 2011). Men usually refuse to marry never-married women who are not virgins. This culture is not based really on religion, because according to the "Sharia" (teachings of Islam), looking at the genitalia of any person without the view of medication is considered a great sin in Islam.

Women in Spain gained sexual freedom following a change in democratic political framework in 1975. While family is still essential in Spain, personal decisions concerning cohabitation, sexual issues, and being a single mother often have more liberty (Castro-Martín, 2010). However, it is interesting and fact that Andalusia is a region in Spain with the highest Muslim population and a significant demand for virginity testing, particularly among immigrants. In 2001, the health department of Andalusia issued a report stating that virginity testing is against medical ethics and that all medical certificates must show a person's health; however, a virginity certificate does not show a person's health, and whether a woman has an intact hymen or not cannot be a medical challenge (Bosch, 2002).

2.2. CATEGORY OF "SOCIAL NEEDS" IN SINGLE NEVER-MARRIED WOMEN

In traditional communities marriage is considered as a necessity to building up a stable and long-term relationship, to ensuring the next generation, and to achieving social status (Ezabadi et al., 2015). Despite the enormous impact of a modern lifestyle and individualism in

both eastern and western communities (so-called individualistic societies as opposed to so-called collectivistic societies), marriage and living with a spouse are still preferred both socially and culturally, especially among older people (Kitayama & Cohen, 2007). In Iran, marriage is regarded as a social norm and a source of human empowerment with cultural, social, and religious importance (Shahanvaz et al., 2020).

In this sense, this category includes all aspects relating to social well-being in relation to the imaginaries of single women, social status, collective considerations, cultural meanings, social norms, inclusive feelings of stigma and social view that was researched on women and women's experience.

As such and compared to married people, single people experience a feeling of isolation and rejection from the family and society (Shahanvaz & Azadeh, 2019). It is noted that such dynamics are particularly prevalent in Asian communities where marriage is known as a social norm, while on the flip side being never-married is perceived as a deviation from the norms and expectations. Given this, never-married women are stigmatized (Ezabadi et al., 2015). A further negative consequence of stigma is that never-married women avoid social interactions and further social activities. Such an avoidance behavior appears to further accelerate feelings of isolation and loneliness (Qaderzadeh et al., 2017a).

As discussed, remaining never-married is considered a stigma in various communities, and the severity of the stigma varies depending on the cultural, religious, and societal context. Although the number of never-married women in the United States has risen dramatically, the stigmatization of singleness has gradually declined (Sharp, 2011). However, singleness is viewed as a failure in life in the United Kingdom, though it is no longer regarded as embarrassing (Macvarish, 2006). In England, never-married women are called "On the shelf". In the Spanish language (in Spanish speaking countries) there is the expression "Solterona", spinster, for never married women with negative meaning for women living alone. In Norway they are called "pepper". In China, adult never-married women face intense governmental and family pressure to marry. Specifically, being never-married is not accepted, and society does not support single women. Not surprising, never-married Chinese women are called "Shengnu", meaning "leftover women". In Spain, although there is many rules in favor of women such as social support and women have equal opportunities in many aspects with men, there is stereotypical view on single women (not for single men) and women in Spain experience patriarchal society (Billari et al., 2003). For example, traditionally there was in the Spanish language the expression "*se te pasa el arroz*" ("pass the rice-time is going over") that had a negative meaning for never married women in relationship with get married and maternity, but on the other hand there is a word "*soltero de oro*" ("golden single") that single never-married men are called. Even successful entrepreneur women in Spain are underestimated just because of their gender (ThéBaud, 2010).

Stigma is more visible in Muslim Eastern nations where marriage is heavily featured in religious comments, and being a woman equals being a wife and mother (Saili & Shanat, 2018b). Single never-married women in Malaysia, are called "Andartu" which means "an old virgin" (Ibrahim & Hassan, 2009). Single never-married women in Iran, are called "Torshideh", meaning "the expired". In Eastern Arab countries they are called "Aabes" meaning "Fruitless". There is no world against never-married women in America. However, attention to the meaning of the stigma words in the world, indicating that the stigma of being never-married are more visible and more significant issue in Eastern societies than Western societies.

One of the reasons that single people live more comfortably in Western societies is that they are not questioned for marital status and people are not pitied in social interactions (A. A.

Azmawati et al., 2015). In contrast, in Eastern societies, marital status is key information in social interactions (Himawan et al., 2018a). Given this, family and friends put never-married women in a status of continuous stress (Saili & Shanat, 2018b).

Also, never-married women face psychological pressures such as sarcasm and false sympathy from the family and society (Ezabadi et al., 2015). In other Eastern countries where marriage is also highly valued such as Malaysia and Indonesia, never-married women even experience feelings of failure, because these women believe to have acted against societal values. Furthermore, never-married women feel angry about their social situation, feel inferior in society, and always relinquish their demands in society (Himawan et al., 2018a; Saili & Shanat, 2018b). Such societies usually reject such women, too. Never-married women face social isolation in countries where marriage is socially valued. In these societies never-married women face difficulties in living alone (especially in small towns and villages), staying in hotels, and going on trips; besides, they encounter some problems at home. Although there is no rule to prevent alone women to stay in hotels in Iran, some hotel owners do not let women to stay in their hotel and ask for governmental letter (Administration of premises) from women; This is as the same in renting a house by an alone person (*Hotel reservation for single girl*, 2021).

Evidence shows that never-married women in comparison with married ones are less socially supported (Hirth, 2010). Less social support may lead to a higher risk of mental health issues such as symptoms of depression and unsatisfying interpersonal relationships (Zeynalzadeh Chini Bolagh, Esmailpour, Alipour Gourand, et al., 2015). Not surprising, such women feel more pessimistic, and they struggle with life, fate, and with God. As such, socially less accepted behavior such as high-risk behavior, addiction, and non-suicidal self-injury, and suicidal behavior might be understood as a proxy of dealing with the dilemma: (Sharafoddin, 2018). Never-married women may also face workplace harassment from men, such as being assigned more tasks due to having more leisure time, not being married, and having no children, sometimes no sufficient wages, or when male colleagues compete with them due to greater efforts (Farzizade, 2014).

Last, single people have a higher tendency for cohabitation (Sharafoddin, 2018; Sussman & Steinmets, 2013). Cohabitation is noticeable in all societies, but it is more accepted in Western communities than in Eastern communities, particularly in Muslim regions where this type of lifestyle is forbidden. Also, singleness can threaten the health of society, especially those who do not commit to moral values. Crises included sexual need, social corruption, and wrong social interactions (Zeynalzadeh Chini Bolagh, Esmailpour, Alipour Gourand, et al., 2015).

2.3. CATEGORY OF “PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS” IN SINGLE NEVER-MARRIED WOMEN

Singleness in never-married women may have adverse short-term and long-term psychological consequences (Charles, 2013). Although psychological problems are reported from single women all over the world, the consequences of singleness can vary across countries (different cultures and religion) and may lead to different psychological and social consequences for the individual. To illustrate, one of the most significant issues for never-married women is not having children when they get older (Sharp, 2007a). Given that the only way being a mother in most eastern countries is marriage, never-married women undergo insufficient psychological support, and they experience a double lack of social support and social relationships: Not having children (and a husband) and losing their parents

(Qaderzadeh et al., 2017a). In a study on elderly single women in Spain, Reher et al. (2017) found that the proportion of single women living alone in old age is growing. They claimed that one of the biggest issues facing single women is aging alone without having children (Reher & Requena, 2017).

In this sense, this category includes all aspects relating to psychological health and the different psychological and social consequences for the individual in relation to the singleness of women, feel alone, lack of children and family boundaries, experience of mental health issues such as isolation, lack of self-confidence, feelings of psychological failure, depression, and fear of an uncertain future, particularly as they get older.

Never-married women typically experience a dual positive-negative emotion spectrum, with positive feelings such as satisfaction, peace, freedom, and independence on one side, and negative feelings such as loneliness, stigma, and deprivation on the other side (Adamczyk, 2017; Hosseini & Izadi, 2016). However, in comparison with their married counterparts, never-married women are more typical to experience mental health issues such as isolation, lack of self-confidence, feelings of psychological failure, depression, and fear of an uncertain future, particularly as they get older (Safiri & Shahanavaz, 2016). Iranian never-married women reported lower mental health issues; it appears that this lower degree of mental health issues was related to fewer marital-related responsibilities (Noorbala et al., 2017b). In Malaysia, single women appear to be happier and more satisfied with their life, compared to married women (A. A. Azmawati et al., 2015). Following the will of God for women who have never been married may make them more satisfied. Thus, such women focus on their lives and other responsibilities and avoid intellectually engaging in the grief of singleness (Alwi, 2020; Himawan et al., 2018a). In a similar vein single women feel free and comfortable as they do not have to care for spouses and children, and they prefer to focus on the advantages of being never-married (Sharp, 2007a).

In a Canadian study, community and family support, and individual personality traits such as openness were identified as primary factors for single women having positive feelings (Newbold et al., 2013b). In contrast to Western countries, where people prefer to live independently, single women in Eastern societies are more likely to live with their families, and this can give these women a sense of security (A. Situmorang, 2007). Never-married women in South Africa reported feelings of freedom and loneliness, but they also had many sexual relationships to find a committed partner (Lesch & Watt, 2018).

Despite some regional and cultural differences, it is noted that psychological mental health issues of never-married women are very similar. For instance, single women in Poland endure negative feelings such as severe depression, disruption in social relationships, and anxiety (Adamczyk, 2017). Among never-married women in Texas (USA), singleness was causally connected to behavioral disorders, sadness, and anxiety symptoms (Sharp, 2007a). Never-married Iranian women reported loneliness, diminished satisfaction, less attractiveness, low self-esteem in social interactions, rage, isolation, depression, and emotional and mental deprivation as prevalent feelings (Sharafoddin, 2018). In the same vein, never-married women experienced a sense of uselessness, uncertain future, psychological violence, and isolation as the most serious consequences of singleness in Iran. This study was carried out in a small town in Iran where never-married women were not allowed to live alone even at older ages, resulting in psychological problems and feelings of worthlessness and social isolation (Qaderzadeh et al., 2017a). A study by Alaminos and Ayuso (2019) in Spain was carried on single and married people showed that older women who live alone (single or widowed) experience a higher risk of death than those who have an intimate partner. This fact can be related to psychological perspective which they justified the fact that single people who are

alone generally lacks family ties and loneliness is a key factor in the risk of death among them, especially in old age (Alaminos & Ayuso, 2019).

Malaysian never-married women reported inadequacy, anger, regret, and sadness of not having a partner as the most leading psychological impacts of singleness. Further, participants in this study also felt guilty for ignoring God's orders, because marriage is advised in Islam; accordingly, never-married women feel guilty for neglecting God's commands (Saili & Shanat, 2018b). Studies carried out in Poland and in the United Kingdom in 2015 revealed that married women reported being mentally healthier than single ones, presumably due to a sense of support from the spouse (Janicka, 2015b; L. K. Soulsby & K. M. Bennett, 2015). Studies reported that Iranian single women were mentally more vulnerable than married women; spouses appeared to play a critical role in solving problems during marital life. These researchers introduced marriage as a supportive system to damp mental disorders in married women (Khodarahimi et al., 2009; Zeynalzadeh Chini Bolagh, Esmailpour, Alipour Gourand, et al., 2015).

Women who are single also face stigma and solitude (Collins, 2011). Psychological illnesses like depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and hostility are more common in women in this category (Safiri & Shahanavaz, 2016). In addition, they have difficulties living independently and communicating with others (Qaderzadeh et al., 2017a). Also, it is probable that they may encounter deprivation on an emotional, psychological, and supporting level in addition to gender inequity (Sharafoddin, 2018).

Further, consequences of singleness can vary in different societies and it affects not only individuals but also their families and the social environment. Sharafoddin (2018) revealed that single women are more likely than married one to participate in addiction or suicide (Sharafoddin, 2018). A study in Iran examined the psychological effects of never-married females and males aged 32 to 42. According to the author, these individuals, were sad, socially alienated, and anxious about their financial and personal freedom (Kajbaf et al., 2008a). Having a partner, on the other hand, is said to satisfy a person's need for belonging, and those in committed sexual relationships are happier than single people. (Adamczyk, 2017). In contrast to previous findings, a study found that the rate of mental problems in never-married persons was lower than in married people, owing to the lack of marital life challenges (Noorbala et al., 2017a).

Unlike so-called individualistic societies, collectivist communities include those found in Africa, South and Central America, Southern Europe, and Asia (Kitayama & Cohen, 2007), staying alone in old age may go against social norms and traditions. Marriage in young adulthood is viewed as a developmental job in many cultures (Havighurst, 1972), with the idea that couple relationships will last into old life (Havighurst, 1972; Kitayama & Cohen, 2007). Over this context, social standards can have a negative impact on the lives of unmarried women (Bhanderi & Kannan, 2010; E. A. Sharp & L. Ganong, 2011). For example, a study of never-married women in Iran discovered that not being married was regarded as a social stigma (Ezabadi et al., 2015). Every community has values and criteria for evaluating individuals and classifying them. Due to the stigma theory, single people may not become ideal humans, and hence they face a great deal of psychological discrimination (Massoud Kianpour, 2007). This is particularly common in Asian countries where marriage is considered a social norm and not marrying is considered unusual and stigmatized (Ezabadi et al., 2015). According to Qaderzade (2017), single never-married women experience psychological issues, an uncertain future, and sentiments of being a burden to others. They frequently dislike themselves and refuse to interact with others. As a result, they become

conscious of their solitude and loneliness (Qaderzadeh et al., 2017a). We do not have research in Spain that specifically works on the psychological consequences of single never-married women, but the results of a study done on single never-married women and men showed that women had higher levels of anxiety and depression than men; it should be noted that in this study, 63% of women and 55% of men were never-married (Matud et al.).

The majority of studies on single women have concentrated on young unmarried women, but it is critical to evaluate all age groups and the full range of personal and social features (Ahmadi & Babashahi, 2012;12th year).

Although single women can advance through education and career (Ibrahim & Hassan, 2009) and may be content with their single status (A. A. Azmawati et al., 2015), they confront the prospect of loneliness in old life and must plan to adjust to this possibility (T. Band-Winterstein & C. Manchik-Rimon, 2014). Singleness is becoming more common in various communities in recent decades. Economic, structural, socio-cultural, and individual factors have a significant impact on singleness (Shahanavaz & Azadeh, 2019). Singleness appears to be double-edged: Singleness can be associated with feelings like anxiety, depression, aimlessness, uselessness, emotional deficiency, and singleness can be associated with feelings like independence, freedom, peace, satisfaction, and an increased desire to employment and study (T. Band-Winterstein & C. Manchik-Rimon, 2014).

In relation to psychological needs of never-married women in Spain, in the literature review, we could not find the article that assess their needs or concerns. As Spain is a western country that all women as well as single never-married women are under the social support and on the other hand in the Spain like other western countries, marriage and having a husband is not consider as a norm (there is no differences between a women with husband and a women that never-have husband in accessing to social facility, health, and being mother), we expect that women in Spain have a good psychological health.

2.4. CATEGORY OF “MEDICAL-BIOPHYSICAL NEEDS” IN SINGLE NEVER-MARRIED WOMEN

Physical health is a very important dimension in the life of a person. But there are differences in this issue between married and unmarried people. For example, the results of a study conducted on the marriage's impact on cancer diagnosis revealed that 55% of married women and 47% of never-married women, their diagnosed cancer was limited to one part of their body ($p < 0.0001$), but unmarried women are at higher risk and worse prognosis (AHR¹² 1.35; 95% CI 1.28-1.43) (El Ibrahimy & Pinheiro, 2017). In relation to chronic diseases, the study of Wise et al. (2014) in England also showed that the life expectancy of women without a spouse with heart disease is less than that of married women (Wise, 2014).

This category includes all aspects relating to physical health, bodily sufferings, ailments, diseases and the different consequences for the individual in relation to the singleness of women.

The results of a study was done in America have shown that one of the factors that affects Pap-smear screening test is the marital status, so women who have never-married usually do not show a desire to do this test, while the risk of infection with human papilloma virus and the rate of cervical cancer is higher in all women even unmarried people over 40 years old (Hanske et al., 2016b). In addition, unmarried women who are old may suffer from diseases such as breast and ovarian cancer, which are related to their age and need to seek help (Mohammadi et al., 2016b). Being labeled when in receipt of health services for genital

¹² Adjusted Hazard Ratio

problems is another problem for single women (Shahrak et al., 2021). The results a study on never married female students in Iran showed that these women avoided seeking help from health services for genital problems (Abedian & Shahhosseini, 2014a). As women get older, the incidence of reproductive cancers increases and they need more frequent check-ups (Mohammadi et al., 2016a). Since in Iran having an intact hymen until marriage is highly valued, this influences the use by never-married women of reproductive health services such as the Pap-smear test is influenced by this culture (V. Sychareun, 2004). The law in Iran treats damage to the hymen, whether accidental or during a routine examination, as an offense (*Iran. Po. Judicial and Legal Commission, Islamic criminal law*, 2013). Consequently, even doctors refuse to perform vaginal examinations on never-married women and this can lead to late diagnosis of the disease and impose high costs on them. According to the results of a study, the possibility of damage to the hymen during a routine examination is one of the most important reasons for never-married women not to refer themselves to reproductive health services in Iran (Kohan et al., 2017a).

The rise in celibacy and the young population have created new and growing demands in the field of reproductive health (Barooti et al., 2006). Reproductive health is defined as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and its functions and processes” (Loaiza & Blake, 2010). The World Health Organization has directed attention to women’s needs and the pressures and problems affecting them in different stages of life. This attention is essential to ensuring that reproductive health services attain their goals. This means removing barriers to the use of reproductive health services among different groups of women, especially unmarried women (WHO, 2009).

Studies have shown that in many cultures unmarried women are less likely than married women to refer to reproductive health services. Different reasons are cited why unmarried women use reproductive health services less than married ones, such as the intellectual and cultural backgrounds of societies, the ways services are offered and the performance of health staff (Bott et al., 2003). For example, in some countries reproductive health providers do not recognize the needs of young people nor do they welcome providing services to them, especially those who are unmarried (DeJong & El-Khoury, 2006). Staff seem uncomfortable talking to unmarried individuals, especially women, about sex and family planning. They rarely attempt to gain women’s trust or keep their privacy. Therefore reproductive health services for unmarried women are usually provided by the private sector (V. Sychareun, 2004). But studies have also shown that young people, single individuals, minorities, the illiterate and the poor are more likely to depend on public reproductive health services because of financial problems and lack of insurance coverage (Habtom & Ruys, 2007). Although reproductive health services are provided widely and are publicly available in the Islamic Republic of Iran, studies have shown unmet reproductive health needs (such as barriers to accessing these services) of single people (Dolatian et al., 2007; Simbar et al., 2005). Like other services, reproductive health services are influenced by factors such as availability, price, quality, sociocultural factors and the characteristics of clients using them (Chakraborty et al., 2003), and it may be that a lack of attention to these features makes these services unattractive for young and unmarried people (WHO, 2015). In some countries such as the Islamic Republic of Iran, reproductive health services are not be designed to care for unmarried individuals. Talking about sexual and reproductive health in these cultures is taboo, and the use of such services by single people is accompanied by specific sensitivities and is associated with a sense of shame (Abedian & Shahhosseini, 2014b; V. Sychareun, 2004). The

stigma of receiving reproductive health services and Iranian laws and traditions regarding the hymen was one of the obstacles for participants attending a woman's clinics for problems with their reproductive system (Shahrak et al., 2021).

These issues mean that factors such as confidentiality and privacy are especially important for unmarried people when they use these services. Furthermore, feeling that they would not be labelled was an important factor facilitating unmarried women's utilization of reproductive health services. It seems that a strong emphasis on this characteristic of services is needed to avoid stigmatization of single individuals in diseases related to reproductive and sexual health.

In Spain, there is no study that investigated medical-biological health of single never-married women, but in the study by Alaminos (2019) that was done on single elderly people, researchers declared that health policies for elderly people have to reorganized and activated because the elderly single people are in the risk of chronic disease and disabilities (Alaminos & Ayuso, 2019).

2.5. CENTRAL HYPOTHESES

In relationship with these related central research categories, we part from the following central hypotheses:

1. Relating to the issue of "sexual needs" our data will show that never-married women have poor sexual health because of their marital status, especially accused in the Iran context.

We expect in a concrete way referring to the women of Spain which in the legal and religious situation of Spain, never-married women can choose singleness while satisfy their sexual needs, but the important thing is that with passing time and getting older usually never-married women would like to have stable sexual partner while finding a commitment and stable person is difficult. This issue is completely different in Iranian context that having sexual relationship before marriage is forbidden in accordance with Islamic thoughts and on the other way from the legal view, having sex out of marriage considers as a crime. In addition, according to Iranian culture, having intact hymen in the time of marriage is essential for never-married women and they can put under the force of husband for having hymen examination by doctors. As a result, Iranian single women suffer a lot in responding to their sexual needs and generally, in comparison to Spanish women, they have poorer sexual health.

2. The research data about "social needs" will show that never-married women have poor social health because of their marital status, especially accused in the Iran context.

We expect in a concrete way referring to the women of Spain that there is a social stigma against never-married women in comparison with never-married men. The evidence is the words "se te pasa el arroz" and "soltero de oro". But never-married women in Spain are under the social and familial support which in the cultural and legal situation of Spain living alone or having cohabitation is completely acceptable. This issue is completely different for Iranian women that marriage consider as a social norm and people that are never-married are adjudge as abnormal. Iranian never-married women are stigmatize with a words like "torshideh" (meaning an expired woman) while there is a word "shumbul tala" meaning "gold genitalia" that is saying to men. On the other hand, cohabitation for Iranian is not acceptable from the viewpoint of social and legal system. In this situation, never-married women feel more rejection and separation in daily life. As a result, although never-married women in two countries are under the stigma, the social situation of Spain for never-married women are more better than Iran's social context.

3. In relationship with “psychological needs”, our data will provide the evidence that never-married women have poor psychological health because of their marital status, especially accused in the Iran context.

We expect in a concrete way referring to the women in both countries that singleness brings negative and positive outcome for women. Feeling like loneliness and getting old without having a child, and depression was the usual negative expression of never-married women, on the other side, having more freedom and flourishing in the education and occupation was the positive side of singleness in both contexts. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the psychological situation of Spanish never-married women is more better than Iranian counterparts as they can be mother without marriage and social support and familial acceptance of singleness in Spanish context make them more happy while in Iran single women are looked as abnormal and they feel more negative psychological consequences.

4. In relationship with “medical-biophysical” needs in single never-married women our data will provide the evidence that never-married women have poor medical-biophysical health because of their marital status.

We expect in a concrete way referring to the Spanish and Iranian women that singleness can affect physical health of never-married women. As the investigations revealed that the rate of some chronic disease in single people are more than married one and also never-married women have less tendency to get under the routine annually check-up while with increasing age the rate of some cancers increase. In addition to these things, for Iranian women, stigma of receiving gynecological health service as well as legal and cultural system of society which force women to keep their hymen intact until the time of marriage, impede them to receive medical-gynecological service. As a result, medical-biophysical health situation of Iranian never-married women is poorer in comparison with Spanish women.

5. From a sociocultural comparative point of view our data will show differences in all the categories between the Iranian and the Spanish context.

We expect in a concrete way referring to the social, legal, and cultural context of two countries, in the Spanish society that singleness considers as a normal lifestyle and Spanish never-married women are under the support of law, they can live with less problem and can have social normal connecting, feel less psychological outcomes, can enjoy sexual life. While in Iranian context that marriage is a standard of life and not only never-married women are not under support of social and law, but also traditional custom of having hymen intact just for husband affect all aspects of social, psychological, sexual, and medical-biophysical life of them.

**PART III:
DATA ANALYSIS AND
RESEARCH RESULTS**

1. ANALYSIS OF DATA IN QUALITATIVE PHASE

In this section, the results of the first phase of the study (qualitative phase) are presented. These findings are presented in order to achieve the general goal of the research, "Sociological comparison of sexual, social, and psychological-medical needs between Iranian and Spanish women"; based on the Conventional Content Analysis method.

Here we analyze the 12 face-to-face, semi-structured interviews (six interviews with Spanish Galician single women and six interviews with Iranian single women). All interviews recorded and then transcribed to the text. After preparing the appropriate text from the experiences of the participants, semantic units were identified, then coding was done. After that the codes of interviews were compared with each other to determine their similarities and differences. The codes were categorized with the approach of continuous comparative analysis until subcategories were formed. According to the relationship between the subcategories, the main categories were revealed. It has to be noted that the classification of codes started from the first interview. The obtained subcategories and categories were reviewed several times and compared with each other.

Participants in this study were single never-married women between 30-57 years old. Participants were from different socioeconomical, educational and job situation.

1.1. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF DATA FOR SPANISH-GALICIAN WOMEN

We extracted 345 codes, 15 subcategories and 4 categories from Spanish- Galician interviews. Here we present and comment in details, the different data.

Table 1: Individual-Social Characteristics of Spanish Participants

Number	Age	Education	Job	Living Status
1	38	Bachelor	Yoga Teacher	Living Alone
2	40	Bachelor	Clerk	Living Alone
3	57	Bachelor	Retired	Living Alone
4	35	High School Diploma	Garson	Living Alone
5	43	Bachelor	Clerk	Living Alone
6	45	Doctorate	Professor	Living Alone

Origen: own elaboration

In table 1, we can see the individual-social characteristics of Spanish never-married women. As it is shown in the table, six Spanish women took part in the interviews. Their age was between 35 to 57 years old. The majority of them had university degree (four bachelor's degree and one Ph.D. degree) while just one had a high school diploma. They were in different socio-economic condition as they had different jobs such as yoga-teacher, clerk, garson, and professor; one woman was retired, too. Also, all of Spanish women live alone.

Table 2 contains the subcategories and categories that extracted from Spanish participants' interviews.

Table 2: Subcategories and categories Extracted from Spanish Participants' Interviews

Subcategories	Categories	Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender equality of all people in the society • Parent's expectations • Need stable life • Economic problems • Patriarchal society • Stereotype view 	Social Needs	Never-married women's needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motherhood • Need to have partner • Superiority of loneliness • Independency • Worries 	Psychological Needs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns • Sexual needs 	Sexual Needs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of dependency in the future • Keeping body healthy 	Medical-Biophysical Needs	

Origen: own elaboration

In this table, we had four categories including 1. "social needs category" (subcategories contains "gender equality of all people in the society", "parent's expectations", "need stable life", "economic problems", "patriarchal society", and "stereotype view"); 2. "psychological needs category" (subcategories contains "motherhood", "need to have partner", "superiority of loneliness", "independency", and "worries"); 3. "sexual needs categories" (subcategories contains "concerns" and "sexual needs"); and 4. "medical-biophysical needs category" (subcategories contains "fear of dependency in the future" and "keeping body healthy"). All categories and subcategories will be explained in detail as following:

1.1.1. Social Needs

One of the main categories extracted from the Spanish participants' experiences was "Social Needs". This Categories included six sub-categories named "Gender equality of all people in the society", "Parent's expectations", "Need stable life", "Economic problems", "Patriarchal society", and "Stereotype view". In general, the subcategories indicated the issues that never-married women face in the society.

Table 3: Semantic Units and Subcategories of the "Social Needs" Category

Category	Subcategories	Semantic Units
Social Needs	Gender equality of all people in the society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similarity of single and married women • Self-value as a human not as a single woman • Having child the only difference between single and married women
	Parent's expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents positive view about singleness • Speaking with daughters to have a partner and children • Changing parents view about marriage
	Need stable life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stability as do not want to control by emotions • Tiredness from fighting with unstable life • Like stability after special age
	Economic problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Necessity of economic independency for all people • Not having economic problem because of having job • Forced to live with a partner because of life expenses
	Patriarchal society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spain in macho • Women are not listened as men • Gender perspectives • Difficulty of singleness for women
	Stereotype view	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single women as spinsters • Underestimated • Stereotype view about single women's marriage time • Relax with myself but annoying with social view

Origen: own elaboration

In this table, we represented category of "social needs" with six subcategories and their semantic units. Next, we will do a detailed analysis of the interviews of the most significant sequences and explain all subcategories.

1- Gender equality of all people in the society

Spanish women believe that all people are the same in the society and people has to accept this issue. In this regard, some of participants' statements were:

"In our society all people work as the same rules and situation. There is no difference among women related to their marriage status. In my view single women are not a special category." (Participants No.3)

"I never judge people according to their marital status because all of us live in the society with more or less similar needs." (Participants No. 5)

2- Parent's expectations

Traditionally, parents like that their children have a partner and a baby. In the past, accepting the singleness was difficult for parents but now their view has changed. Participants said:

“In the past my parents wanted me to marry.... I have many cousins that had married and then divorced.... Now, my parent changes their view about my marriage and it is not important for them anymore.” (Participant No. 2)

“I never have told to my family that I am homosexual. Because they do not understand this issues. In fact, I protect myself mentally from my parents view.” (Participant No. 3)

“My grandmother loved that see their niece and nephew in wedding dress and she spoke about marriage with us a lot.” (Participants No. 1)

3- Need stable life

Having stable life specially in adulthood was the need of most of participants. In this regards participant declared:

“I can control my emotions. I have my job, I have income ... My life is like a calm sea. There are some waves in my life, but I can control them.” (Participant No. 1)

“I like that word be balanced, my work be balance, my life be balanced Always I am fighting about them ...” (Participant No. 4)

4- Economic Problems

Economic concerns was one of the issue that most of participants talked about it. This issue was obvious for the participants that did not stable job or enough income. Participants mentioned:

“For me economic independence is essential. Being able to support yourself, without depending on anyone, this implies enjoying the freedom. To do what you want without being accountable to anyone.” (Participant No. 5)

“I think in this world, having money is more important than anything else. I didn't want to go to the university because I wanted to have my career and money and be independent.” (Participant No. 4)

“As a single woman, one of my big worries about future is economic problems. Because life is for two persons and in this situation if you do not have stable job, in the future you face with economic problems.” (Participant No. 4)

“....One of my friend forced to live with her boyfriend because she could not pay apartment rent.” (Participant No. 4)

5- Patriarchal Society

Different view of people to women and men that arise from patriarchal view of society was another complain of Spanish women. In this regard, participants mentioned:

“... Men in my age prefer to marry with the young women. But if a women marry with the very young men, people look at her as a not wright thing” (Participants No. 2)

“If you are 40 and you need to marry or having relationship, you need to show the society that you are happy... You have to impress people with buying good

clothes, going to good restaurants, but for a man... situation is different.”
(Participant No. 2)

“If you are a woman and go to the doctor, the doctor will tell you that you have stress and anxiety but if you are a man, the doctor will make you some observations and tests... When I speak with my colleagues, they say the same.... there is a lot of social protocols that are influences the vision of the patriarchy....”
(Participant No. 1)

“... I think there is something that is going wrong; the things that are just for women. But for the men because of patriarchy of the society, they can do whatever they want. The society look them different form women. Because they have carriers and also they can have children at fifty, sixty with younger women ...” (Participant No. 1)

6- Stereotype view

Society view about single women was the issue that most of participants mentioned in the interviews. Although they were relaxed and happy with themselves, the society’s view about single women bothered them. Participants said:

“In the wedding party, some people ask me if I do not want to have children, or do not want to be mother ... These questions bother me because it makes me feeling that I am not worthy by myself if I do not have boyfriend and child.”
(Participant No. 1)

“The society vision about single women are dangerous, people think that single women are less lovely, less valuable ... may be they think we are strange.”
(Participant No. 1)

“... in the society, we are judged negatively or underestimated ...” (Participant No. 6)

In summary, we can see that never-married Spanish women faced with some problems related to the society situation, they were suffered from stereotype view and patriarchal situation of Spanish society while they believed all people in the society are equal. They had issues with traditional view of their parents to the marriage. In addition, they wanted to live in a stable situation in accordance with private life and occupation.

1.1.2. Psychological Needs

One of the main categories extracted from the Spanish participants' experiences was "Psychological Needs". This Categories included five sub-categories named "Motherhood", "Need to have partner", "Superiority of loneliness", "Independency", and "Fear". In general, we can see positive and negative psychological aspects of singleness for Spanish never-married women.

Table 4: Semantic Units and Subcategories of the "Psychological Needs" Category

Category	Subcategories	Semantic Units
Psychological Needs	Motherhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worry about not having enough biological time for having children Do not want to be mother Doubting about being mother
	Need to have partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having someone to accompany you Wish to have a partner in the future Having someone to share good thing with him Difficult to be alone
	Superiority of Loneliness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enjoying freedom Happiness of living alone Need my own space Living with parents like a big stone Liberty
	Independency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children are no guaranty for the future Able to support yourself Autonomy Independency in doing things
	Worries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worry about family health Physical or sexual violence Worries about mental health in the future

Origen: own elaboration

In this table, we represented the "psychological needs" with five subcategories and their semantic units. Following that, we will do a thorough analysis of the interviews for the most important sequences and explain all subcategories.

1- Motherhood

Having child was the issue that participants had different ideas about it. They mentioned:

"I am single women near to 40, sometimes I doubt to have baby but I do not know it is good or bad decision...." (Participant No. 1)

"I never wanted to have baby because I think I cannot deal with a baby. I think it's not necessary for all people" (Participants No. 3)

2- Need to have partner

Having somebody that speaks with him or her and sharing the life challenges was mentioned in the statements of some participants. They said:

“I like to go home every day and have someone to talk about the day ... I miss the couple life” (Participant No. 4)

“I have some friends. We are at the same age and situation. Maybe in the future, we gather in a house for not being alone.” (Participants No. 3)

“...Avoiding loneliness is very important. I believe that this is an important psychological problem at any ages.” (Participant No. 5)

“... The things that affect my mental health badly is my loneliness. This issue makes me fragile ...” (Participant No. 6)

3- Superiority of singleness

Although having a close person was the need of some Spanish women, most of them were satisfied with their singleness and look at it as an opportunity to improve their life. Participants mentioned:

“It is very easy that live single... Now, I am very happy...” (Participant 4)

“When my parents were alive did not allow me to live alone. I wanted to leave the house at 18 but I live with them and took care of them until 33. That period was very bad time in my life. It was like a big stone” (Participant No. 3)

“... You can start relationship with partner by living in a same place but I think that every women have to be single at least for two years. I know a lot of women that have relationship and they broke up then go to another relationship and so on ... I think being single is necessary.” (Participant No. 1)

“For having good connection with people, I need to be alone sometimes. I need my lonely space to charge my battery. If I can reach this charge I can be in peace with all people.” (Participants No. 1)

4- Independency

“Standing on own feet” (independency) was one of psychological needs that participants spoke about it:

“Some people think that children can take care of them at the time of aging, but it is not true. Maybe your child does not like you or live abroad. So, it is very important to dependent on yourself. I have income and I do exercise to keep myself healthy and independent to anybody in the future” (Participant No. 1)

“Being able to support yourself, without depending on anyone... this implies enjoying the freedom, to do what you want without being accountable to anyone, avoiding "guardians", I think it is essential for any woman.” (Participant No. 5)

5- Worries

Concerns or mental rumination about family or environment was the issue that women spoke about it in the interviews. These worries bothered women psychologically. In this regard, participants mentioned:

“I am satisfied of my life, but the only thing that I am worried about it is my family health, the environment, and ...” (Participant No. 5)

“One the important social problem is physical or sexual violence against women, even women that live alone... I think all women are scared of being raped” (Participant No. 1)

In summary, in this category, we can see that Spanish never-married women had some advantages and disadvantages. They doubted about being a mother. They suffered from not having an intimate and close partner and they were worried about some consequences related to their family or social condition. On the other side, they enjoyed their independent life and mentioned about the superiority of single life like freedom, which they could not have it in couple life.

1.1.3. Sexual Needs

“Sexual Needs” was one of the main categories appeared from Spanish participants' statements. This Categories included two sub-categories named "Concerns" and "Sexual needs". In general, we can see that while Spanish never-married women felt sexual needs they had some worries related to their sexual life.

Table 5: Semantic Units and Subcategories of the “Sexual Life” Category

Category	Subcategory	Semantic Units
Sexual Needs	Concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worries about having sex with not educated men • Do not have enough capacity for sex in the future • Concern about being pregnant • Men’s view about sex
	Sexual needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional connection • Limited sexual life because of not having partner • Need to have sex with stable partner • Satisfied of sexual life • Less importance of sex with passing the time • Accustomed to not having sex

Origen: own elaboration

In this table, we represented the “sexual needs” with two subcategories and their semantic units. Next, we have a detailed analysis of the interviews of the most significant sequences and explain all subcategories.

1- Concerns

Sex is an important and enjoyable thing in the life of every person. However, sometimes it can make some worries for people, especially if a person does not have a stable partner for doing it. In this regard, participants mentioned:

“In the past, I had a boyfriend and sometimes that I did not want to have sex, he told me what happen to you? You are wrong... However, it is the body... I hate to do sex with uneducated men about sexual desire of women” (Participant No. 4)

“My concern is that what will happen to my sexual power in the future. Some studies showed that physical and sexual power of women in 40 decreases. Now I am 30 and” (Participant No. 4)

“... I completely enjoy my sexual life. But my concern is about being pregnant” (Participant No. 1)

2- Sexual Needs

Sexual needs is a natural need for a human being. All Spanish participants had the experience of sex. However, with passing time or losing their sex partner they do not do it and cope with their life without sex. They said:

“Usually, I speak about sexual issues with a very close person... For me sex is an emotional connection that happen with a closed person” (Participant No. 5)

“I do not have boyfriend, because of that my shared sexual life is not rich I know that connecting with people after special time is difficult and after this age, I need somebody that be stable to my life to have sex with him...” (Participant No. 6)

“It is like a joke, but I do not remember when I did sex. In this moment, I do not have sex with any person... I think when you do not have opportunity to do a thing you used not to do it. When I had girlfriend, I did sex but now I do not have girlfriend...” (Participant No. 3)

“... I am in the age that sex is not important for me ...” (Participant No. 3)

“Although sex is an issue in the life, it is not the main thing in the life. When I was younger, I considered it but now I have other issues more important than sex” (Participant No. 2)

From a joint vision, we can conclude regarding this category and its subcategories that Spanish never-married women had some concerns in their sexual life like having sex with uneducated person or being pregnant during the sex. In addition, they were worried about their sexual abilities in the future. For some of them sex was not important (because of their age) while others considered it as an important issue in the life.

1.1.4. Medical-Biophysical Needs

The last category extracted from the Spanish participants' experiences was “Medical-Biophysical Needs”. This category included two sub-categories named "Fear of dependency in the future" and "Keeping body healthy". In general, we found here that Spanish never-married women wanted to be independent physically in the elderly ages and did the things to keep their body healthy.

Table 6: Semantic Units and Subcategories of the “Medical-Biophysical Needs” Category

Category	Subcategory	Semantic Units
Medical-Biophysical Needs	Fear of dependency in the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Afraid of losing physical health • Physical health as a concern in the future • Difficulty of disability or dependency
	Keeping body healthy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical health as main needs of people • Going to the gym • Need to support from institution for physical health • Physical health is more important than mental health in old ages • Stopping smoking • Preventing from disease in any cost • Physical health not under the social standards

Origen: own elaboration

In this table, we represented the category of “medical-biophysical needs” with two subcategories and their semantic units. After that, we will thoroughly examine the interviews pertaining to the most important sequences and provide an explanation for each subcategory.

1- Fear of dependency in the future

Physical health is very important issue in the life. Its importance is obvious when a person become old. Dependency on others in doing daily works was the scare of single women in the study. They mentioned:

“.... I am going to be old.... As an alone women, always I am worry of my physical health in the future” (Participant No. 6)

“One of my concerns about future is my physics because after 40 usually my body will be down” (Participant No. 4)

“Always, I think about my physical health because I do not want to be a disable and dependent women. It is very hard to me to accept that someone do everything for me. May be children can help or take care of the parent, but I am single and do not have a child.” (Participant No. 1)

2- Keeping body healthy

In the study, participants mentioned that they did anything to keep their body healthy. They stopped smoking, went to the gym, and did check-up ... Some of their statements are as follows:

“For me, physical health is a main and basic health. As a single woman, I never want to suffer from any disease. In the past, I was smoking but since some years ago, I stopped it because my physical health is important for me” (Participant No. 5)

“In my view, in old ages, physical health is more important than mental health. Every day, I go to the gym because I want to keep my body healthy and I do not want to be dependent on anybody in the future” (Participant No. 3)

“Keeping myself healthy is very important for me. I go to the checkup, I prevent to be sick, and I try to save my health in any cost” (Participant No. 1)

Here we can conclude regarding to this category and its subcategories that the most important thing related to physical health for never-married women is that they tried to keep their body healthy because they did not want to have disability in the old ages and be dependent on other people.

1.2. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF DATA FOR IRANIAN WOMEN

In general, we extracted 367 codes, 15 subcategories and 4 categories from Iranian interviews. Here we present and comment in details the different data.

Table 7: Individual-Social Characteristics of Iranian Participants

Number	Age	Education	Job	Living Status
1	38	Bachelor	Clerk	Living with Family
2	40	Bachelor	Clerk	Living with Family
3	52	Bachelor	Retired	Living Alone
4	39	High School Diploma	Teacher of Quran	Living with Family
5	40	Bachelor	Clerk	Living with Family
6	41	Doctorate	Professor	Living with Family

Origen: own elaboration

In table 7, we can see the individual-social characteristics of Iranian never-married women. As it is shown in the table, six Iranian women took part in the interviews. Their age was between 38 to 52 years old. The majority of them had university degree (four bachelor's degree and one Ph.D. degree) while just one had a high school diploma. They were in different socio-economic condition as they had different jobs such as clerk, teacher of Quran, and professor. One woman was retired, too. The majority of women lived with their families and just one of them live alone because she had lost her parents.

Table 8 contains the subcategories and categories that extracted from Iranian participants' interviews.

Table 8: Subcategories and Categories Extracted from Iranian Participants' Interviews

Subcategories	Categories	Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stigma of being single • Stereotype thinking of people including gender • Failure to provide reproductive health services • Need to set up partner-finding centers for singles • Need for skills to live alone • Need for financial support 	Social Needs	Never-married women's Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of emotional support • Insecurity • More opportunity for life • Acceptance of singleness • Motherhood 	Psychological Needs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern of meeting sexual needs • Forced to ignore sexual needs 	Sexual Needs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of emerging disease • Fear of disability without a supporter 	Medical-Biophysical Needs	

Origen: own elaboration

In this table, we had four categories including 1. "social needs category" (subcategories contains "Stigma of being single", "stereotype thinking of people including gender", "failure to provide reproductive health services", "need to set up partner-finding centers for singles", "need for skills to live alone", and "need for financial support"); 2. "psychological needs category" (subcategories contains "lack of emotional support", "insecurity", "more opportunity for life", "acceptance of singleness", and "motherhood"); 3. "sexual needs categories" (subcategories contains "concern of meeting sexual needs" and "forced to ignore sexual needs"); and 4. "medical-biophysical needs category" (subcategories contains "fear of emerging disease" and "fear of disability without a supporter"). All categories and subcategories will be explained in detail as following:

1.2.1. Social Needs

One of the main categories extracted from the Iranian participants' experiences was "Social Issues". This Category included seven sub-categories named "Stigma of being single", "Stereotype thinking of people", "Failure to provide reproductive health services without judgement", "Need to set-up partner finding center for singles", "Need for skills to live alone", "Parents expectation", and "Need for financial support". In general, the subcategories indicate the challenges that never-married women face in the society.

Table 9: Semantic Units and Subcategories of the "Social Needs" Category

Category	Subcategories	Semantic Units
Social Needs	Stigma of being single	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural issues as a reason for why women don't get married • Changing the culture in the direction of happy life for single women • Married women worry about living together with unmarried women
	Stereotype thinking of people including gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-suppression in public due to the stigma of being single • Being bothered by the looks of others
	Failure to provide reproductive health services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worrying about the society's ridicule when single women go to the gynecologist • Bad view of health staff on never-married women
	Need to set-up partner finding center for singles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to create a matchmaking company • Need for a safe place to find single men looking for marriage
	Need for skills to live alone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for a program to support the mental health of never-married women • Need for training to manage life's needs
	Parent's expectation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nagging about daughter's situation • Disappointing of parents from their single children
	Need for financial support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need government support for having a shelter • Need for social support for financial problems • Need for insurance support

Origen: own elaboration

In this table, we represented category of "social needs" with six subcategories and their semantic units. Next, we will do a detailed analysis of the interviews of the most significant sequences and explain all subcategories.

1- Stigma of being single

In traditional societies that marriage is highly valued, one of the people believes is that all people should marry and people that do not marry can harm other people's life. In this regard, participants mentioned:

"In public, when I say that I'm not married, people totally change their opinions about me ... They think I must have a problem that I'm single." (Participants No. 4)

"I never talk in public, especially if there is a group of women and men, because people say she is rude and wants show herself off." (Participant No. 5)

2- Stereotypical thinking of people including gender

Another issue that never-married women face with and married people scare of their manner was the stereotypic view of people about these women. Participants mentioned:

"One day I was in the mosque. The religion women asked me why you are single... If you respect to the religion, you must marry." (Participant No. 1)

"When people know a single woman lives in an apartment, they have negative opinions about her; they think that their husbands are in danger..." (Participant No. 3)

3- Failure to provide reproductive health services

Beside the bad view of society, some health staff are not good view to never-married women, too. Participants said:

"Although I believe that all women should have routine check-up, when I go to the gynecologist office, I don't say I am single." (Participant No. 3)

"Once when I went to the hospital for my vaginal infection, the ladies asked me why you got the infection!?" (Participants No. 1)

4- Need to set up partner-finding centers for singles

In a society that men has to propose women and using app for finding partner is forbidden, usually women want somebody helps them to find a good husband for them. Participants revealed:

"If I were a policymaker, I would create a series of centers where psychologists would talk to single women separately and single men separately. So that they can get to know each other from the psychological and personal aspects, and after expressing their own opinion, introduce those who are more compatible with each other." (Participant No. 1)

5- Need for skills to live alone

Although singleness is not a new issue in the societies, but the number of single people is increased and in traditional countries, people do not have any experience about it before, so they need to have some education about this kind of new life. In this regard, participants mentioned:

“In my opinion, an association should be formed that educates single people about life and explain a new culture for them. Because in the next years we will have many never-married women.” (Participant No. 6)

“... When a person has no way to get married, but she needs sex, what does she do? I wish someone would put a solution in front of us.” (Participant No 1)

6- Parent’s expectation

In Iran that marriage in a traditional norm, parents expect that their children must marry. Therefore, if this does not happen, they become worried. Participants mentioned:

“.. My mom all the time nag about my situation. She just wants that I marry, while I am satisfied my single life ...” (Participant No. 5)

“Before, my parents spoke with me a lot but now they accept my singleness...” (Participant No. 1)

7- Need for financial support

This feeling was one of the feelings that was seen in the participants who did not have a stable job and enough income and who were financially dependent on others. In addition, the participants stated that they need to receive pension in old age. They mentioned:

“I am worried financially. I do not have a stable income and how long my mom can support me. Maybe I die before my mother, but what happen if my mom die ...” (Participant No. 4)

“If I was a parliament man, the first thing I would do for these women would insure them all, medically and financially.” (Participant No. 6)

“The first need of a single woman is job and income. Because nobody want to be a burden to her father and God forbidden to be a burden to the siblings.” (Participant No. 2)

Summarizing the data of the section of “Social Needs” for Iranian women gives us the idea that these women faced with many problems in the society. Iranian women were suffered a lot about the stereotype view and stigma related to their marital situation. They did not want to be judged when search reproductive health service. They mentioned that they need to take part in some courses to learn how to live alone and they wanted opportunities for dating with single men. They had challenges with their parents about their single situation and they had economic worries and would like to get financial help from the government.

1.2.2. Psychological Needs

Another main category extracted from the Iranian participants' experiences was "Psychological Needs". This Categories included five sub-categories named "Lack of emotional support", "Insecurity", "More opportunity for life", "Acceptance of singleness", and "Motherhood". In general, we can see positive and negative psychological aspects of singleness for Iranian never-married women.

Table 10: Semantic Units and Subcategories of the "Psychological Needs" Category

Category	Subcategories	Semantic Units
Psychological Needs	Lack of emotional support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to love and be loved • Speak with God because of not having a life partner • Need marriage for having a companion
	Insecurity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worrying about being burdened on others due to not having married life • Feeling guilty for disobeying God's commandment regarding marriage • Regret seeing the life of married people • Feeling psychological pressure due to not having a spouse
	More opportunity for life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic progress and financial support • Avoiding the troubles of married life • Comfort and independence with singleness
	Acceptance of singleness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Singleness is the God's will and destiny • Enjoying singleness because of having family and good friends
	Motherhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to become a mother • Praying for marriage in order to have a child before the end of the fertile period • Motherhood is the nature of all women • Need to have a child to love him/her

Origen: own elaboration

In this table, we represented the "psychological needs" with five subcategories and their semantic units. In the following, we will analyze the interview and explain all subcategories.

1- Lack of emotional support

Need a companion was one of the worries and mental rumination that the vast majority of single never-married Iranian women mentioned in their interviews. They wanted to get married to have a body closed to them. They usually talked to themselves or to God because they did not have a companion. They told that:

"... When you reach to 40- 45, you need a companion ... you have done all your education, you have your job, you have money, you just need a companion to talk. Now, all your friends have married and have their life and you are alone" (Participant No. 6)

"Well, someone who has a husband is very different from a woman who always goes to work and comes back to home. When you are alone, you tell your problems to yourself or tell them to God and pray." (Participant No. 3)

2- Insecurity

Psychological pressures were the issues that participants mentioned in their interviews. They were worried, disappointed and felt guilty. They declared:

"Sometimes I feel that I am a burden on my brother. I see that everyone goes somewhere with their own families, but I go with my brother and his wife. I think with myself, why should I bother them?" (Participant No. 2)

"We even injured ourselves by not getting married. In addition to not listening to God's comments, we denied ourselves the pleasure of sex which was our right. I only ask God to forgive me." (Participant No. 4)

"I don't have a problem with being single, the only thing that bothers me is that when I enter a party or family, friend meeting, I see all people come with their spouse and I'm alone ... (Participant No. 5)

"A woman has a delicate feeling and a man can give her a feeling of security from an emotional point of view." (Participant No. 1)

3- More Opportunity for life

Some participants were satisfied of their single life, specially who had good income. They look at singleness as an opportunity. They mentioned:

"Marriage is like a dessert beside your food, and it is not the main dish. For example, if your dessert is good, you will enjoy it, but if your dessert is bad, you will remove it from your meal and you will not miss your main meal." (Participant No. 1)

"I am very comfortable in my life; I go wherever I like, and I do whatever I want easily and carefree. I am very comfortable in the life." (Participant No. 3)

4- Acceptance of singleness

When single women cannot change their marriage status, they accept it and try to cope with it. For example, they go to the gym, do the thing that make them happy and ... In this regard, participants mentioned:

"In my opinion, a person should reach that intellectual maturity and prosperity that goes towards self-fulfillment, not to be sad and depressed because of singleness." (Participant No. 6)

“Single people gradually get used to single life. They considered the passage of time and constant neglect of their needs to be the most important reason for getting used to be alone. One of the reasons for coping with singleness is having good friends and family.” (Participant No. 2)

“Because I am a person who wants to enjoy the moment, I enjoy the relationships that I have with my friends or with my family; therefore, I am very satisfied with my situation.” (Participant No. 3)

5- Motherhood

According to the participants statements, becoming a mother is one of the natural needs of every woman, and that having a child not only makes a woman feel useful, but also makes the feeling of having a supporter in her old ages. Participants mentioned:

“In our usual life, when parents get old, children take care of them. So we need to get married and have children in order to have someone to take care of us in the future.” (Participant No. 2)

“...In the university students surround me, they call me professor, but I wish someone would call me “mom” instead ...” (Participant No. 6)

In conclusion referred to the section of Psychological Needs, we can underline that for the group of Iranian women investigated, singleness had some advantages and disadvantages. They suffered from not having a husband in their life and were worried about being burden to the family. They wanted to be mother, but they could not and this bothered them. On the other side, they accepted singleness and were happy about some opportunities that singleness had brought them such as comfortable life (without having married life’s responsibilities).

1.2.3. Sexual Needs

Sexual needs was another category extracted from the Iranian participants' experiences. This category includes two sub-categories named "Concern of meeting sexual needs", and "Forced to ignore sexual needs". In general, we can see that Iranian never-married women had worries if they responded to their sexual needs and they ignored the sexual needs.

Table 11: Semantic Units and Subcategories of the "Sexual Needs" Category

Category	Subcategories	Semantic Units
Sexual Needs	Concern of meeting sexual needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual relationships • Temporary marriage to satisfy sexual needs • Masturbation • Not having sex causes concern about losing beauty
	Forced to ignore sexual needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreased sexual desire due to not having sex • Suppression of sexual need by not responding to it • Control sexual desire by turning to religious practices

Origen: own elaboration

In this table, we represented the "sexual needs" with two subcategories and their semantic units. Subsequently, we will explain each subcategory and do a thorough analysis of the interviews pertaining to the most significant sequences.

1- Concern of meeting sexual needs

Sexual need is one of the needs that cannot be easily ignored, and therefore responding to it is important for a person. Sexual need is a psychological and internal need. According to some participants, not fulfilling this need causes mental and physical problems in people. Some statements of the participants were as follows:

"When a woman does not have sex, her body's sexual hormones run out quickly. This makes me sad that estrogen in my body is less than that of a married woman. Estrogen is not only for the health of uterus and vagina, it is important for the beauty of the skin ... Maybe this is one of the reasons why I am in favor of masturbating, because with masturbation, at least the estrogen in my body does not decrease quickly." (Participant No. 1)

"I know a woman who is old, and she is "Sigheh"¹³ of a man. She said "I really needed sex because I could not focus on my work. I didn't have any financial need, but when I saw a man holding his wife's hand on the street, I wanted to shout why I do not have somebody to touch or have sex with me". (Participant No. 4)

¹³ Sigheh is a kind of religious marriage in Islam that does not register in governmental marriage office. In fact, it is a contract for sex between man and woman. Although this kind of marriage is not acceptable in public in Iran, it is completely legal. According to this marriage, people can become Sigheh for one hour or for years. In this kind of marriage (contract) women must do sex with man and man have to pay money to woman.

2- Forced to ignore sexual needs

This subcategory is the second subcategory of "Sexual Issue". Women who do not find a way to satisfy their sexual needs, and on the other hand, have not found a suitable case for marriage, try not to pay attention to their need. Participants said about this:

"In my opinion, sex is not a very important issue for a woman who is getting older. First of all, we do not have a husband to fulfill this need, second, we are not sexually active like married women ... and our need disappears sooner..." (Participant No. 5)

"Some years ago, when I was in mid cycle of my monthly period, I feel sexual need a lot. That time I met a gynecologist, and she recommended me to do exercise in these times.... Now, I do not pay attention to my needs and do exercise or preoccupy myself with work" (Participant No. 6)

From a joint vision, we can conclude regarding this category and its subcategories that although Iranian never-married women wanted to have sex, they could not. They were worried about consequences of not having sex in the longtime. At the final, they did not any choice except ignoring their sexual feelings.

1.2.4. Medical-Biophysical Needs

This category in a wide medical sense included two subcategories of “Fear of emerging disease” and “Fear of disability without a supporter”. In general, we found here that Iranian never-married women scared about diseases that can be appear in old ages and were worried about being disable without having any support in elderly years.

Table 12: Semantic Units and Subcategories of the “Medical-Biophysical Needs” Category

Category	Subcategories	Semantic Units
Medical-Biophysical Needs	Fear of emerging disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worrying about cancer due to lack of screening • Fear of getting sick in old age
	Fear of disability without a supporter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worrying about physical health with passing time • Worry about lack of peace due to not having a spouse • Living with friends to escape loneliness

Origen: own elaboration

Table 12 shows represented the category of “medical-biophysical needs” with two subcategories and their semantic units. Following that, we will do a thorough analysis of the interviews from the most significant sequences and explain all subcategories.

1- Fear of emerging disease

Emerging disease due to old age was another concern of women. In this regard, they said:

“All the times I scare of dangerous disease because it will make me more disable.” (Participant No 3)

“I had cancer before... I know how it is difficult specially if you are an alone woman. I pray not to be sick anymore.” (Participant No. 2)

2- Fear of disability without a supporter

Aging was one of the main concerns of participants. One of the most important reasons for this concern was not having a husband or family and becoming more lonely with the passage the time. Participants mentioned:

“... I do not have children now. I don't know who I should take refuge in, when I am old and disable.” (Participant No. 1)

“When a person gets older, the people around her diminished and she becomes more alone” (Participant No. 4)

Here we can conclude regarding to this category and its subcategories that the most important worries for Iranian women related to their physical health were fear of getting cancer in old ages because they scared of disability without having a supporter.

1. ANALYSIS OF DATA IN QUALITATIVE PHASE

In this section, we analyzed the qualitative data that we had extracted from interviews of Spanish and Iranian never-married women. In the next section, we will analyze the quantitative data that we had gathered from researcher-developed questionnaire for Spanish-Galician never-married women.

2. ANALYSIS OF DATA IN THE QUANTITATIVE PHASE FOR SPANISH-GALICIAN WOMEN

In this section, the results of the second phase of the study (quantitative phase) are presented. These findings are presented in order to achieve the goal of the quantitative part of research, "sexual, social, and psychological-medical needs of Spanish women".

The results in the quantitative phase are referred to the previous explained included seven categories: "Social Issues", "Psychological Needs", "Acceptance of Singleness", "Sexual Issues", "Bio-medical Needs", "Economic Issues" and "Reasons of Singleness". The 13 shows the developed questionnaire with the categories and items. You can see the questionnaire in the "Appendix" part at the end of thesis.

2. ANALYSIS OF DATA IN THE QUANTITATIVE PHASE FOR SPANISH-GALICIAN WOMEN

Table 13: Categories and Items of the Questionnaire

Categories	Statements
Social issues	<p>1. I refuse to participate in ceremonies and events due to concern for the words and views of others.</p> <p>2. Patriarchal view of society are annoying for me.</p> <p>3. I do not like that people ask about my partnership situation.</p>
Psychological needs	<p>4. I think, I will be more complete and more full-fledged with marriage.</p> <p>5. Because of loneliness, I keep myself busy with others. *</p> <p>6. I get married to get rid of loneliness. *</p> <p>7. I want to have someone to love and he loves me.</p> <p>8. There will no one in old age to support me and I may be a burden to others.</p> <p>9. I miss married life.</p> <p>10. I always think about my past. *</p> <p>11. I get lonelier as I get older.</p> <p>12. With passing of time, I am worried about going through menopause without being a mother.</p> <p>13. I hope to get married in the future.</p> <p>14. I have become lonelier after breaking up with my boyfriend. *</p> <p>15. My life has become monotonous. *</p> <p>16. I need to have stable life (emotionally and economically)</p> <p>17. I have planned to live with my friends for overcoming loneliness in the future.</p>
Acceptance of singleness	<p>18. I feel happy and cheerful.</p> <p>19. I live comfortably because I do not have the worries and problems of married people.</p> <p>20. I enjoy my single life because of having family and friend.</p> <p>21. Over time, I have accustomed to celibacy and loneliness. *</p> <p>22. I have taken refuge in my job and education in my life.*</p>
Sexual issues	<p>23. I feel bad after masturbating.*</p> <p>24. I get nervous about not being able to meet my sexual needs.</p> <p>25. I am worried about having sex.</p> <p>26. With passing time, it is easy for me to control my sexual needs.</p>
Bio-medical needs	<p>27. I always like to look young and beautiful.</p> <p>28. I save my physical health because I do not want to be a disable and dependent women in the future.</p> <p>29. It is easy for me to go by a doctor to treat gynecological disease.</p>
Economic issues	<p>30. I need government support to provide the living expenses.*</p> <p>31. I have economic and financial worries.</p>
Reasons of	<p>32. I could not marry because I did not find my love.</p>

Singleness	33. I did not marry because I am at a higher level in education and job than the most men.*
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*Extracted from literature review

Origen: own elaboration

In the following, we will focus on the results obtained from socio-economic and characteristics of participants and also results that obtained in the different items of the questionnaire.

2. ANALYSIS OF DATA IN THE QUANTITATIVE PHASE FOR SPANISH-GALICIAN WOMEN

In the present quantitative part of the study, the maximum age of participants was 58 and the minimum age was 30. The mean (Standard Deviation) of participants were 40.7 (6.7).

In the following, there are tables and Pie charts of socio-demographic characteristics of participants. The distribution corresponds approximately to the structural socio-demographic distribution of Galicia. The tables in this part contains data about “living place”, “Education level”, “Occupations”, “Income”, and “Living status” of participants.

In the following, we will discuss all the tables in details.

Table 14: Residency of the Participants

Residency	Frequency (%)
Big Cities	11 (11)
Small Cities	64 (64)
Suburb	25 (25)

Origen: own elaboration

Table 14 represents the “residency place of participants”. We divided the residency place to three categories of “big cities”, “small cities”, and “suburb”. The data shows that majority of participants (64%) lived in small cities, the minimum amount of participants lived in big cities (11%), and 25% of them lived in suburbs.

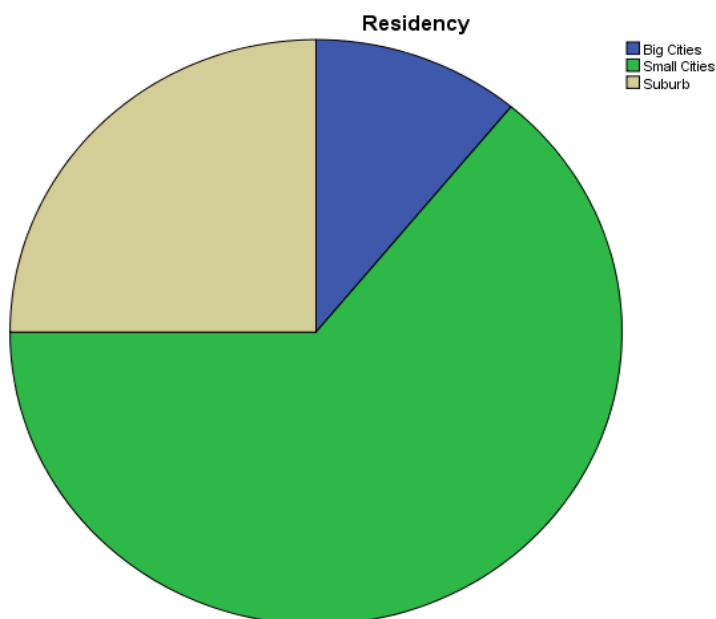


Figure 3: Pie Chart of Residency of the participants in Quantitative Phase

Origen: own elaboration

Figure 3 gives the idea about “residency place of participants”. As it discussed in the table 14, this pie-chart shows that majority of participants (green zone) were lived in small cities while minority of them were lived in big cities (blue part).

Table 15: Education Level of the Participants

Education	Frequency (%)
High School	7 (7)
Diploma	9 (9)
University	84 (84)

Origen: own elaboration

Table 15 represents the “educational level of participants”. In this table, participants were divided to three categories including “high school”, “diploma”, and “university”. According to the table, majority of participants, (84%) had university degree. 7% of them had high school degree and 9% had diploma.

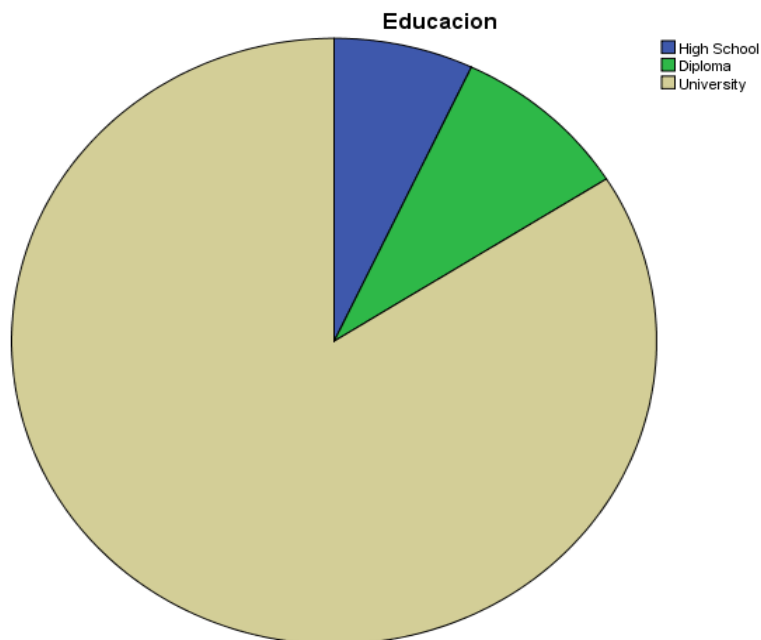


Figure 4: Pie Chart of Education Level of the participants in Quantitative Phase

Origen: own elaboration

Figure 4 shows the “education level of the participants” in a pie chart. According to this figure, the majority of participants had university degree (gray zone), and approximately, the number of participants with high school degree and diploma were the same.

2. ANALYSIS OF DATA IN THE QUANTITATIVE PHASE FOR SPANISH-GALICIAN WOMEN

Table 16: Occupation of the Participants

Job	Frequency (%)
Without job	20 (20)
Worker	14 (14)
Employed	48 (48)
Businessmen and managers	18 (18)

Origen: own elaboration

In relationship with the occupation, represented in Table 16, participants were divided to four categories of “without job”, “workers”, “employed”, and “businessmen and managers”. The table stand out the majority of participants (48%) were employed. 20% of them did not have any job. 14% were workers and 18% were occupied in a high-level job (businessmen and managers).

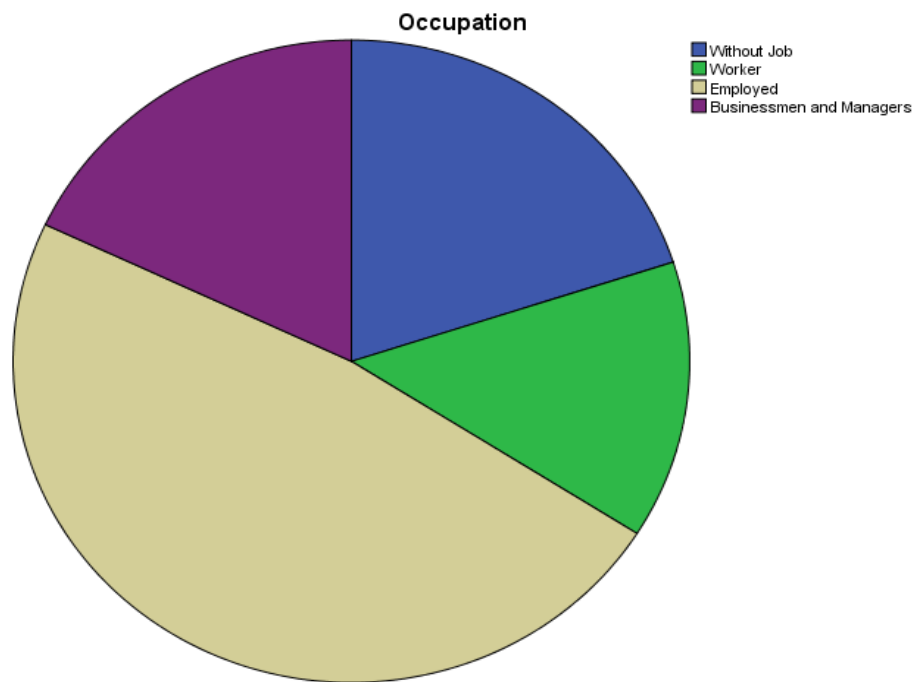


Figure 5: Pie Chart of Occupation of the participants in Quantitative Phase

Origen: own elaboration

In the figure 5 that represents the “occupation” of participants in pie chart, majority of participants were employed (gray zone), and the amount of women without any job, workers and businessmen and managers were the same, approximately.

Table 17: Income of the Participants

Income	Frequency (%)
High	21 (21)
Medium	56 (56)
Low	23 (23)

Origen: own elaboration

Table 17 shows the “income” of participants in three categories of “high”, “medium”, and “low” level. According to the table, 56% of participants (the majority) had a medium level of income, while 23% had low income and 21% had high income.

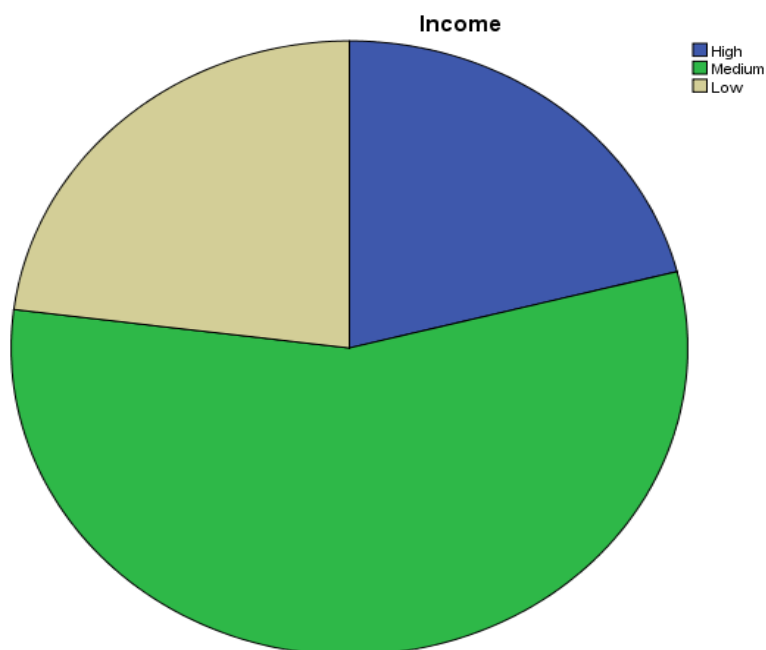


Figure 6: Pie Chart of Residency of the participants in Quantitative Phase

Origen: own elaboration

Figure 6 represents the income level of participants in a pie chart. According to this chart, high number of participants (green zone) had medium level of income. While the number of women with low level and high level were nearly the same.

2. ANALYSIS OF DATA IN THE QUANTITATIVE PHASE FOR SPANISH-GALICIAN WOMEN

Table 18: Living Status of the Participants

Living Status	Frequency (%)
Family	7 (7)
Friends	12 (12)
Alone	81 (81)

Origen: own elaboration

Also interesting is the “living status of participants” which is presented in the table 18. According to data, the majority of women (81%) lived alone. While 12% lived with friends and just 7% of them lived with the family.

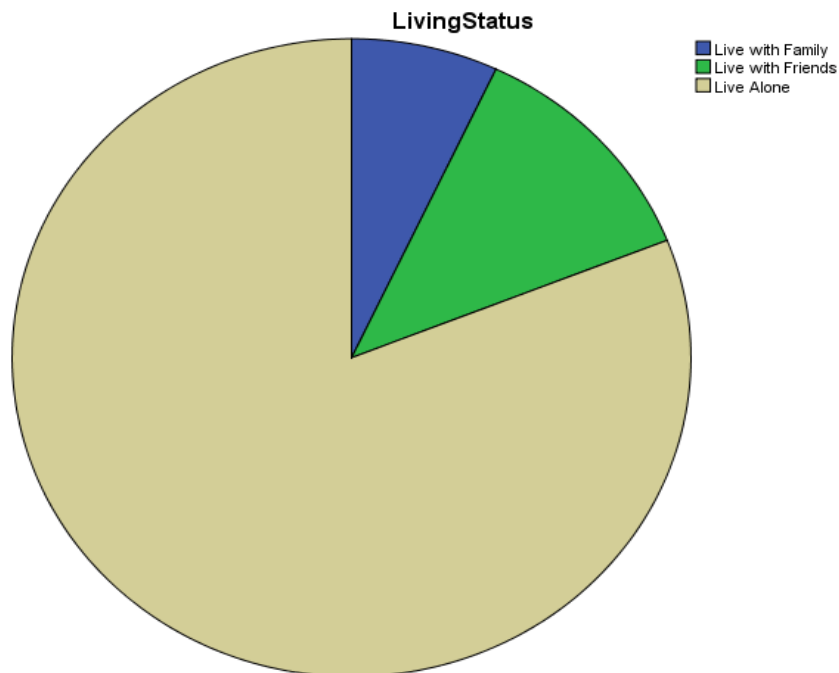


Figure 7: Pie Chart of Living Status of participants in Quantitative Phase

Origen: own elaboration

Figure 7 shows the “living status” of participants in a pie chart. This figure shows that the high amount of women (gray zone) lived alone. Some of them (green zone) lived with family and minority of them lived with family (blue zone).

Table 19 showed the percentage of answers to each statement in the developed questionnaire. This table contained 33 statements according to seven categories (Social Issues, Psychological Needs, Acceptance of Singleness, Sexual Issues, Bio-medical Needs, Economic Issues and Reasons of Singleness). Participants answered to the questionnaire according to 5-Likert scale (completely agree, agree, no idea, disagree, completely disagree). In this part, we calculated the percentage of all answers of participants, using SPSS. The detailed explanation of table is available in the next page.

Table 19: The Percentage of Answers to Each Statement in the Questionnaire

No	Questions	Completely Agree	Agree	No Idea	Disagree	Completely Disagree
1	I refuse to participate in ceremonies and events due to concern for the words and views of others.	2%	8%	1%	18%	71%
2	Patriarchal view of society is annoying for me.	32%	44%	2%	8%	14%
3	I do not like that people ask about my partnership situation.	24%	31%	18%	13%	14%
4	I think, I will be completer and more full-fledged with marriage.	10%	20%	12%	24%	34%
5	Because of loneliness, I keep myself busy with others.	10%	30%	7%	25%	28%
6	I get married to get rid of loneliness.	10%	17%	3%	20%	50%
7	I want to have someone to love, and he loves me.	45%	22%	8%	8%	17
8	There will no one in old age to support me and I may be a burden to others.	9%	18%	41%	15%	17%
9	I miss married life.	9%	16%	12%	16%	47%
10	I always think about my past.	6%	25%	3%	27%	39%
11	I get lonelier as I get older.	18%	15%	10%	21%	36%
12	With passing of time, I am worried about going through menopause without being a mother.	20%	19%	4%	22%	35%
13	I hope to get married in the future.	30%	14%	24%	10%	22%
14	I have become lonelier after breaking up with my boyfriend.	14%	16%	12%	24%	34%
15	My life has become monotonous.	12%	17%	5%	29%	37%
16	I need to have stable life (emotionally and economically)	31%	37%	10%	9%	13%
17	I have planned to live with my friends for overcoming loneliness in the future.	8%	19%	8%	19%	46%
18	I feel happy and cheerful.	38%	41%	9%	8%	4%

2. ANALYSIS OF DATA IN THE QUANTITATIVE PHASE FOR SPANISH-GALICIAN WOMEN

19	I live comfortably because I do not have the worries and problems of married people.	23%	41%	12%	16%	8%
20	I enjoy my single life because of having family and friend.	56%	29%	3%	8%	4%
21	Over time, I have accustomed to celibacy and loneliness.	52%	22%	10%	8%	8%
22	I have taken refuge in my job and education in my life.	16%	23%	5%	34%	22%
23	I feel bad after masturbating.	0%	11%	5%	17%	67%
24	I get nervous about not being able to meet my sexual needs.	13%	14%	8%	19%	46%
25	I am worried about having sex.	8%	18%	3%	18%	53%
26	With passing time, it is easy for me to control my sexual needs.	24%	18%	16%	33%	9%
27	I always like to look young and beautiful.	34%	8%	10%	34%	14%
28	I save my physical health because I do not want to be a disable and dependent women in the future.	39%	27%	16%	15%	3%
29	It is easy for me to go by a doctor to treat gynecological disease.	65%	18%	3%	8%	6%
30	I need government support to provide the living expenses.	6%	11%	0%	24%	59%
31	I have economic and financial worries.	14%	17%	5%	15%	49%
32	I could not marry because I did not find my love.	23%	18%	23%	16%	20%
33	I did not marry because I am at a higher level in education and job than the most men.	15%	13%	18%	18%	36%

Origen: own elaboration

The detailed interpretation of table 19 is as follows:

1. The first statement was “I refuse to participate in ceremonies and events due to concern for the words and views of others”. As you see, 8% of participants were completely agree and 2% were agree, while 71% of them were completely disagree and 18% were disagree. In addition, 1% of participants did not have any idea. As a conclusion, most of participants (87%) did not agree and just 10% were agree with the phrase that shows the most of never-married Spanish women did not believe to the words of people and took parts in ceremonies and events.
2. In second statement including “Patriarchal view of society is annoying for me.”, 44% of participants were chosen agree option and 32% were completely agree with statement. In addition, 14% of the participants were completely disagree and 8% were disagree. Also 2% of participants did not have any idea. Cumulatively for this phrase, 55% of women were agree and 22% were disagree which shows that patriarchal view of society bothered them.

3. Third statement were “I do not like that people ask me about my partnership situation”. In this place, 24% of women were completely agree and 31% were agree. On the other side, 14% participants were completely disagree and 13% were disagree. In addition, 18% women put no idea answer for this phrase. To sum it up, For this statement 55% women were agree and 27% were disagree, that shows the majority of never-married Spanish women did not like that people ask them about their marital status.
4. In the fourth statement “I think, I will be completer and more full-fledged with marriage”, 34% women were completely disagree and 24% were disagree, while on the other side, 10% of them were completely agree and 20% were agree. Also, 12% of women did not have any idea about this statement. According to the answers, we can say 58% of women had agree idea and 30% had disagree idea which shows the majority of them felt that marriage help them to become complete in the life.
5. The fifth statement including “Because of loneliness, I keep myself busy with others”. For this phrase, 10% women were completely agree and 30% were agree. In addition, 28% women were completely disagree and 25% were disagree. Among all participants, 7% participants did not have any idea. Cumulatively, we can say 40% of women were agree and 53% were disagree, which shows never-married women did not make themselves busy with others because they feel they are alone.
6. The sixth phrase was “I get married to get rid of loneliness”. For this statement, 10% of women were completely agree, 17% were agree, 50% were completely disagree, 20% were disagree, and 3% were neutral. It means that 27% women accept this statement while 70% did not accept it. It shows that the majority of participants never wanted to marry just for not being alone.
7. The seventh statement was “I want to have someone to love, and he loves me”. In this phrase, 45% chose completely agree, 22% chose agree, 17% chose completely disagree, 8% chose disagree response and 8% chose no idea option. Cumulatively, 67% women were agree, 39% were disagree, and it shows that majority of them wanted to have a love in their life.
8. With the eighth statement “There will no one in old age to support me and I may be a burden to others”, 9% were completely agree, 18% were agree. In addition, 17% were completely disagree and 15% were disagree. In addition, 45% women did not had any idea. To sum it up, 27% women were agree, 32% were disagree. The important thing was that the majority of women (45%) did not have any idea which shows that they did not think about the future and for them having supporter in the future and being burden to others were not an issue in current life.
9. Ninth phrase was “I miss married life”. For this statement, 9% of participants were completely agree, 16% were agree, 47% were completely disagree and 16% were disagree, and 12% declare that they did not have any idea. Therefore, we can note that majority of women (63%) did not miss married life and just 28% miss it.
10. In the tenth statement “I always think about my past”, 6% of women answered completely agree, 25% women answered agree, 39% women answered completely disagree, and 27% women answered disagree. Also, 3% of women did not have any idea. In conclusion, 31% participants thought about past while majority (66%) did not think about the past.
11. The eleventh statement that says, “I get lonelier as I get older”, 18% women chose completely agree option, 15% women chose agree, 36% chose completely disagree, 21% chose disagree and 10% chose no idea option. It means that majority of women

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(57%) were disagree with the statement and 33% thought that with getting older, they become lonelier.

12. The twelfth statement were “With passing of time, I am worried about going through menopause without being a mother”. For this statement, 20% of women were completely agree, 19% were agree, 35% were completely disagree and 22% were disagree. In addition, 4% of women did not have any idea. Cumulatively, it can be mentioned that 39% women were not worried about getting menopause without being a mother while 57% were worried about this issue.
13. The thirteenth phrase was “I hope to get married in the future”. 30% women were completely agree, 14% were agree, 22% were completely disagree, 10% were disagree and 24% did not have idea, which shows that majority of women (44%) wanted to marry while 32% did not want to marry in the future.
14. In the fourteenth statement “I have become lonelier after breaking up with my boyfriend”, 14% participants were chosen completely agree option, 16% were chosen agree option, and 34% and 24% were chosen completely disagree and disagree options, respectively. In addition, 12% of participants did not have any idea. It means that 30% of participants felt loneliness after breaking up with boyfriend while 56% did not have this feeling.
15. The fifteenth statement was “My life has become monotonous”. For this statement, 12% of women were completely agree, 17% of women were agree. In addition, 37% of women were completely disagree and 29% were disagree. In this statement, 5% of women did not have any idea. Cumulatively, 29% women believed that their life was monotonous because of their single status and majority (66%) of women disagreed with this idea.
16. With sixteenth statement “I need to have stable life (emotionally and economically)”, 31% of women were completely agree, 37% of women were agree, which means 68% of women would like to have stable life. Also, 13% of women were completely disagree and 9% of women were disagree, cumulatively 24% of participants did not want to have stable life or think that their life is stable, enough. In addition, 10% women did not put any idea about this statement.
17. Statement seventeenth were “I have planned to live with my friends for overcoming loneliness in the future”. For this statement, 8% of participants were completely agree, 18% agree, 46% completely disagree, 19% disagree, and 8% no idea. It can be resulted that majority of participants (65%) did not want to live with boyfriend for overcoming loneliness while 26% wanted to live with a boyfriend.
18. “I feel happy and cheerful” was the eighteenth statement. For this statement, 38% of never-married women were chosen option completely agree, 41% were chosen agree which showed that majority (79%) of participants were happy in their life. On the other hand, 4% women were completely disagree and 8% women were disagree which means 12% of women were unhappy in their life. In this statement, 9% participants were chosen “no idea” option.
19. The statement nineteen was “I live comfortably because I do not have the worries and problems of married people”. In this phrase, 24% of women were completely agree, 41% of women were agree, 8% of women were completely disagree, 16% of women were disagree, and 12% of women did not have any idea. We can say that majority (65%) of women felt comfortable because did not have responsibility of married life and just 24% of women were not comfortable in their single life.

20. The statement twenty was “I enjoy my single life because of having family and friend”. For this phrase, 56% of women were completely agree, 29% were agree, 4% were completely disagree, 8% disagree, and 3% did not have an idea. As a result, 85% of women were happy in their single life because they had family and friend while 12% were not happy.
21. The twenty-first statement was “Over time, I have accustomed to celibacy and loneliness”. As you can see in the table, 52% of participants were completely agree, 22% were agree with this statement, while 8% were completely disagree and 8% were disagree. In addition, 10% of participants did not have any idea. As a conclusion, most of participants (74%) were used to live alone.
22. In twenty-second statement including “I have taken refuge in my job and education in my life”, 16% of participants were chosen completely agree option and 23% were agree with statement. In addition, 22% of participants were completely disagree and 34% were disagree. Also 5% of participants did not have any idea. Cumulatively, for this phrase 39% of women were agree and 56% were disagree which shows majority of participants did not refuge in their job and education (because of having single life).
23. Twenty-third statement were “I feel bad after masturbating”. In this place, 0% of women were completely agree and 11% were agree. On the other side, 67% of participants were completely disagree and 17% were disagree. In addition, 5% of women put no idea answer for this phrase. To sum it up, For this statement, the most number of women (84%) were agree and 11% were disagree, that shows the majority of never-married Spanish women did not have bad feeling after masturbation.
24. In the twenty-fourth statement “I get nervous about not being able to meet my sexual needs”, 13% of women were completely agree and 14% were agree, while on the other side, 46% of them were completely disagree and 19% were disagree. Also, 8% women did not have any idea about this statement. According to the answers, we can say that 27% of women had agree idea and 65% had disagree idea which shows that they were angry that did not have somebody to do sex.
25. The twenty-fifth statement including “I am worried about having sex”. For this phrase, 8% of women were completely agree and 18% were agree. In addition, 53% of women were completely disagree and 18% were disagree, 3% of participants did not have any idea. Cumulatively, we can say 26% of women were agree and 71% (majority) were disagree, which shows never-married women did not have worried about having sex.
26. The twenty-sixth phrase was “With passing time, it is easy for me to control my sexual needs”. For this statement, 24% of women were completely agree, 18% were agree, 9% were completely disagree, 33% were disagree, and 16% were neutral. It means that controlling sexual needs with passing time for 44% of women was easy while for 49% it was not easy.
27. The twenty-seventh statement was “I always like to look young and beautiful”. In this phrase, 34% chose completely agree, 8% chose agree, 14% chose completely disagree, 34% chose disagree and 10% chose no idea option. Cumulatively, 42% of women were agree, 48% were disagree, and it shows that it was not a big issue for Spanish never-married women to look young and beautiful.
28. With the twenty-eighth statement “I save my physical health because I do not want to be a disable and dependent women in the future” 39% were completely agree, 27%

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- were agree. In addition, 3% were completely disagree and 15% were disagree. In addition, 16% women did not had any idea. To sum it up, 66% of women (most of participants) were agree and 18% were disagree which shows that for majority of participants (66%) keeping body health is important specially for old ages.
29. Twenty-ninth phrase was “It is easy for me to go by a doctor to treat gynecological disease”. For this statement, 65% of participants were completely agree, 18% were agree. 6% were completely disagree and 8% were agree. In addition, 3% declare that they did not have any idea. We can say that majority of women (83%) did not have problem to visit doctor for gynecological problems.
 30. In the thirtieth statement “I need government support to provide the living expenses”, 6% of women answered completely agree, 11% of women answered agree, 59% of women answered completely disagree, and 24% of women answered disagree. Also, 0% women did not have any idea. In conclusion, 17% of participants expected a help from the government while 83% did not want any help from the government.
 31. In the thirty-first statement that says, “I have economic and financial worries”, 14% of women were chosen completely agree, 17% of women were chosen agree, 49% were chosen completely disagree, 15% were chosen disagree and 5% were chosen no idea option. It means that majority of women (64%) did not have economic worries and just 33% had economic concerns.
 32. The thirty-second statement were “I could not marry because I did not find my love”. For this statement, 23% of women were completely agree, 18% were agree, 20% were completely disagree and 16% were disagree. In addition, 23% women did not have any idea. Cumulatively, it can be noted that 41% of women could not marry because they did not find a real love while 36% did not have this idea.
 33. The thirty-third phrase was “I did not marry because I am at a higher level in education and job than the most men”. 15% of women were completely agree, 13% were agree, 36% were completely disagree, 18% were disagree and 18% did not have any idea, which shows that majority of women (54%) did not believe that having high level of job impact marriage while 28% believed this.

In table 20, we wanted to find correlation between “level of education” and the “agree response of participants” for each statement. One of the tests in SPSS that evaluates correlation is “Pearson Chi-Square”. In this test, we can access to the P-value and the number of correlations. If P-value is less than 0.005, it means that there are significant differences between level of education and agree response of participants. Correlation co-efficient is a number between -1 and 1. The number zero means that there is no correlation between two variables. The closer this numerical value to -1 or +1, means that the correlation between two variables is stronger and vice versa.

Table 20: Correlation Between Level of Education and Agree Responses in the Questionnaire

Agree Responses	High School n (%)	Diploma n (%)	University n (%)	P-value	Correlation Coefficient*
Question 1	1 (9.1)	0 (0)	10 (90.9)	0.533	-0.030
Question 2	6 (7.7)	6 (7.7)	66 (84.6)	0.627	0.003
Question 3	5 (6.9)	6 (8.2)	62 (84.9)	0.896	-0.032
Question 4	5 (11.9)	2 (4.7)	35 (83.4)	0.140	0.084
Question 5	3 (6.4)	1 (2.1)	43 (91.5)	0.071	-0.136
Question 6	4 (133.3)	3 (10.0)	23 (76.7)	0.249	0.159
Question 7	5 (6.7)	4 (5.3)	66 (88.0)	0.078	-0.133
Question 8	7 (10.3)	5 (7.4)	56 (82.3)	0.135	0.128
Question 9	4 (10.8)	1 (2.7)	32 (86.5)	0.146	0.018
Question 10	3 (8.8)	2 (5.9)	29 (85.3)	0.667	0.007
Question 11	4 (9.2)	3 (6.1)	36 (83.7)	0.633	0.040
Question 12	5 (11.6)	1 (2.3)	37 (86.1)	0.048	0.040
Question 13	5 (7.3)	3 (4.5)	60 (88.2)	0.065	-0.101
Question 14	4 (9.5)	2 (4.8)	36 (85.7)	0.345	0.012
Question 15	3 (8.9)	2 (5.9)	29 (85.2)	0.667	0.007
Question 16	5 (6.4)	8 (10.3)	65 (83.3)	0.665	0.003
Question 17	3 (8.6)	4 (11.4)	28 (80.0)	0.724	0.073
Question 18	6 (6.8)	7 (7.0)	75 (85.2)	0.590	-0.068
Question 19	4 (5.3)	8 (10.5)	64 (84.2)	0.335	-0.062
Question 20	6 (6.8)	7 (7.9)	75 (85.3)	0.590	-0.068
Question 21	5 (5.9)	8 (9.5)	71 (84.6)	0.606	-0.064
Question 22	3 (6.8)	2 (4.5)	39 (88.7)	0.380	-0.076
Question 23	3 (18.7)	1 (6.2)	12 (75.1)	0.129	0.161
Question 24	2 (2.2)	2 (2.2)	31 (88.6)	0.635	-0.076

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Question 25	1 (3.4)	0 (0)	28 (95.6)	0.075	-0.183
Question 26	2 (3.4)	7 (12.1)	49 (84.5)	0.140	-0.084
Question 27	3 (5.8)	4 (7.7)	45 (86.5)	0.770	-0.070
Question 28	5 (6.1)	6 (7.3)	71 (86.6)	0.313	-0.132
Question 29	7 (8.1)	8 (9.3)	71 (82.6)	0.508	0.114
Question 30	4 (23.5)	0 (0)	13 (76.5)	0.007	0.193
Question 31	4 (11.1)	2 (5.6)	30 (83.3)	0.349	0.064
Question 32	7 (10.9)	3 (5.7)	54 (84.4)	0.022	0.084
Question 33	3 (6.5)	3 (6.5)	40 (86.0)	0.705	-0.056

* Pearson Chi-Square test

Origen: own elaboration

According to the table, the p-value for the statements 12 and 30 are less than 0.005 (0.048 and 0.007, respectively). Therefore, there is a significant difference between agree responses of statements 12 and 30, and level of education. The correlation value for statement 12 was 0.040 and for statement 30 was 0.193 which means that there is a weak correlation between agree responses of participants and level of education.

In table 21, we wanted to find correlation between “occupation” and the “agree response of participants” for each statement. Here, we used “Pearson Chi-Square” test, too.

Table 21: Correlation Between Occupation and Agree Responses in the Questionnaire

Agree Responses	Without Job n (%)	Worker n (%)	Employed n (%)	Businessmen and managers n (%)	P-value	Correlation Coefficient*
Question 1	3 (27.3)	2 (18.2)	5 (45.5)	1 (9.0)	0.791	0.098
Question 2	14 (17.9)	11 (14.1)	38 (48.7)	15 (19.2)	0.781	-0.099
Question 3	14 (19.2)	11 (15.1)	36 (49.3)	12 (16.4)	0.855	0.016
Question 4	15 (35.7)	5 (11.9)	12 (28.6)	10 (23.8)	0.001	0.201
Question 5	12 (25.5)	4 (8.5)	20 (42.6)	11 (23.4)	0.154	0.002
Question 6	12 (40.0)	4 (13.3)	7 (23.3)	7 (23.3)	0.002	0.224
Question 7	17 (22.7)	11 (14.7)	31 (41.3)	16 (21.3)	0.122	0.046
Question 8	16 (23.5)	11 (16.2)	27 (39.7)	14 (20.6)	0.118	0.097
Question 9	12 (32.4)	5 (13.5)	13 (35.1)	7 (18.9)	0.086	0.181
Question 10	7 (20.6)	6 (17.6)	13 (38.2)	8 (23.5)	0.494	-0.005
Question 11	11 (25.6)	8 (18.6)	15 (34.9)	9 (20.9)	0.146	0.112
Question 12	13 (30.2)	7 (16.3)	15 (34.9)	8 (18.6)	0.074	0.193
Question 13	17 (25.0)	10 (14.7)	28 (41.2)	13 (19.1)	0.176	0.140
Question 14	15 (35.7)	7 (16.7)	13 (30.9)	7 (16.7)	0.003	0.303
Question 15	14 (41.2)	3 (8.8)	8 (23.5)	9 (26.5)	0.000	0.207
Question 16	11 (14.1)	12 (15.4)	37 (47.4)	11 (14.1)	0.159	0.216
Question 17	6 (17.1)	8 (22.9)	15 (42.9)	6 (17.1)	0.314	0.029
Question 18	19 (21.6)	11 (12.5)	42 (47.7)	16 (18.2)	0.546	0.041
Question 19	12 (15.8)	13 (17.1)	40 (52.6)	11 (14.5)	0.035	-0.032
Question 20	16 (18.2)	13 (14.7)	43 (48.9)	16 (18.2)	0.648	-0.083
Question 21	16 (19.0)	10 (11.9)	44 (52.4)	14 (16.7)	0.212	-0.061
Question 22	13 (29.5)	5 (11.4)	20 (45.5)	6 (13.6)	0.179	0.185
Question 23	6 (37.5)	3 (18.8)	4 (25.0)	3 (18.7)	0.149	0.171
Question 24	12 (34.2)	8 (22.9)	8 (22.9)	7 (20.0)	0.001	0.261
Question 25	10 (34.5)	5 (17.2)	11 (37.9)	3 (10.4)	0.079	0.256
Question 26	15 (25.9)	7 (12.1)	26 (44.8)	10 (17.2)	0.380	0.125
Question 27	14 (26.9)	9 (17.3)	22 (42.3)	7 (13.5)	0.144	0.227
Question 28	18 (21.9)	10 (12.2)	38 (46.3)	16 (19.5)	0.429	0.013
Question 29	14 (16.3)	12 (13.9)	43 (50.0)	17 (19.8)	0.120	-0.231

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Question 30	15 (88.2)	2 (11.8)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0.000	0.692
Question 31	15 (41.7)	7 (19.4)	12 (33.3)	2 (5.6)	0.000	0.461
Question 32	17 (26.6)	11 (17.2)	25 (39.0)	11 (17.2)	0.043	0.229
Question 33	10 (21.7)	5 (10.9)	21 (45.7)	10 (21.7)	0.686	-0.031

* Pearson Chi-Square test

Origen: own elaboration

According to the table 21, the p-value in the statements 4, 6, 14, 15, 19, 24, 30, 31, 32 are less than 0.005 (0.001, 0.002, 0.003, 0.000, 0.035, 0.001, 0.000, 0.000, and 0.043, respectively). So, there is a significant difference between agree response of participants in the mentioned statements and different kind of occupation. The correlation values for these statements were 0.201, 0.224, 0.303, 0.207, -0.032, 0.261, 0.692, 0.461, 0.229, respectively which means that there is a weak correlation between agree responses of participants and occupation in the mentioned statements.

**PART IV:
DISCUSSION
AND
CONCLUSION**

1. DISCUSSION AND COMPARISON OF QUALITATIVE FINDINGS BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES

In 1960, when the feminist movement achieved the second wave of feminism, the feminist perspective changed. It is in this time when the women's studies began to introduce in the university and academic sphere with critics of modern science, how we had already explained in the theoretical epistemological part. From a feminist epistemic point of view, it was beginning a revision of the scientific knowledge and epistemology, especially in relationship to women in the different disciplines, and the scientific concept of modern science.

Women's, feminist and gender knowledge has expanded the knowledge of human society, culture, and history by focusing on women's experiences and viewpoints, as well as pushing for social justice and policy reforms to address gender inequities. As "women's studies" evolves and expands, it remains an important catalyst for achieving gender equality and enabling members of all genders to actively participate in academic, scientific, and societal initiatives. In this line, our research contributes in an important way to increase this knowledge, in a particular form about single never married women in Iran and Spain.

Nevertheless, women have traditionally been viewed differently around the world, impacted by diverse countries' political, economic, and social statuses, as well as the status of women that was achieved through the feminist movement. It is evident that women's condition in the developed world, which acts as a state of welfare, is substantially better compared to the developing world (Pandey, 2016). This vision is interesting regarding to our data that we gathered from two completely different country (Iran and Spain). In this section, we discuss about the differences and similarities of the single never-married women in two different societies.

1.1. Comparison of “Social Needs” among Single Never-Married Women in Two Countries

Social needs were the first category that we extracted from participants' items. The subcategories of “Social Needs” among Iranian participants included: “Stigma of being single”, “Stereotypical thinking of people”, “Failure to provide reproductive health services without judgment”, “Need to set up partner-finding centers for singles”, “Need for skills to live alone”, “Parent expectation”, and “Need for financial support”. The subcategories of “Social Needs” among Spanish women include: “Equality of all people in the society”, “Parent's expectation”, “Need stable life”, “Economic Problems”, “Patriarchal society”, and “Stereotype view”. The subcategories in the category of “Social Needs” has some similarities and differences among the women of two countries.

Although human beings have the same needs from a general point of view, their behaviors in various societies even among same group can be different. Many things can affect people's behavior in various societies. The important thing is the different culture of two societies. Culture is a comprehensive term that encompasses information, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, abilities, and human habits in addition to social values and standards in human civilizations. In the other hand, culture is a complex system of knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, morality, habits, and everything that an individual learns as a part of her/his society, according to Edward Barnett Taylor (Tylor, 1871)

Still, it's interesting to see parallel issues between the results of the Spanish and the Iranian women, even when they're different. In this category, the first thing that mentioned by

participants of both countries was the stigma or the perception of a certain form of stigmatization and stereotype view of society about single women. The majority of research participants were worried about the stigma associated with being unmarried. They believed that society's preconceived notions about single people were the source of this stigma. Feelings of incompetence, low value, and low self-esteem were brought on by this stigma (Ezabadi et al., 2015). The results supported the "Goffman theory"; Goffman explains that as the marriage is value in the society so single people are not complete persons from the view point of social and psychological, and this causes that they face with stigma in social life (M. Kianpour, 2007). The stereotype view of society cause that single people experience a feeling of exclusion and rejection from the family and society (Shahanavaz & Azadeh, 2019). It is noted that such dynamics are particularly prevalent in Asian communities where marriage is known as a social norm; while on the flip side being never-married is perceived as a deviation from the norms and expectations (Ezabadi et al., 2015).

A further negative consequence of which can be considered as a certain stigma or as stigma is that never-married women avoid social interactions and further social activities. Such an avoidance behavior appears to further accelerate feelings of isolation and loneliness (Qaderzadeh et al., 2017b).

In general, remaining never-married is considered a stigma in different communities. The severity of the stigma varies depending on the cultural, religious, and societal setting. In general, the issue of never-married women in social areas with stronger religious and cultural norms (so-called collectivistic societies) gets apparent, when comparing their status with the context of never-married women living in so-called individualistic societies (Kitayama & Cohen, 2007). While the number of never-married women has increased significantly in US, the stigmatization of singleness has gradually declined (E. A. Sharp & L. Ganong, 2011). Iranian culture is affected by Islam's orders and in Islam there is deep emphasized on marriage. In Islamic countries like Iran, marriage and having family are known as a social value for people. So, women that cannot find the opportunity of marriage in the society are known as invaluable or abnormal. Further, over time, single women are more likely to desist from the idea of starting a family. Alternatively, such women might be forced to accept any kind of marriage, in order to avoid any stigma. Most of Spanish people are Catholic and believe to God, but their religious believes do not affect their family life, especially among new generations. In Eastern countries where marriage is highly valued, never-married women even experience feelings of failure, because these women believe to have acted against societal values. Furthermore, never-married women feel angry about their social situation, feel inferior in society, and always relinquish their demands in society (Himawan et al., 2018b; Saili & Shanat, 2018a). Such societies usually reject these women, too. In this societies, never-married women face difficulties in living alone (especially in small towns and villages), staying in hotels, and going on trips; besides, they encounter some problems at home (Qaderzadeh et al., 2017b).

Another stigma that participates were faced with was the stigma about gender and unfair treat of society about this issue between men and women. ThéBaud (2010) explained a system that effectively perpetuates inequality in a society is the gender structure. ThéBaud declared that although the number of entrepreneur women increased, cultural perceptions about gender and entrepreneurship have implications for women entrepreneurs; this belief causes the underestimating of women ability by society (ThéBaud, 2010), the issue that affects to all issue of women as well as single women in communities. Gender stereotypes are commonly held beliefs about the characteristics and features associated with gender differences, according to Heilman (Heilman, 2001). Gender stereotypes, according to Ashmore and Del

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Boca, function as "pictures in people's heads" that they utilize to form opinions and judgments (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1979). All participants in two countries expressed that their culture is unfair to single never-married women and it ought to be changed. One example of this issue is a study that was done on Spain about job unfairness. The findings revealed that female ICT workers in general suffer negative working conditions, particularly in highly skilled occupations and ICT intensive businesses. Despite attempts in Spain aimed at increasing female employment, some sectors, such as "Information and Communication Technology" (ICT), have long been dominated by men. That is, segregation, gendered stereotypes, and environmental factors all have a direct effect on educational and career options, in addition to workplace conditions (Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019).

Gender stereotypes have historically been considered to be fairly stable and to have a constant impact on behavior of people in the society (Nosek et al., 2002); For example, according to Spanish participants, health staffs connect all physical problem of women to mental health while they treat the same disease for men by examination and medications. In this regards, literature shows that men are frequently regarded as more able and more competent than women (Fiske et al., 2018). According to Fiske et al. (2018), regardless of age, various participants from various areas of the United States consistently ranked the category "men" higher than the category "women" on a variety of dimensions of ability, trustworthiness, capability, efficiency, intelligence, and skillfulness (Fiske et al., 2018). In this regards, Iranian participants mentioned that using reproductive health service is a problem for them. They were afraid of being stigmatized when seeking health care for genital illnesses. The findings of Abedini's (2014) study on single never-married Iranian women revealed that these people refused searching medical care for genital disorders (Abedian & Shahhosseini, 2014b). In the study that was conducted in Iran in 2016, single never-married women mentioned that one of their most important problems when they referred to the gynecologist's office for genital problems was the fear of being stigmatized for having sex. It was also mentioned in this study that sometimes when these women were trying to solve their gynecological disease and looking for reproductive health services, they even faced opposition from their families. These women were embarrassed when they received reproductive health services, and they hid their singleness. Even sometimes they hid their problem so much that their problem became more acute (Mohammadi et al., 2016a). While women's reproductive malignancies become more common as they age, requiring more frequent screenings. (Mohammadi et al., 2016a).

Patriarchal view limits women in the societies but the important thing is the view of women to this issue and acceptance of it. Although the patriarchal behavior in Spain is lower than in Iran. Spanish women want to fight against this issue, they mentioned that all people in the society are the same and have same rights and freedom; on the other side, the legal situation recognize and guarantee the rights of women. However, acceptance of limitation is accepted in the conservative society of Iran by some women. The result of a study that was done on never-married women in a small city in Iran revealed that single women accepted the limitation that their father or brothers bring for them. They mentioned that although we are limited in our society interaction, it is good for us because if women become freer, it is not good for them (Ezabadi et al., 2015).

Another difference of two societies was related to the people's questions about other people's life. While searching the private lives of individuals is frowned upon in most Western nations, in Eastern societies, questions about marital status and children are normal in social contacts, and judgments regarding single individual lives are formed (Himawan et al., 2018c); Women in this community are willing to keep relations with just other single friends and to avoid

being too visible in public. Conversely, unmarried people in Western nations enjoy a more relaxed social life and are able to live more contentedly (A. A. Azmawati et al., 2015). The result of a study that was done on UK showed that single women was not comfortable when people ask about their sexual orientation or sexual life (Sharabi, 2023).

Difficulty of finding a stable partner (for Spanish single women) or husband (for Spanish and Iranian single women) after especial age were mentioned repeatedly by participants. It has to be mentioned that cohabitation is illegal in Iran -different from Spain where it is even legally recognized- and the only way of living with a man is marriage. This cause never-married women the feeling of sadness and even mental rumination.

There is a view in both society that men can marry and have child at any ages, and this causes that men live very calm, even they prefer to have a relationship with a women very younger than them. Even, in Islam it is recommended to men to marry with young and beautiful women (As Mohammad, the profits of Muslims, marry with a 7 years old girl when he was about 54). Therefore, women after special age do not have more chance for marriage or finding somebody for long relationship.

All of participants in Iran and most of participants in Spain sought for having long-term relationship. However, their searching method was completely different. Many Iranian participants stated a desire to establish agencies that introduce people who are single to each other for marriage. It has to be noted that in conservative societies like Iran, when meeting a suitable marriage partner, unmarried women are prohibited from expressing their sentiments or take the initiative, rather they accept that marriage proposals should be made by males. As a result, despite knowing about prospective suitable spouses, many of these women do not marry. The results are congruent with a study in Malaysia (Ibrahim & Hassan, 2009). In the past, usually aunts or neighbors introduced girls of a family to other people, so young people had many choices, but with changing in the society, these activities gradually disappeared. So, in the interviews with Iranian single women, some of them mentioned that they need some places for visiting and finding men for marriage. In the other side, one of the things that has been more popular these days in the most of western countries as well as Spain is online dating for finding a partner. There is some studies showed that the dating apps could lead to long relationship (Sharabi, 2023) but most of the time it is used for finding sex partner. Using these kind of apps for Iranian singles is considered as a stigma and a great problem¹⁴ and is not popular. Instead, in Iran, some institutes in universities and masques act for introducing single people to each other. Even in these institutions, that the number of them are low, the couple finding processes is under the supervision of families.

Teaching life skills to single women was the significant subject that mentioned by Iranian participants. In Spanish society, it is usual that children leave their family and experience single life before marriage; although sometimes they are under the economic support of family, they learn to deal with life challenges, alone. In this study, all Spanish participants live alone, and all Iranian participants live with their family. There has not been any planning to support and prepare single women for living alone because of the ingrained idea in the Iranian context that people ought to live with their parents before marriage. Therefore, when single women reach old ages and do not have siblings to live with them, experience stress of loneliness (The life that they never experienced it before). Thus, the increasing proportion of elderly women who have never married has been a concerning trend for traditional

¹⁴ As in Iran, marriage happens under the direct supervision of families and before marriage the family of girl and boy must know each other, no family accepts that their daughters or sisters marry with a person that is unknown for family. For example, in Iran there is a custom that family of boy goes to the house of the girl and speak with her family before starting the legal marriage process.

communities (A. A. Azmawati et al., 2015). For this reason, it is crucial to impart single life skills to those who are not accustomed to living alone. This may be accomplished by giving them training and classes that would help them have better, happier lives as single people.

The other statement that was repeatedly said in interviews of women in both societies was economic problems. Nowadays, economic problems surround all over the world. It is more visible for some group of people especially for whom live alone. The statements like “Life is made for two people” in participants’ interviews revealed this idea. The result of a study showed that single women who have job live happier than other women (A. A. Azmawati et al., 2015). The majority of women in both countries in the current study were employed or actively seeking employment, but a small percentage of unemployed women (especially in Iran) bemoaned their reliance on their families and believed that the government should provide them with a job or health insurance. One of the main reasons women do not marry is because they have a job and a higher education, and having a job also enables them to live happily, freely, and independently (Azmawati, 2011; A. A. Azmawati et al., 2015). These results are in line with the Saudi Arabian study conducted by Salama (Salamah, 2018). Some single women, on the other hand, unintentionally stay unmarried and do not work; these women feel uneasy and like a burden to their families or society. Indeed, for several of the participants, unemployment was a problem that occasionally left them permanently dependent on their family members or hard life. Single women also may be subjected to financial exploitation by their families, as well as violations of privacy because of strict supervision, and sometimes never-married women suffer from being neglected. Never-married women may also face workplace harassment from men, such as being assigned more tasks due to having more leisure time, not being married, and having no children, sometimes no sufficient wages, or when male colleagues compete with them due to greater efforts (Farzizade, 2014). Singleness not only has negatively impacts on the individual but also on the closest family and society (Sharafoddin, 2018). Parent’s expectations or parent’s worries about the social future of the single daughters was the statement that was obvious in the declarations. This issue is more apparent in the pronouncements of Iranian women, where living with parents then husband and children is highly recommended. In this society, single life considers as an abnormality. It is noted in one study that singleness can threaten the health of society, especially those who do not commit to moral values. Crises included sexual need, social corruption, and wrong social interactions (Zeynalzadeh Chini Bolagh, Esmaeilpour, & Alipour Gourand, 2015). Single people have a higher tendency for cohabitation, too (Sharafoddin, 2018; Sussman & Steinmetz, 2013). Cohabitation is noticeable in all societies, but it is more accepted in Western communities than in Eastern communities, particularly in Muslim regions where this type of lifestyle is forbidden.

1.2. Comparison of “Psychological Needs” among Single Never-Married Women in Two Countries

Psychological needs were the second important category in the study, which get more codes and subcategories after the category of the social needs. Iranian and Spanish participants had many similarities in this corner. The subcategories of this category among Iranian women include “lack of emotional support”, “insecurity”, “more opportunity for life”, “acceptance of singleness”, and “motherhood”. The subcategories among Spanish women were “motherhood”, “need to have partner”, “superiority of loneliness”, “independency”, and “fear”. In fact, we can divide this category to two “good effect of singleness” and “bad effect of singleness” subcategories. In this category, the similarity among participant in two countries are more than differences.

Marriage or having a long-term relationship might be a valuable resource for one's emotional and personal growth. Most of Iranian and Spanish participants feel loneliness and wanted to have permanent companion or marriage for love and be loved. This need become more apparent when people get older. The current findings align with Greitemeyer's findings in this regard, which shown that single people experience loneliness and seek companionship in their social life (Greitemeyer, 2009).

On the flip side, evidence reveals that with passing the time, never-married women are fewer likely for marriage (Iran, 2021). Therefore, never-married adult women eventually give up on ever finding a stable partner, and they have negative feelings like guilt along with their ongoing sorrow for their previous mistakes. These outcomes agree with the conclusions of Sharp's investigation. According to the female participants in this study, they were always thinking that something was wrong with their lives and found themselves too old to get married and start a family (Sharp, 2007c). In a different study, women who had never married similarly reported feeling guilty, incompetent, and regretting lost possibilities (Saili & Shanat, 2018a). One of the worries expressed by single women in different research studies was that they would end up marrying the wrong person since they couldn't locate a compatible partner over time (Kajbaf et al., 2008b). Although most of Iranian and some of the Spanish participants expressed concern about becoming lonely in the future, they mentioned that they could never marry or involved in a serious relationship until they found the suitable partner; as they grew older, this became increasingly evident in their lives. The key thing to remember is that as time goes on, women become more and more educated and successful in their careers, making it more and more difficult to find a suitable partner. This is demonstrated by a study conducted in Malaysia by Azmawati, which found that staying single can be attributed to two factors: having a high degree of education and a high-level job (A. A. Azmawati et al., 2015). According to a survey, older single women had a lower tendency to marriage than younger single women (Dominguez-Folgueras & Castro-Martin, 2013).

The result of a study found that women who were unmarried had tension and anxiety about being alone, and their main worry was not having children (Sharp, 2007b). In many studies it is based on the idea that every woman seems to have an instinctive desire to be a mother (Salehi & Asghari Ebrahimabad, 201). Actually, by becoming a mother, they have someone to love and be loved. But the way to be mother in different cultures under the different religious and rules is different. In Iran, marriage is the only possible option to motherhood. Most of Iranian women wanted to be mother but they could not because they could not have sex out of the marriage and on the other hand, pregnancy and having child for never-married women was a taboo and even government considered some punishment for single mother (05/08/2023). While in Spain like other European and American countries singleness is not a barrier to becoming a mother. In Spain, according with state legislation women can have baby without marriage and even they are under the support of government. Some Spanish participants mentioned that they want to be mother, but they refused to be mother because they did not want to accept the responsibility of having a child, and some women were worried that there is late for them to be a mother.

One of the issues that was different in Iranian and Spanish society was the independence life for Spanish women. While in Spain, children can leave their family and start their individual life (like other American and European countries), in Iran, women are compelled to reside with their families in any ages until the time of marriage. This way of living is also prevalent in other Eastern societies including Indonesia and Malaysia (A. Situmorang, 2007). This issue cause that they feel burden to their family specially when their parents die, and they forced to live with their siblings. Especially, the issue is more visible in the small cities, where

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women must supervised by brothers or father (Ezabadi et al., 2015). Women in Iran typically live with their families until marriage. When their parents die, unmarried women are often compelled to live with their siblings, even if they have a job, so they consider themselves a burden. Being a burden on others leads to feelings of self-loathing, insignificance, a loss of belonging, and loneliness (Ribeiro & Joiner, 2009). Qaderzadeh demonstrated that unmarried women in conservative nations such as Iran are less likely to live freely, and as they age, they believe they are a burden on others (Qaderzadeh et al., 2017b).

Mental rumination was frequently observed in the replies of participants, followed by emotions like psychological insecurity, despair, remorse, and regret from viewing the lives of married individuals. Mental stability is one of the fundamental human needs that, when addressed, can provide a person with peace of mind (La Guardia et al., 2000;). According to Janicka's findings, married women felt more mentally secure than unmarried women (Janicka, 2015a). Their mental security was most likely due to the fact that they felt appreciated and had someone to back them while making significant decisions. Another study found that married people had greater mental health than unmarried people (L. K. Soulsby & K. M. Bennett, 2015). In our data, we did not observe the mental health in a strict sense and we can infer from our results that women in both countries had some mental concerns such as not having child, not having a stable partner, worries, and psychological pressures.

Beside all psychological problems arise from singleness, most of participants in both countries were happy and satisfied their single life. Indeed, by remaining single and focusing their efforts and attention on themselves rather than the pressures of marital life, they can both advance in life and live more freely and joyfully. According to Band-Winterstein, never-married women feel more at ease and pleased with their lives since they have more control over their lives and have greater autonomy when making decisions (T. Band-Winterstein & C. Manchik-Rimon, 2014).

Two coping strategies about emotional issues were living with family or good connection with family member and having good friends. According to our data, having family and good friends were two important issues for our participants and they did not feel loneliness. The findings of a study carried out in 2022 shows that single people more that married people tend to use virtual social media for communication and find friends although it does not provide complete satisfaction for people when they contact face to face (Karsten et al., 2022). Furthermore, participants reported that having good friends made them feel happy and comforted. According to Newbold (Newbold et al., 2013a), support of family and society, as well as individual traits, play a significant role in feelings of well-being. Similarly, never-married women stated that family and friends were the most significant individuals in their lives, yet it should be noted that living alone for women in Iran is culturally and socially prohibited (Memar & Yazd khasti, 2016). Unsurprisingly, single never-married women claimed that family and friends assisted them in dealing with private concerns (Endut et al., 2015). However, the result of studies are revealed that single women can actually live comfort and more happily than married women because they feel liberated and enjoy more meaningful interactions with friends and family (Noorbala et al., 2017b; A. Situmorang, 2007). The basis for this in Muslim communications could be a faith in God's destiny and that God knows what is best for them (Ibrahim & Hassan, 2009). In fact, a way to cope for singleness was belief in God's destiny in marriage. While Spanish women look at singleness more realistic. Typically, Iranian participants stated "Enshaallah", meaning "If God willing".

1.3. Comparison of “Sexual Needs” among Single Never-Married Women in Two Countries

Another category that extracted from participants' interviews was “Sexual Issues”. This category contains subcategories such as “Concerns if meeting sexual needs” and “Forced to ignore sexual needs” for Iranian never-married women and subcategories like “Concerns” and “sexual needs” for Spanish never-married women. It has to be noted that in this study, all Iranian women were heterosexual while one of Spanish participants were homosexual and rest of them were heterosexual. Although the women investigated of two societies had in the same form sexual needs and desires, their views, believes and responses were completely different. Sexual desires are formed in a variety of economic, cultural, and religious situations. Colonial and hegemonic power structures, legal and religious prohibitions and taboos, capitalism, religious imagery and symbols, technological breakthroughs, and many other factors all contribute to the framework, or cultural backdrop, that fuels and develops sexual impulses. That framework shapes women's choices and limits their agency in ways that prevent them from using it. Despite the rise of secularism, religion continues to be a profoundly significant cultural force that impacts people's lives in general and, hence, their attitudes about what constitutes sex (Hunt & Jung, 2009). Religions, on the other hand, have traditionally served as custodians of societal sexual norms and behaviors. Religious ideas and practices differ greatly, but they are a significant resource for considering human sexuality. Religious understandings of sexuality affect a variety of cultural characteristics, including sexual initiation ceremonies, marriage and family norms, and attitudes toward homosexuality. Indeed, patriarchal faiths are notorious for their taboos and prohibitions on women and sex, which are generally invented and imposed by men (Poulos, 2020).

Patriarchal traditions usually created sexual standards that are mostly intended to regulate sexuality. In accordance with the Islam, having sex before marriage is forbidden and single people at any age and under any circumstances should not have any kind of sex. Iranian culture is influenced very much by Islam and having sex before marriage is highly condemned and considered a big sin (Farahani et al., 2011b).

But it should be noted that sexual desire is a basic and powerful emotional, physiological, and social desire and if it is not met, problems may arise for a person (C. Meston & D. M. Buss, 2010). In this study all Iranian participants were Muslim but despite believing in Islam, under sexual pressure, they sometimes responded to this need in the form of masturbation or rarely sexual intercourse, (In this study, just one Iranian woman had sexual relationship with a man). They refuse sex because of their religious believes and fear of virginity testing that can be happened in the time of marriage.

In fact, Iranian never-married women suffered from not responding sexual needs and were always worried and upset about masturbation, but according to their statements, they had no other choice. In the time of masturbation, they were very careful about saving the hymen intact because having an intact hymen¹⁵ in the time of marriage is a value for a never-married women and also the virginity may be tested in that time. In a study that was done on Iranian never-married women aged 18-30, participants mentioned that although keeping hymen intact is the sign of old mind, most of them that had sex did not do it vaginally because they told that we have to keep our hymen for the our husbands or for proofing of virginally at the time of virginity testing (Rahmani et al., 2016).

¹⁵ Usually, in Iran, no men prefer to marry with a never-married women who has ruptured hymen because ruptured hymen shows that this woman before marriage had sex. In the case of disease that doctor rupture the hymen, the forensic medicine gives a signed document to the woman which shows the hymen was ruptured under the health condition and is not related to the previous sex.

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While the situation of Spanish women was completely different from Iranian women. In Spain, homosexuality or masturbation is not considered as a sin or taboo. Although some Spanish women that their number is rare do not have sex because their religious believes, in general, they do not believe that sex is against religious believes. All Spanish participants in this study were Cristian's and they were relax about having sex or masturbation. Although the Hebrew Bible/Old mentioned the sexual relationship as a relationship between woman and man and it noticed to response to the sexual need under the structure of marriage (330), most of women do not pay attention to these orders. In this study, all Spanish women had sex and even, they told that they never pay attention to the religious orders. According to Spanish participants, sex was a very enjoyable process in their life. However, they had some worries in this regards. One of the worries was about being pregnant or having sex with unknowledgeable person about sex. As women were single, they doubted to have baby; therefore, this was one of their concerns. The results of a study show that single women have sexual needs like married women, which they try to fulfill it, but because of the society's attitude towards and having little or no knowledge about fulfilling their sexual needs and Contraceptive methods usually face with problems (Rokicki & Merten, 2018).

Some of Iranian participants mentioned that they never put themselves in the erotic situation and at the time that sexual desire of them increase, they do exercise or preoccupied themselves not to think about sex. However, the sexual desire had such a power that most of them masturbate, but in the time of masturbation, they feel sin because masturbation was emotionally painful for them. According with Islam's orders, masturbation is a very big sin and response to sexual needs have to be with a man under the condition of legal marriage. While Spanish women do masturbation without any bad feeling. Spanish participants at the time of masturbation were not completely satisfied because they mentioned that they need a person to have sex with him or her. Not only Iranian participants suffer emotionally when they masturbate, but also the way that they masturbate was completely different from Spanish participants. As I mentioned before, having intact hymen is a value for women in the time of marriage, so Iranian never-married women were very worried about the hymen, and they did not use sex toys for masturbation.

Cultures differ on various dimensions around the world can have a significant impact on people's actions, beliefs, and value systems. One feature of cultural difference is the "ideology of honor" (Brown, 2016). In a typical "honor culture", reputation is all things, and people are permitted or even encouraged to safeguard and defend their reputations from threats. Particularly, men in "honor cultures" aim to establish and protect reputations for strength, bravery, and an intolerance for disrespect, while women often attempt to establish and safeguard reputations for faithfulness and purity of sexuality (Vandello & Cohen, 2003). Typical examples exist all across the world, particularly communities bordering the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and South and Central America (Peristiany, 1966; Vandello et al., 2009). In accordance with this custom, women maintain their hymen intact until the marrying. They do not engage in sex through their vaginas, and if they do, they seek for a hymenorrhaphy, that is an illegal circumstance that happen in Iran. They maintain their hymen intact during masturbation because they must prove their virginity through virginity examinations before marriage to the man that wants to marry with them.

In the category of "sexual needs", Iranian and Spanish never-married women had some similarities, too. First, most of participants in two contexts mentioned that they need a stable partner or husband not only for emotional support but also for having sex. Nevertheless, the important issue that was mentioned by single women were the difficulty of finding a person after special age to have long relationship as a boyfriend or as a husband.

The other similarity of Iranian and Spanish single women in this category was their decreasing desire about sex with passing the time and getting older. They mentioned that the sexual desire diminished with increasing age, and they accustomed to live without sexual relationship. As one of participants said that she has forgotten that when she did the last sex. In Mroczeka's (2013) study, which was carried out on single women over 60 years old, the participants mentioned that despite feeling the need for sex, they ignored it because they have no one to answer it. At the same time, the participants stated that with increasing age, this need decreased in them and they felt this need very little in themselves (Mroczeka et al., 2013).

Another similarity among Iranian and Spanish women was their refusing to speak about their sexual issues. Although this behavior was seen commonly among Iranian women, it was occurred in the interview with Spanish women, too. Most people confuse sex for something personal and intimate about themselves. Sex is regarded as being about pleasure for oneself or potentially mutual pleasure in a relationship with someone in this style. It is believed not to be a topic for polite discourse because it is located in the domestic realm.

1.4. Comparison of “Medical-Biophysical Needs” among Single Never-Married Women in Two Countries

The last category that got the least codes in the study was physical health. This category contains subcategories such as “Fear of emerging diseases” and “Fear of diseases without a supporter” for Iranian women and subcategories like “Fear of dependency in the future’ and “Keeping body healthy” for Spanish women.

In this category, women of two countries were similar but the big difference between them was Spanish women’s more happiness, which raised from their more social connection and living in the moment.

Physical health is a very important issue in the life of all people. Especially with passing time and getting older, it become more significant in the life. Physical health was a category that women in two contexts emphasized on it. Women in two contexts have been started to do healthy things. For example, Spanish women stopped smoking (None of Iranian participants smoked cigar because in Iran, smoking for women consider as a big taboo) or pay attention to the body weight. Some of them went to the gym, too. One of the reason that single persons pay more attention to their health was due to their single status and without any marital life responsibility, they could spend all their time and attention to their body (Shahrak et al., 2023a).

Being alone during illness and in old age can make single people feel anxious and encourage them to do more check-ups, exercise or pay attention to their health because they know that when they are sick in old ages, they don't have children and partner to take care of them, and in fact, by taking these works, they prevent the occurrence of possible problems and diseases in the future (Saili & Shanat, 2018c). Fear of emerging diseases such as cancer as people aged and, on the other hand, lack of support in times of illness caused concern among participants.

The rate of cancers such as breast and ovarian cancer increased in old ages that shows the importance of doing routine yearly check-up for all women. In addition, unmarried women who are old may suffer from diseases such as breast cancer or ovarian cancer, which are related to their age and need to search help (Mohammadi et al., 2016a). In this study, women in two contexts emphasized on doing routine check-up. However, there was some limitation for accessing this process for Iranian never-married women. The most reason for not going to the routine check-up among Spanish women was mentioned their laziness or forgetting themselves in the daily life. The results of a study in America have shown that one of the

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factors that affects Pap smear screening is the marital status, so women who have never married usually do not show a desire to do this test, while the risk of infection with HPV¹⁶ and the rate of cervical cancer is higher in unmarried people over 40 years old (Hanske et al., 2016a). The most reason of Iranian women for not going to some check-up was related to their cultural believes about saving hymen intact at any ages before marriage. According to the results of a study, the possibility of damage to the hymen during a routine examination is one of the most important reasons for never-married women not to refer themselves to reproductive health services (Kohan et al., 2017b). This believes are strengthened with the law of Iran that any doctors never do gynecological check-up such as Pap smear for never married women. The law in Iran treats damage to the hymen, whether accidental or during a routine examination, as an offense ("Iran. Po. Judicial and Legal Commission, Islamic criminal law: Tehran: Parliemant of Islamic Republic of Iran; 2013,"). Consequently, even doctors refuse to perform vaginal examinations on never married women and this can lead to late diagnosis of the disease and impose high costs on them. Even in the gynecological problems like cancer, gynecologists do big abdominal surgery instead of doing small vaginal surgery. In the case of intensive need to vaginal surgery or treatment, doctors do it with the written consent from the never-married women and her father or judge and under the supervision of forensic medicines ("Iran. Po. Judicial and Legal Commission, Islamic criminal law: Tehran: Parliemant of Islamic Republic of Iran; 2013,").

Loneliness arising from aging was another concern of never-married women. Women in both countries did not want to be very old or sick in old ages because for them dependency to other people were very difficult.

The reason of fear among Iranian participants were the fear of emerging diseases such as cancer as they aged and, on the other hand, lack of support in times of illness. While most of Spanish participants never concern about future loneliness and they mentioned that they live in a moment and never think about future. The fact is that women who have never been married are forced to accept loneliness in old age, and instead of living with husbands and children and receiving support from them, rely on substitutes such as friends (T. Band-Winterstein & C. Manchik-Rimon, 2014). The most important problem for such individuals in old age and disease is being alone, which is particularly noticeable with the death of parents and the loss of older supporters.

Loss of fertility with age was another concern in the lives of some participants in two countries. But it was more significant among Iranian participants. Loss of fertility and subsequent anxiety were also apparent among the participants in the study of Saili that was done on single women (Saili & Shanat, 2018a)

2. DISCUSSION OF THE QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS FOR SPANISH-GALICIAN WOMEN

In this part, we will discuss about needs and concerns of Spanish single women that were evaluated with our developed questionnaire. This is important from the epistemological viewpoint of women's studies, as this information are the sound of group of women (never-married women) that are neglected and stigmatized for their situation.

We applied our questionnaire in Spanish-Galician single never married women over 30 years old. It has to be noted that until now there is no published questionnaire for evaluating the needs of single never-married women in the world. In addition, in the concept of single women, mostly research have focused on qualitative approach. How we explained before, in this thesis we start from a women's and gender epistemic point of view, which realize a special criticism of the axiological postulate of neutrality of modern science. Modern science is not objective from a gendered point of view. Our results are very interesting in this sense. Also, in the Spanish context never-married women perceives that society they look in a special way. There, we can detect certainly patriarchal and androcentric patterns which constringe influence live of single never-married women in Spain- Galicia. That means although there are many rules that benefits all women in Spain, never-married women suffer from patriarchal manner of Spanish society which is important to research and discuss. Here we will discuss each category, specially starting from the mentioned gendered epistemic perspective:

2.1. Discussion of "Social Needs" Among Spanish-Galician Never-Married Women

The first category in our questionnaire asked about the "Social Issues" of Spanish never-married women. This category contained three questions and generally asked about social view of people to the never-married women. The participants' answers showed that although women were upset about social view to their single situation, never limited themselves in participating social activities. This findings was consistent with the study that was done in UK on single women; in this study, women complained about social reaction to their situation and mentioned that they hate if somebody ask them about their marriage situation (Simpson, 2015b).

Single women can face a numerous social issues that can affect various aspects of their lives. These challenges are often rooted in societal norms, gender expectations, and economic disparities. Society often places undue importance on relationship status, leading to social stigmas and judgments against single women, this is important in the epistemology of women study because in this context, it is explored the interplay between gender and other social categories like sexuality, ability status, and global location in shaping knowledge and addressing epistemic injustices.

Standpoint theory, which is important to the epistemology of women's studies since Harding reflections (Harding, 1986) asserts that women in marginalized social situations possess unique and valuable views that provide insights not readily available to those in more privileged positions. From this point of view, women's studies attempt to elevate and highlight women's voices and experiences, recognizing them as vital sources of knowledge. Statistics showed that the number of single women in Spain has increased in recent decades (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE)*. <https://www.ine.es/jaxiT3/Tabla.htm?t=4031&L=0>. Retrieved 20 Dec 2023). Also, since 1990s, family formation in Spain has changed and for example the cohabitation that was described as a "marginal" phenomenon, it has increased

dramatically (Sweeney, 2015), however, even in this century, there is a stereotype view for single women in the societies. This is the issue that Goffman explained, vastly. According to Goffman theory, society can have stigmatized view to special group of people. Women who are single have long been viewed as not normal. Single women may feel pressure to adopt to societal expectations that may affect their self-esteem and well-being.

Patriarchal condition of Spanish society and stereotypical view of society are two problems that single women face. This means that society as well as the women themselves accuse the unequal conditions that affect them in terms of their lives and their life organization as women who live alone. We can explain our results in this category regarding to the patriarchy vision, that considers men are self-sufficient, the model of human being, and can do what they want. Our investigated Spanish Galician women showed in their responses that they perceived that they were considered in a secondary way. This finding underscores the necessity for further investigation and dialogue, particularly with policymakers, to address and mitigate this issue. Potential solutions include implementing targeted policies to promote gender equality, increasing representation of women in decision-making roles, and conducting educational campaigns to raise awareness about gender biases. Additionally, fostering community engagement and support networks can empower women and contribute to cultural shifts towards greater gender parity.

2.2. Discussion of “Psychological Needs” Among Spanish-Galician Never-Married Women

The second category in our developed questionnaire was “Psychological Needs”. This category included 14 statements and were contained statements about intimate relationship, loneliness, and motherhood.

Although most of participants mentioned they need a closed relationship, they did not feel that they are alone (just because they are single). Many women find that being single is an empowering and gratifying lifestyle choice. However, solo women may suffer distinct psychological obstacles in many facets of their lives; addressing these concerns and devising effective solutions is critical.

Although in the study, most of women wanted to have somebody to love and be loved but most of them did not think that marriage make them complete. This can be the result of family transition in Spain as family formation and having child has changed in Spain in recent decades. The results here show us ambivalent and, at times, contradictory aspects, although we see once again the influence of the imaginary and definition of the classic traditional gender roles. However, a major part of the women investigated (63%) did not miss married life while 25% missed it. The most part of participants (68%) indicated that they want to have stable life (emotionally and economically) and that they want to make cohabitation with other persons. In addition, 65% of women planned to live with her friends for overcoming loneliness in the future.

Democratic Political structured that happened in Spain after 1975 cause many changes in family formation, very important from the perspective of equality of women, and so, from the epistemic vision of women’s and gender studies. In this period, transition in family and social life, secularization of society framework, increasing high-educated women, increasing number of women that participated in labor, and sexual freedom were the consequences that changed the family and social life for women (Castro-Martín, 2010).

Cohabitation or having intimate partner but living separately is a significant change in the modern societies. As a new gender role, nowadays women want to go out of traditional roles and traditional social structure. With changing in family structure in the western counties as

well as Spain, many people want to live in the condition of cohabitation without traditional marriage customs. The Second Demographic Transition (SDT) theory, which contends that ideational or cultural variables, in addition to structural and economic changes, are important drivers of family transformation, is one of the primary theoretical frameworks used to explain historical changes in marriage and cohabitation. In this situation, women without traditional roles as a wife and mother can live freely and happily, and also can have child (Manning et al., 2019).

The finding showed that 39% women were preoccupied about going through menopause without being a mother versus 57% women who are not. This finding maybe related the issue that to be a mother means the classic traditional role about going mother, exerts considerable influence on them and marks aspects of their gender identity. In Spain, cohabitation is growing increasingly among younger adults, and data indicate that cohabitation is not a childless period before marriage which 39% of cohabiting spouses bearing children (Martín & Folgueras, 2008). The year 1975 coincided with the transition to a democratic political system and legislation modifications, which caused persistent increase trend in non-marital childbirth. Some of the social processes that accompanied this trend included the gradually democratization of political, social, and family life, the secularization of nations, women's progress in higher education and workforce, and a surge in sexual liberty. The Civil Code was modified in 1981, abolished the idea of illegitimacy and provided equal rights to all births inside or outside of marriage. Although Spain is usually portrayed as a “traditional” society regarding its family patterns, except for its lowest-low fertility rate, recent trends in non-marital childbearing suggest a delayed but rapid process of convergence with the rest of Europe. In fact, the current level of non-marital childbearing in Spain (30.2%) is close to the European average (32% for EU), although it remains below that prevailing in Northern Europe (Castro-Martín, 2010).

From a classic vision of the traditional role of women, in the past, usually people had courtship-marriage without prior cohabitation and then had first birth; but nowadays the number of single mothers that live alone have increased in Spain (Billari et al., 2003) and nearly one out of three births occurs outside the framework of marriage (Castro-Martín, 2010). Even though in today's western societies as well as Spain, there are various possibilities for single women to have children, there are still many problems for childcare for a single woman, problems of a social, economic, labor nature etc. From the point of view of women's equality all the advances and legislative changes in this sense (Equality Law, Law about maternity leaves, Law about paternity leaves,) does not manage to guarantee effective equality regarding childcare for single mothers. Regardless of the meaning, that such a fact may have for the child himself.

Examining the psychological issues faced by single women through a feminist epistemological lens within women's studies is necessary to reveal the underlying gender biases, societal pressures, and power dynamics that shape individual experiences. Understanding these problems is critical for creating treatments, support networks, and advocacy campaigns that enhance the well-being, empowerment, and inclusion of single women in society.

2.3. Discussion of “Acceptance of Singleness” Among Spanish-Galician Never-Married Women

The third category of the developed questionnaire was “Acceptance of Singleness” This category included five items and it mostly covered the idea about positive side of single life like happiness, autonomy, and lack of responsibility of married life.

According to literature, coping is emotion-focused when it is targeted at regulating stressful emotions and is utilized when a situation is judged, out of person's control, as something that must be accepted, and from the person's perspective is not changeable (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Folkman et al., 1986). Coping is problem-focused when it aims to address the person-environment relationship that is creating the unpleasant emotions and when the situation is perceived as adaptable to change (Folkman et al., 1986).

In current study, regardless of reason of singleness, most of single women were happy and the major reason of happiness was having family and friends. With modifications to the family structure in Spain, many women want to live alone with or without a partner. This could explain why the majority of Spanish women were happy with their lives and did not desire to change it. Researches indicated that women cope with single life by having a social network, close friends and family, income, as well as social support (Yuthika U. Girme et al., 2022; Shahrak et al., 2023b).

Compatibility with singleness (new lifestyle) for women is important from the view point of women studies, as singleness is a modern life style for women while keep their right for being mother and even having intimate relationship, they can enjoy their life and have a more happy life style. It is important to note that the advantages of coping with singleness in women comes from the empowerment and resilience they provide in establishing societal standards, promoting self-empowerment, and building supportive societies which are objectives of women's studies.

2.4. Discussion of “Sexual Issues” Among Spanish-Galician Never-Married Women

In the developed tool, “Sexual Issues” was the fourth category. Usually, adult people search the ways to answer to this need. This category had four statements that revealed believes and personal demands on the sex.

One of the most obvious potential social benefits of being in a romantic relationship is partnered sexual activity. Nowadays, not all singles are interested in sex, but a large portion of individuals are sexually active and/or seek sexual possibilities (Gray et al., 2019). The result of a study revealed that Individuals in serious relationship have sex more often and are more sexually pleased than single persons (Park & MacDonald, 2022).

Sexual health needs a positive and respectful attitude toward sexuality and sexual relationships, and also the ability to have joyful and safe sexual encounters that are free of compulsion, prejudice, and violence. To achieve and maintain sexual health, all people's sexual rights must be acknowledged, protected, and fulfilled (WHO).

In the second feminist movement (1960s), women reach more rights in the themes like reproductive rights, abortion, sexual liberation, etc. but even in this time feminists struggle with traditional structure of femineity. It seems that in the feminist movements, especially in the 80th and the 90th , but also before, women could be more liberal in the matters like sexual life and women could speak freely about their sexual life, their desire, etc. With changing in family structure in the western countries, the necessity for women to adhere to traditional gender roles and sexual behavior has significantly decreased. In this time women reached more sexual liberation, contributing to a "permissive turn" in which women were permitted to have sex without marriage (Gavey, 2005). However it has to be noted that a rapidly changing in the family status, in addition to lack of open contention about sexuality within the family and deficiency in a comprehensive sexuality education (Ismail et al., 2015), can extremely enhance individuals' vulnerability.

Sexual desire is one of the major needs of a person all over the life; while the amount of desire can change during the lifetime, but it never disappears. The result of our study showed

that single women were not angry if they could not answer the sexual desire. In the current study the percentage of agree and disagree answers to the statement “controlling the sexual need with passing time is easy” were the same. These findings were inconsistent with the study of Mroczecka (2013); in this study that was done on single women over 60 showed that with passing the time sexual desire decrease and control of it is easy for women. (Mroczecka et al., 2013). Maybe the reasons of inconsistency of this study with our findings is related to the age of participants, as in our study, the participants were younger and the mean age of them were 40 years old. Also in the past there was a stereotype view that older adults are asexual, now there is a positive stereotype view of “sexy oldie” (Drummond et al., 2013). Even a result of a study stated that sexual desire can increase in women in older ages (Fileborn et al., 2015).

2.5. Discussion of “Bio-Medical Needs” Among Spanish-Galician Never-Married Women

“Bio-Medical Needs” was the other category in the developed questionnaire and contained three items. This category mainly included issues about physical health and concerns.

Women's studies professionals highlight the idea that gender, particularly the understanding of the female body, is constructed by society, as we see in our theoretical part. This implies that societal views, rules, and cultural norms have a considerable impact on how the female body is viewed, valued, and treated. Women's studies might look objectively at how the female body is represented in the media, art, as well as popular culture. This includes investigating how visuals and narratives influence societal standards and perceptions of female bodies, and their impact on women's self-esteem and image of themselves.

Although the feminist movement gave women numerous rights and encouraged them to break free from conventional roles, the importance of appearance and experiencing a sense of beauty remains an internal sense in women. This issue is particularly significant to middle-aged women. Researches have demonstrated that in the middle ages, sexual satisfaction in women was influenced by their appearance and physical changes (Thomas et al., 2019). Although dissatisfaction with the bodies and poor body image are exceedingly prevalent among women, particularly in middle-aged and older women, body image does not always decrease as women age. In fact, the value of personal appearance to women declines with age, demonstrating that as women get older, they are less inclined to compare themselves to other women, self-monitor their bodies, and concern about attractiveness (Thomas et al., 2019). This issue is apparent in our study. In our study, less than half of women wanted to look young, but many women wanted to keep their body healthy. They wanted to be healthy, one of the most important elements find in our results in the groups of the women investigated in the Spanish, but also in the Iranian context, because they did not want to be burden to others in the future. This finding was consistent with the study of Saili (2018); in this study, single women were worry about future and they mentioned they scared to lose their physical health and dependent physically to other people (Saili & Shanat, 2018a).

Physical health is very important in the lifetime especially in old ages. Usually, people try to prevent to get disease. Evidence shows that the number of chronic diseases increase in the old ages. For example the rate of breast or ovarian cancer in old ages is more than young ages (Rottenberg et al., 2018). Having gynecological screening is a useful way for preventing women disease. In our study, most of women did not have any concern about gynecological visit. As in Spain, women access to reproductive rights and for them having intact hymen in the time of marriage is not valued for both gender, having gynecological visit were easy and important for them. Our finding is in contrast with findings of a study that was done on Iran; in this study, researcher stated that single women in reproductive age did not visit

gynecologist, because according Islamic culture having intact hymen was more important than physical health and also they were worried that they would be labeled for having sex when they visit gynecologist (Mohammadi et al., 2016a).

2.6. Discussion of “Economic Issues” Among Spanish-Galician Never-Married Women

“Economic Issues” were the sixth category in the current questionnaire. In this category, we asked about two statements, which were related to single women’s economic worries and governmental support.

In western countries, most of people want to leave their parents’ house after finishing the education (Lesthaeghe, 2014). According to our findings in the quantitative phase, 81% of women lived alone. This means that they are forced to cover their life expenses, alone. However, there is many economic problems according to their gender such as gender gap wage.

Economic problem is a global challenge in the world that has caused difficulties for all people especially for people that live alone. This issue can be analyzed from the perspective of gender and women’s studies. The feminist economic perspective considers global approach, when addressing the gender pay, in this regard there is various socio-economic gap and market factors, including globalization, crises in the economy, liberalization of economy, political and cultural shifts, job environment, industrial, and organizational interactions, the state’s welfare, social support frameworks, and family structure (Grimshaw et al., 2017). In addition, economic problems cause numerous concerns for single individuals. General economic problems as well as gender pay gap and social view on women cause that all women as well as single women have an economic worry in their life.

Gender wage gap is a famous phenomenon. United Nation has confirmed that women are paid less than men (Women, 2015). To some extent, this is regarding to discrimination and gender stereotypes; women are connected to historically “female’s occupations”, which have been linked with less favorable working conditions and lower wages (Stockdale & Nadler, 2013); even this issue impacts the types of positions that women have and their promotion inside business entities. As a result, women are more probable to obtain lesser salaries than their man counterparts (Commission, 2018). Inequity in paying can be worse for women when they want to live alone and without economic support.

“Statistical discrimination” theory indicates that cultural traditions and gender stereotypes might lead to discrimination against female perceived performance and production (Phelps, 1972). Gender stereotypes claim that women are subservient and play a primary role in the household. As a result, the subjective evaluation of female candidates for an employment is affected by the presumption that they will be less productive owing to household responsibilities, a belief which overrides the objective evaluation of their personal abilities. A study in Spain indicated that men continue to participate in entrepreneurship at higher rates than women (Fernandez-Guada & Martín-Lopez, 2023).

The interesting thing in the study was that although most of women had financial concerns, most of them did not want to get some help from government, this is maybe because most of women have job and do not need any financial support from the government.

2.7. Discussion of “Reasons of Singleness” Among Spanish-Galician Never-Married Women

The last category in the quantitative phase were “Reasons of Singleness” that contained three statements.

Not finding a love and not having high education or high-level position were not the reasons of singleness in current study; it means that social issues such as having high level of occupation or education were not the obstacle for marriage for Spanish women. On the other hand, single women stayed single voluntarily. In the past, the usual pattern of life for women were being wife and then mother. Beside the reasons like economic circumstances, the second transition changed women’s role in the western societies, nowadays women can choose to marry or stay single. This change was very important from the perspective of women studies, as stigmatized social view on single women were more apparent in comparison their situation with men.

Single women's reasons for being single can be affected by external as well as internal variables, such as chance or circumstances. Women’s choice to stay single can be influenced by a complex interaction of cultural, social, economic, and personal variables, making it a diverse and contextually dependent issue.

At least some people’s decision to remain single was undoubtedly impacted by the political and cultural setting in which they grew up. Second-wave feminism challenged established relationship structures and customs, inspiring many women to expect more out of their partnerships. Access to higher education, and the paid occupation that typically followed, provided women with financial stability and independence, liberating them from depending on their partner for support. However, some of women recognized drawbacks to being single, namely the loss of companionship. Nevertheless, a perceived scarcity of "good" older men, combined with an unwillingness to compromise on relationship norms, resulted in a higher proportion of single women. The scarcity of appropriate or appealing companions further restricted the choices available to women, and many of them undoubtedly would have entered a relationship if the ideal person was present (Fileborna et al., 2015).

3. FINAL CONCLUSION AND VALIDITY OF THE CENTRAL HYPOTHESIS

3.1. GENERAL CONCLUSION AND VALIDITY OF THE CENTRAL HYPOTHESES

This study has begun with a discussion about the modern concept of science and its criticism, especially from epistemological positions of critical theory as is the case of the vision of the so-called women's studies. There is an important discussion about this epistemological problem from times ago in the social and social philosophic areas that begins with the hermeneutical, critical hermeneutic and phenomenological discussion in social science, which put on the center the question of axiological neutrality of modern science.

The present research is placed, from an epistemological point of view, in this scientific line, connects with theoretical-epistemic vision and starts of its theoretical epistemological contributions. That is, as Radl Philipp said (Philipp, 2001):

“We start from the assumption that the epistemological debate in the field of gender studies is particularly linked to the general epistemological discussion about positivism in the social sciences” (Radl Philipp, 2001, p. 25).

The main object of the current study was comparison of Spanish and Iranian single never-married women under the perspective of the different social, psychological, sexual, and physical-medical needs from women's and gender studies perspective.

The epistemology of singleness among women is the study of how knowledge is gained and understood in the context of single women's experiences. This notion investigates how societal attitudes, individual beliefs, and cultural factors alter women's understandings of being single. It examines how individual and social experiences construct singleness perceptions among women. By investigating the epistemological dimensions of singleness, researchers seek to understand the underlying mechanisms that drive the construction of beliefs and attitudes toward single women in different societies.

In the few past decades, the number of single never-married women has increased worldwide. Globalization, changing in family structure, accessing to sexual and reproductive rights, and achievements of the various feminist waves are some consequences that lead to this transition. Single women like married ones have needs and concerns, however the important thing is that although all never-married women in the world have the same needs from a general point of view, the responses to these needs and their experiences can be vary based on individual circumstances, social norms, socioeconomic status, personal goals, religious believes, traditions, values, cultural contexts, political structure and governmental legislation.

Social norms are dynamic and subject to change over time, influenced by factors such as globalization, urbanization, and education. Social norms around marriage and family structures have become more diverse. Additionally, cultural factors play a significant role in shaping attitudes towards singlehood within religious communities. In many Western cultures, there is generally greater acceptance of singlehood. Single women often have the freedom to pursue education, careers, and personal interests. In Middle East countries, cultural attitudes towards single women can be influenced by religious beliefs and traditional values. That is what we can see in our data.

The experiences of single women within different religious contexts can also vary significantly, as religious beliefs and practices influence social norms and expectations. In Christianity traditionally (religious of most Spanish people), marriage has been highly valued,

but attitudes vary. Single women may be involved in various aspects of the church, and there is a range of acceptance for singlehood. Traditional Islamic societies like Iran often place a strong emphasis on family and marriage. Therefore, comparing the experiences of single women in Iran and Spain involves considering various cultural, social, and legal factors that shape their lives.

From the social point of view, although never-married women in both countries mentioned about similar concerns such as stereotype view and economic problems, the turning point of the study was the cultural and legal differences between two countries; as it discusses in sociology of knowledge that, various cultures can appear the same information in different ways.

Spain has more progressive legal frameworks. Although women in Spain have legal equality with men, Spanish participants stated about inequality that comes from the patriarchal view of society. This is very important from epistemological viewpoint of women and gender studies. And that is so, despite legislative changes regarding women's equality and although there are many rules that benefits women in western countries as well as in Spain, women highly confirmed the perception of the existence of inequality and stigmatization in relationship with men or single men and, also, how it is logical, stated about reducing stigma about never-married women. Though there were many attempts in Spain for women rights and considering singleness as an identity, never-married women have many problems, specially from the traditional view of society that exists in this time and never-married Spanish women wanted to change the social construct and people traditional view. This issue was mute in the statements of Iranian women. In fact, Iranian women did not see the patriarchal behavior of society, perhaps the reason for this is due to the laws in Iran that never-married women have to struggle with their most basic rights such as living independently and doing gynecological examinations; so, they struggle to get their basic rights and do not have opportunity to shout against the patriarchal culture. In fact, this is an internalization of public stereotypes by individuals about themselves and their specific situations (self-stigma), which in deeply patriarchal societies, women often feel pressured into, or feel more comfortable accepting subordinate positions where they will feel less criticized and/or into behavior in which they remain reassuringly (traditionally) feminine like accepting patriarchal privilege of society.

On the other hand, in a conservative society that family decides about all things, Iranian women face parent's expectations related to marriage and societal norms. They find the marriage a way for finishing this situation, also, they asked for making spouse finding centers. While family remains important in Spain, there is often more autonomy in personal decisions. Single women in Spain may experience a greater degree of independence in shaping their lives and making personal choices.

In psychological view, women had the same needs, such as the need to have a stable partner (spouse for Iranian women and boyfriend or spouse for Spanish women) and motherhood. Both women mentioned about the benefits of singleness, such as spending all the time for themselves, independency, and not having the responsibility of married life that shows an important degree of empowerment of the women in both countries. However, happiness and satisfaction of Spanish women were more than Iranian women. In a society where being a woman consider as a deficit and being women means to being a wife and a mother, women who found themselves far from the norms of society lived in grief, also, living with the family took them away from opportunity of independency and enjoying the opportunities of single life. In fact, while singleness was a modern lifestyle for Spanish women, Iranian women were forced to accept this way of life.

3. FINAL CONCLUSION AND VALIDITY OF THE CENTRAL HYPOTHESIS

Concerns such as fear of being raped, concern of family health and probable mental problems in the future expressed by Spanish women, and concerns such as feelings of guilt for not following God's orders in the issue of marriage, worrying about overwhelming on the family, and regret were the issues that Iranian women were stated.

Form the sexual view, although the needs of all women are the same, social context and religious believes affect the response to it. Iranian never-married women suffered from their sexual needs. While they felt the needs, they could not response to it. In Islam, having any kind of sex outside of marriage is considered a major sin that must lead to a penalty. Iran's legal situation is influenced by Islamic law. While the most concern of Spanish women were their fear from pregnancy or having relationship with uneducated person, for Iranian women having sex was a big concern. This issue can be considered from the perspective of violence against women that women must neglect their sexual needs because they must keep their hymen intact just for her husband and in the case that they cannot marry they never have right to satisfy their basic sexual need.

On the other hand, never-married women of both countries wanted to maintain physical health, especially in old ages. They did many works to keep the body healthy such as stopping alcohol or smoking. As smoking is taboo for women in Iran and alcohol consumption is illegal, so, Iranian women had a healthier lifestyle. However, Iranian women spent a lot of time and money in beauty salons to look more attractive and younger, while appearance was not a big challenge for Spanish women.

The finding of the present study can help to understand better the concrete situation of single never-married women. In general, the experiences of single women in Iran and Spain are influenced by a combination of cultural, legal, and societal factors. Until now, all researchers focused on the issue of single women in a special context with mostly qualitative approach, but this study was the first study that compare adult single never-married women in two different contexts and evaluated the effect of different culture and religious as well as legislation on the needs and concerns of never-married women. Understanding more about this social-individual issue would be important from gender perspective. By implementing strategies for greater empowerment and equality of women as well in guiding society's reaction and possible resolutions rooted in feminist epistemology within women's studies, it is possible to challenge social stigmas faced by single women, promote empowerment through education and advocacy, foster supportive communities, and advocate for policy changes that advance gender equality and inclusivity. These efforts aim to create a more equitable society where single women are valued, respected, and empowered to live fulfilling lives free from discrimination. On the other hand, this study can be the sound of never-married women as a group with special needs and concerns that most of the time are neglected in all societies. Single never-married women not only struggle with the problem related to their gender but also suffer from social and cultural view to their situation.

With a comprehensive view to the findings of this study in two qualitative and quantitative phases, it is hope that the findings of this study be a light for politicians and policy makers to consider the needs and concerns of this group of women in their decisions and with changing the legislations (specially in Eastern Muslim countries), reaching their rights and empowering them help to promote the quality of life of single women, all over the world.

Relating to the validity of our hypotheses, we can infer from our data that the validity of our central hypotheses is supported by evidence indicating that never-married Iranian women exhibited poorer sexual health compared to their Spanish counterparts. How we formulated referred to the issue of "sexual needs" in our first hypotheses. In relation to the second hypothesis, we can conclude from the findings that the validity of our core hypotheses is

supported by evidence demonstrating that never-married Iranian women had poorer social health than their Spanish ones, as we referred to the issue of "social needs" in the second hypothesis. In the third hypothesis, based on our data, we can deduce that the evidence supporting our primary hypotheses is valid, as we found that Iranian women who had never married had poorer psychological health than the Spanish never-married women. This is consistent with our initial hypothesis, which focused on the issue of "psychological needs". In addition, the evidence supporting the fourth hypothesis, which we developed in reference to the issue of "medical-biophysical needs", shows that Iranian never-married women had poorer medical-biophysical health than their Spanish counterparts. This suggests that the validity of our central hypotheses is supported. Finally, the evidence supporting the fifth hypothesis, which we formulate that "differences in all categories between Iranian and Spanish women", shows that Iranian and Spanish never-married women had many differences in all four categories of sexual, social, psychological and medical-biophysical needs. This suggests that the validity of our central hypotheses is supported, although as we saw in our analysis of the results, there are also general coincidences that lead to the need to clarify some aspects of our singular hypothesis, as we indicated above.

3.2. PROSPECTS FOR FUTURE RESEARCHES

- 1- Regarding the importance of women's studies in all contexts and the importance of comparative studies in different societies, it is suggested to do the same study at different countries.
- 2- In addition, because the concepts such as marriage and singlehood are concepts for both gender, it is recommended to carry out the same studies with the same methodology on the never-married men.
- 3- Finally, it is suggested to perform the same studies with the same methodology on the married women at different contexts in the different countries.

3.3. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The limitation of this study was the lack tendency of never-married women to participate in the study because participants had to speak about sensitive topics such as sexual needs and concern. For controlling this limitation, before the interviews, researcher explained about privacy and confidentiality of interviews.

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DEVELOPED QUESTIONNAIRE



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Santiago de Compostela, a 28 de setembro de 2023

TÍTULO INDICATIVO DO ESTUDO OU PARTICIPACIÓN REQUIRIDA

Proxecto de investigación: **Salud de las mujeres solteras: Comparación sociolóxica de las necesidades sexuales, sociais y psicolóxico-médicas entre mujeres iraníes y españolas**

IP: **Profa. Dra. Rita Radl Philipp**, Universidade de Santiago de Compostela.

Contacto: ritam.radl@usc.es

Estimada Sra:

La que suscribe, **Profa. Dra. Rita Radl Philipp**, catedrática de Socioloxía del departamento de Ciencia Política y Socioloxía de la Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, directora del grupo de investigación: *GI-1165 Estudios de Género, Feminismo y Educación*, y membro fundador del **Centro Interdisciplinario de Investigacións Feministas y de Estudios de Género (CIFEX)**, centro de investigación que se enmarca en el contexto de los centros propios de la Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, es la directora del proxecto de investigación: *Salud de las mujeres solteras: Comparación sociolóxica de las necesidades sexuales, sociais y psicolóxico- médicas entre mujeres iraníes y españolas*, proxecto de investigación de tesis doctoral de **Dña. Shakiba Poursad Shahrak**.

El objetivo principal de esta investigación consiste en la investigación de las necesidades

¹ Dado que este documento contén datos de identificación, obxecto de protección, débese tratar conforme á lexislación de protección de datos, aínda no caso de que a información que se vaia recadar para a investigación se obteña de maneira anónima desde o seu inicio e/ou non sexa obxecto de dita protección.

sexuales, sociales y médico-psicológicas de mujeres solteras en Irán y España.

Para efectuar la investigación en el contexto español, que se realizará desde septiembre 2023 hasta diciembre 2023, nos gustaría pedirle su colaboración y participación gratuita (altruista) en los cuestionarios que nos aportarán la información sobre la temática principal y que servirán de base para esta investigación. La codificación y el tratamiento de los datos se efectuará a través del paquete estadístico SPSS software. Su participación es absolutamente voluntaria, anónima, confidencial y Ud. podrá en cualquier momento desistir y renunciar a su participación y consentimiento, si así lo desea.

Dña. Shakiba Pourasad Sharak, es doctoranda del programa de Doutoramento en *Marketing Político, Actores e Institucións nas Sociedades Contemporaneas*, de la de la Universidad de Santiago de Compostela y es la persona que efectuará las entrevistas y cuestionarios bajo mi dirección referente al proyecto de investigación referido.

Le agradecemos, de antemano, muy especialmente su amable colaboración en relación con la recogida de información a través de los cuestionarios, cuya información será tratada, tal y como ya señalamos, de forma anónima y con la máxima confidencialidad por parte de todas las personas implicadas en la investigación referida y rogamus nos otorgue su consentimiento respecto a su participación mediante su firma aquí.

Para cualquier duda que se le plantee, también deseo de revocación de su consentimiento, puede contactar conmigo a través del mail ritam.radl@usc.es o mi teléfono de contacto: 881813810, asimismo, con mucho gusto le informaré de los resultados de la presente investigación por esta vía y de sus posibles publicaciones.

Reciba un cordial saludo y nuestro agradecimiento anticipado por su colaboración y ayuda.

Fdo.: Prof. Dra. Rita Radl
Philipp Directora del Proyecto de
Investigación

Fdo.: Shakiba Pourasad Sharak
Doctoranda USC

Participación en las entrevistas y cuestionarios y autorización grabación proyecto de investigación: Salud de las mujeres solteras: Comparación sociológica de las necesidades sexuales, sociales y psicológico-médicas entre mujeres iraníes y españolas

- Confirmando que he leído y entendido el documento informativo que precede a este formulario, e que tengo oportunidad de formular preguntas e dudas relativas al mismo.
- Confirmando que recibí respuestas e aclaraciones satisfactorias a mis preguntas.
- Entiendo que soy libre de abandonar el estudio en cualquier momento, sin necesidad de explicar las razones de mi abandono e sin ningún tipo de consecuencias para mí.

³ Dado que este documento contiene datos de identificación, objeto de protección, debe tratarse conforme a la legislación de protección de datos, aún en el caso de que la información que se va a recabar para la investigación se obtenga de manera anónima desde el inicio y/o no sea objeto de dicha protección.

- Entendo que este estudo non ten finalidade diagnóstica, polo que non recibirei un informe individualizado dos meus resultados nas probas.
- Consinto en participar no estudo arriba indicado.
- Consinto que a información recollida nesta investigación poida ser empregada, con garantía do meu anonimato, en traballos futuros da mesma liña de investigación e en traballos académicos de estudantes dirixidos polos investigadores/as do equipo.
- Consinto que a información recollida nesta investigación poida ser compartida, con garantía do meu anonimato, con outros equipos a través de redes ou repositorios de investigación colaborativa, con fins de investigación sen ánimo de lucro.
- Consinto que se me poida contactar no futuro para propoñerme participar nunha eventual continuidade desta investigación
- Recibo unha copia deste documento.

**O/A
participante,
Data:**

Sinatura:

**Nome: O/A investigador/a que recada o consentimento,
Data: 28/Sep/2023**

Sinatura:

Nome: Shakiba Porasad Shahrak

¹ Dado que este documento contén datos de identificación, obxecto de protección, débese tratar conforme á lexislación de protección de datos, aínda no caso de que a información que se vaia recadar para a investigación se obteña de maneira anónima desde o seu inicio e/ou non sexa obxecto de dita protección.

Información Social-Personal

1- Edad

2- residente

- Gran ciudad
- pequeña ciudad
- Aldea

3- Nivel de educación

- Educación Primaria
- Educación secundaria
- Bachillerato
- universidad

4- Trabajo

- Desempleados
- trabajador manual
- Empleado
- Empresario y Gerente

5- Ingreso

- Altos
- medio
- Bajo

6- Con quien vives

- Familia
- Amigos
- Sola

Cuestionario de necesidades sexuales, sociales, psicológico-médicas de mujeres españolas

No	Declaraciones	Estoy completamente de acuerdo	Estoy de acuerdo	No tengo idea	No estoy de acuerdo	Estoy en completo desacuerdo
1	No participo en ceremonias y eventos preocupada por lo que digan y piensen los demás.					
2	La visión patriarcal de la sociedad me resulta molesta.					
3	No me gusta que me pregunten por mi situación de pareja.					
4	Creo que seré más completa y me sentiría más realizada viviendo en matrimonio o en pareja estable.					
5	Debido a la soledad, me mantengo ocupada con los demás.					
6	Me casaría para salir de la soledad.					
7	Quiero tener a quien amar y quien me ame.					
8	No habrá nadie en mi vejez que me cuide y puedo ser una carga para los demás.					
9	Echo de menos la vida de casada y de prometida.					
10	Siempre pienso en mi pasado.					
11	Me siento más sola a medida que envejezco.					
12	Con el paso del tiempo, me preocupa pasar la menopausia sin ser madre.					
13	Espero casarme o estar en pareja estable en el futuro.					
14	Me he vuelto más sola después de romper con mi novio.					
15	Mi vida se ha vuelto monótona.					
16	Necesito tener una vida estable (emocional y económicamente).					
17	He planeado vivir con mis amigos para superar la soledad en el futuro.					
18	Me siento feliz y alegre.					
19	Vivo cómodamente porque no tengo las preocupaciones y problemas de las personas casadas y de las que viven en pareja estable.					
20	Disfruto de mi vida de soltera porque tengo familia y amigos.					
21	Con el tiempo, me he acostumbrado a vivir como soltera.					
22	Me he refugiado en mi trabajo y en mi educación en mi vida.					
23	Me siento mal después de masturbarme.					
24	Me pongo nerviosa por no poder satisfacer mis necesidades sexuales.					
25	Me preocupa tener sexo.					
26	Con el paso del tiempo me resulta fácil controlar mis necesidades sexuales.					
27	Siempre me gustaría ser joven y hermosa.					

³ Dado que este documento contén datos de identificación, obxecto de protección, débese tratar conforme á legislación de protección de datos, aínda no caso de que a información que se vaia recadar para a investigación se obteña de maneira anónima desde o seu inicio e/ou non sexa obxecto de dita protección.

28	Cuido mi salud física porque no quiero ser una mujer enferma y dependiente en el futuro.					
29	Me resulta fácil acudir a un médico para tratar una enfermedad ginecológica.					
30	Necesito ayudas sociales para poder vivir.					
31	Tengo preocupaciones económicas y financieras.					
32	No me pude casar o emparejar porque no encontré mi amor.					
33	No me casé o no estoy en pareja estable porque tengo un nivel educativo y de trabajo más alto que la mayoría de los hombres.					



The purpose of this study was comparison of social, sexual, psychological, and physical health needs of never-married women in Iran and Spain. In qualitative phases, we used conventional content. In the quantitative phase, we used a questionnaire. Categories for Iranian women was: 1. Social Needs 2. Psychological Needs 3. Sexual Needs 4. Medical-biophysical Needs. Categories for Spanish women were: 1. Social Needs 2. Psychological Needs 3. Sexual Needs 4. Medical-biophysical Needs. There was not correlation between education and the agreed-upon responses in the questionnaire and there was not correlation between job and the agreed-upon responses in the questionnaire. Evidence indicated that never-married women in Spain lived in the better legal and social situation than Iranian never-married women.