

Why Unable to Leave? Influencing Factors and Mechanisms of Disengagement from Intimate Partner Violence

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Abstract

To elucidate the complex pathways and underlying mechanisms of intimate partner violence (IPV) disengagement, this study systematically reviews the multi-level influencing factors of IPV exit, and proposes the Staged-Continuum Dynamic Interaction Model (SCDIM) by integrating the stage divisions of the Transtheoretical Model of Change with the dynamic continuum framework of the Psychosocial Readiness Model. SCDIM incorporates the triggering mechanisms of stage transitions and the dynamic interplay between risk and protective factors during stage conversion, thereby providing an integrative theoretical framework for understanding the complex mechanisms of IPV disengagement and addressing the explanatory limitations of traditional models regarding multi-factor interactions and non-linear relationships between stages. Future research should validate the model validity and scope of application of SCDIM, and expand its application prospects and empirical research directions through interdisciplinary perspectives.

Full Text

Preamble

Why is Leaving Not an Option? Factors and Mechanisms in the Disengagement from Intimate Partner Violence

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Abstract

To clarify the intricate pathways and internal mechanisms of exiting intimate partner violence (IPV), this study systematically examines the multi-level factors influencing IPV disengagement. By integrating the phase divisions of the transtheoretical model of change with the dynamic continuum framework of the psychosocial readiness model, we propose the Staged-Continuum Dynamic Interaction Model (SCDIM). The SCDIM synthesizes triggering mechanisms for phase transitions and the dynamic interplay between risk and protective factors during phase shifts, offering a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the complexity of IPV disengagement. This model addresses limitations of traditional models in explaining multi-factor interactions and nonlinear relationships between phases. Future research should validate the model's efficacy and applicability, while expanding its applications and empirical directions through interdisciplinary perspectives.

Keywords: intimate partner violence, intimate relationships, abusive relationships, domestic violence

1. Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to coercive violent behavior patterns within intimate relationships, encompassing physical, emotional, sexual, and psychological violence (Chan & Sachs, 2023; Storer et al., 2018; Young-Wolff & McCaw, 2019). As a major public health concern, IPV has garnered widespread scholarly attention due to its high prevalence and severe threats to victims' physical and mental health, as well as its detrimental effects on child development (Tu & Zhang, 2024; Aguiar & Corrêa, 2022; Chan & Sachs, 2023; Moffitt, 2013; Smith et al., 2017; Stöckl & Sorenson, 2024; Storer et al., 2018). Research consistently demonstrates that IPV victims frequently experience disengagement barriers that trap them in abusive relationships, leading to escalating multidimensional costs for victims, families, and society (Barrios et al., 2021; Bridges et al., 2018; Cervantes & Sherman, 2021; O' Neal & Beckman, 2016; Storer et al., 2018). Consequently, elucidating the complex pathways and internal mechanisms of IPV disengagement holds significant theoretical and practical importance.

Initial investigations into IPV disengagement factors emerged in the 1970s, identifying key variables such as abuse experiences, learned helplessness, fear of leaving consequences, and sociocultural factors (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Dobash & Dobash, 1988; Schutte et al., 1988; Walker, 1977). However, this early research largely adopted fragmented approaches to IPV disengagement events, lacking systematic theoretical frameworks and focusing primarily on static attribution of risk factors. In 2003, Anderson and Saunders pioneered the conceptualization of IPV disengagement as a dynamic process, extracting important predictors including violence characteristics, external resources, and psychosocial factors (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). Subsequently, researchers

increasingly emphasized the temporal continuity and path diversity of IPV disengagement processes (Enander & Holmberg, 2008; Khaw & Hardesty, 2007). Nevertheless, existing studies predominantly analyze single dimensions—individual, relational, or social levels—while neglecting the nonlinear coupling effects of these factors (Barrios et al., 2021; Bates, 2020; Catallo et al., 2012; Cervantes & Sherman, 2021; Costanza Baldry & Cinquegrana, 2020; Overstreet & Quinn, 2013; Rai & Choi, 2018; Reisenhofer & Taft, 2013; Storer et al., 2018). Furthermore, while researchers have employed mainstream models such as the transtheoretical model of change (TTM) or the psychosocial readiness model (PRM) to advance mechanistic explanations from stage-based or continuum perspectives, neither integrates the dynamic interplay of risk/protective factors, and single-perspective theoretical frameworks cannot accurately describe the complex pathways and mechanisms of IPV disengagement (Atiyat & Al Momeni, 2022; Catallo et al., 2012; Cluss et al., 2006; Overstreet & Quinn, 2013; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984; Reisenhofer & Taft, 2013; Storer et al., 2018).

In reality, IPV disengagement represents a complex process involving both phase transitions and continuous evolution, with its path formation mechanisms dynamically influenced by the interaction of internal and external risk/protective factors. Existing single-theory frameworks fail to construct interaction patterns among multi-level influencing factors and inadequately address the unique roles of key factors at each stage, resulting in insufficient explanatory power for disengagement pathways and limited ability to reveal the complex routes and formation mechanisms IPV victims may experience. This underscores the urgent need to develop an integrative theoretical model.

Accordingly, this paper first systematically reviews internal and external risk/protective factors influencing IPV disengagement and summarizes the explanatory limitations of traditional theoretical frameworks. Building upon this foundation, we innovatively integrate TTM's phase transition mechanisms with PRM's dynamic equilibrium framework to propose the Staged-Continuum Dynamic Interaction Model (SCDIM), which clearly articulates the movement process of IPV disengagement, cross-phase pathways, the interactive effects of pervasive influencing factors, and the mechanisms of core factors at each stage. Finally, we discuss future directions for model validation and application prospects.

2. Main Influencing Factors of IPV Disengagement

The Sanctions and Sanctuary Framework posits that different cultures exhibit varying levels of tolerance toward IPV and support for victims (Counts et al., 1999; Koenig et al., 2006). Based on this perspective, we categorize IPV disengagement factors into risk and protective types based on valence. Risk factors contribute to stagnation, regression, and other adverse states in IPV disengagement, whereas protective factors facilitate victims' preparation and concrete actions across cognitive, emotional, and behavioral domains. Additionally, according to the Socio-Ecological Model (SEM; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; McLeroy

et al., 1988), individual development and behavior are influenced by multi-level environmental factors. This model provides a useful framework for explaining risk and protective factors for IPV disengagement at the macro-system (societal), exo-system (community), micro-system (relational), and individual (victim) levels (Pinnewala, 2009; Sabri, 2014). Integrating SEM with the Sanctions and Sanctuary Framework, we identify and organize IPV disengagement factors into individual-level (victim) and environmental-level (including interpersonal relationships beyond the individual, organizational policies, sociocultural systems, and broader macro-level systems) risk and protective factors. The following sections outline the main influencing factors of IPV disengagement based on this classification.

2.1.1 Individual-Level Risk Factors

Special Age Stages. Research indicates that adolescents and older adults constitute primary at-risk groups for IPV entrapment (Band-Winterstein, 2015; Cheung et al., 2015; Feyissa et al., 2024; Pugh et al., 2018; Rizzo et al., 2020; Roberto & McCann, 2018). Adolescents may struggle to accurately identify psychological coercion in intimate relationships due to incomplete psychological development and insufficient knowledge and experience in handling unhealthy relationships, leading to entrapment in abusive relationships (Cervantes & Sherman, 2021; Muñoz-Rivas et al., 2022). For older adults, dual declines in physical health and social functioning impede IPV disengagement. For instance, chronic illnesses and excessive embeddedness in family systems across economic and emotional dimensions hinder older adults' willingness and capacity to disengage (Roberto & McCann, 2018). Moreover, life course theory emphasizes that individual experiences and choices are jointly shaped by historical context, social structure, and personal agency. For example, older cohorts have been socialized to support male dominance, hold stronger traditional marital values regarding family integrity, and experience constraints on personal agency due to longer-lasting intimate relationships and stronger emotional bonds, all of which create barriers to IPV disengagement (Hightower et al., 2013; Hing et al., 2021; Hutchison, 2010; Roberto & McCann, 2021). Evidently, the unique characteristics of these age stages create deficits in cognitive functioning, physical health, and social functioning, rendering adolescents and older adults particularly vulnerable to IPV entrapment.

Personal Abuse History. Individuals who witness or experience abuse from early childhood through adulthood are prone to IPV disengagement difficulties. According to the intergenerational transmission of violence theory (Kalmuss, 1984), childhood exposure to violence reduces individuals' ability to recognize abuse and increases abuse tolerance, normalizing violent behavior and perpetuating unhealthy relationships (Cervantes & Sherman, 2021; Childress et al., 2021). Furthermore, prolonged exposure to abusive relationships in adulthood further erodes self-esteem and sense of worth, diminishing victims' help-seeking capacity (Bates, 2020; Cohen et al., 2024; Storer et al., 2018).

IPV Cognitive Distortion. Extensive research demonstrates that individuals in violent intimate relationships frequently develop cognitive distortions regarding IPV, manifesting as lack of awareness or willingness to recognize IPV harm, inability or difficulty determining whether they are in an IPV relationship, and consequent failure to seek help information and pathways. For example, individuals may tend to believe they are not typical IPV victims because there is “no physical abuse” or “abuse frequency is not high,” or they may harbor hope for partner repentance and relationship improvement. This can lead to a state of “victimization without self-awareness,” resulting in blind entrapment in abusive relationships (Azeez et al., 2024; Bates, 2020; Caridade et al., 2020; Storer et al., 2018). Such cognitive distortion not only prevents individuals from recognizing their situation but also leads to lack of knowledge about and trust in help-seeking pathways, further causing IPV disengagement failure (Afrouz et al., 2020; Badenes-Sastre et al., 2023; Monterrosa, 2019; Shah et al., 2024). More importantly, lacking correct cognition and recognition of IPV may lead to misattribution of IPV experiences, such as believing that experiencing abuse is self-inflicted and should be accepted as punishment. According to the learned helplessness model (Walker, 1977), this belief in one’s inability or unworthiness to terminate abuse further damages IPV victims’ perception of their own capabilities—such as inability to obtain others’ support and recognition or absence of reasons to leave (Estrellado & Loh, 2016). The resulting learned helplessness ultimately causes individuals to lose belief in their capacity to disengage (Launius & Lindquist, 1988; Lipsky et al., 2006).

Excessive Dependence on Partner and Family. Excessive dependence on partners increases individuals’ willingness to maintain existing abusive relationships, primarily including emotional, security, and sexual dependence (Taherkhani et al., 2019), manifested as relationship attachment in daily life and high expectations for relationship improvement (Cervantes & Sherman, 2021; Lahav, 2023; Taherkhani et al., 2019). High-level partner dependence may restrict women’s independence in sexual, economic, and security domains, causing them to remain in abused states (Badenes-Sastre et al., 2024; Bates, 2020; Estrellado & Loh, 2016; Heron et al., 2022; Sandhu & Barrett, 2020; Tello & Suárez, 2020). Individuals with excessive family dependence may retain a sense of responsibility for caring for the family and maintaining family reputation while in IPV relationships, which may further increase the psychological cost of IPV disengagement while deteriorating the original unhealthy relationship (Badenes-Sastre et al., 2024; Bruton & Tyson, 2017; Childress et al., 2021; Estrellado & Loh, 2016; McKinley & Liddell, 2022). Additionally, some researchers suggest that excessive dependence on partners and families promotes tendencies toward rationalizing cognitive reappraisal of abusive relationships, leading individuals to believe that terminating abusive relationships may symbolize failure to properly fulfill certain “obligations” as partners or family members (Bridges et al., 2018; Caridade et al., 2020).

Fear of IPV Disengagement Consequences. Both genders may fear potential consequences of IPV disengagement and consequently remain in unhealthy

relationships (Azeez et al., 2024; Bruton & Tyson, 2017; Childress et al., 2021). Women are more likely to remain in abusive relationships due to fear of being unable to guarantee their own and their family' s safety or fear of losing livelihood resources (B. Sabri et al., 2018). This process may be accompanied by panic regarding divorcee identity, manifested as heightened awareness of the shamefulness of divorcee status, which predisposes women to “entrapment due to fear” (Taherkhani et al., 2019). Unlike women, men more frequently cannot leave due to threats of malicious accusations from partners or fear of losing custody rights (Bates, 2020; Taherkhani et al., 2019). This indicates that the sources and manifestations of fear differ between genders, with women' s fears focusing on life and property safety, while men' s fears primarily manifest at the social relationship level.

2.1.2 Environmental-Level Risk Factors

Cultural Stigma. Cultural stigma refers to markers of shame and disgrace associated with specific social groups or behaviors (such as divorce), including IPV-specific stigma, shame regarding marital failure, traditional family values, and broader sociocultural factors such as gender role norms (Rai & Choi, 2018). These factors may collectively form a pervasive system of beliefs and value constraints that exacerbate individual IPV entrapment. According to the IPV stigmatization model, IPV cultural stigma can lead individuals to internalize stigmatizing beliefs and develop expectations of post-disengagement stigmatization (e.g., worrying about family criticism and lack of support for leaving a partner, fearing external blame and ridicule for abuse experiences), which hinders clear cognition of abusive behavior (i.e., “I am not the one at fault,” “leaving is the only way to shed victim status”) and ultimately inhibits IPV disengagement (Overstreet & Quinn, 2013). Additionally, shame regarding non-virgin status/marital failure may exist as a cultural stigma phenomenon, causing individuals to learn and internalize corresponding social expectations, thereby obstructing IPV disengagement (Childress et al., 2021; Monterrosa, 2019; Storer et al., 2018). The negative effects of cultural stigma may also manifest through religious beliefs or traditional family values. For example, Catholic notions of maintaining family integrity may create a value orientation where “leaving the family is wrong.” Similarly, traditional family gender role norms may require women to endure partner violence by enacting stereotypical behaviors (e.g., women are expected to play submissive and sacrificial roles in marriage) while forcing men to deny the existence of abusive relationships to maintain masculinity (Afrouz et al., 2020; Bates, 2020; Childress et al., 2021; Estrellado & Loh, 2016; Rai & Choi, 2018; B. Sabri et al., 2018).

Lack of Social Support. Social support is defined as resources, coping strategies, or resource exchanges provided by others, primarily including instrumental (e.g., problem-solving assistance), tangible (e.g., material donations), informational (e.g., advice provision), and emotional (e.g., comfort provision) support (Schwarzer et al., 2004). Research demonstrates that lack of support from in-

timate groups within core social networks hinders victims' IPV disengagement. Specifically, both geographical distance (O' Neal & Beckman, 2016; B. Sabri et al., 2018; Sandhu & Barrett, 2020) and emotional estrangement may reduce individuals' willingness to disengage (Afrouz et al., 2020; Childress et al., 2021; Sandhu & Barrett, 2020). Additionally, non-intimate members outside core social relationships may deny victims' abuse experiences or refuse to provide help. For instance, church encouragement to forgive partners and pressure from social networks may lead individuals to develop beliefs that "leaving is betrayal" and "abuse is forgivable," causing IPV disengagement stagnation (Bates, 2020; Ferrer-Perez et al., 2020; Francis et al., 2017; Gracia et al., 2020; Storer et al., 2018). These findings indicate that low social support availability constitutes a significant barrier to IPV disengagement (Caridade et al., 2020; Shah et al., 2024).

Structural Resource Barriers. Structural resource barriers constrain individuals' ability to independently obtain basic livelihood security, primarily including lack of economic resources, legal protection, and other social security measures. Research shows that economic constraints, lack of housing, and inaction by assistance agencies or lack of legal support directly or indirectly create difficulties in IPV disengagement (Afrouz et al., 2020; Estrellado & Loh, 2016; Murvartian et al., 2024; O' Neal & Beckman, 2016; Spencer et al., 2020; Taherkhani et al., 2019). For example, immigrants in certain regions often lack necessary language skills and social security in their location, making them more likely to fear deportation after disengaging from IPV due to anti-immigration laws (Voolma, 2018). Simultaneously, immigrants' language barriers restrict their help-seeking behaviors (O' Neal & Beckman, 2016), which may further reduce individuals' basic survival capabilities, creating a vicious cycle.

2.2.1 Individual-Level Protective Factors

IPV Cognitive Clarity. IPV cognitive clarity includes accurate identification of abusive behavior, clear cognition of one' s own rights, and effective resource utilization capacity. According to Empowerment Theory, clear cognition enables victims to more accurately assess their situation and promote recognition of abuse patterns and consequences. This cognitive clarity helps individuals make wiser decisions and take more effective actions to disengage from abusive relationships (Sani & Pereira, 2020). This cognitive and recognition process acquires differentiated characteristics as IPV intensifies, with individuals potentially evolving from "recognizing the problem exists" to "recognizing the problem will persist," thereby facilitating subsequent IPV disengagement behaviors. For example, individuals may initially develop vague cognition of being in an abusive relationship due to external factors such as sudden events (e.g., severe abuse) or others' advice at a certain time point. As abuse severity increases, individuals develop clearer cognition regarding the repetitiveness and persistence of partner abuse, consequently losing hope in the current intimate relationship and ultimately making the decision to leave. Research has found that meaning-making

regarding the persistence of partner abuse—recognizing the continuity of abuse facts—constitutes one of the key factors promoting IPV disengagement (Sani & Pereira, 2020).

Positive Psychological Capital. Based on the resilience portfolio model (Grych et al., 2015), high-level comprehensive abilities (e.g., self-regulation capacity, self-efficacy) better equip individuals to cope with negative events and achieve IPV disengagement. Extensive research demonstrates that individuals who can fully utilize their interpersonal resources and internal strengths—such as meaning-making (the ability to find meaning in difficulties) and self-regulation (the ability to maintain motivation and overcome obstacles when striving for goals)—are more likely to achieve IPV disengagement (Fredrickson, 2004; Grych et al., 2015; Masten et al., 2004; Moffitt et al., 2011). Furthermore, higher self-efficacy enhances individuals' sense of control when facing stressful events, leading them to adopt more adaptive coping strategies to complete IPV disengagement (Masten et al., 2004). Additionally, increased self-efficacy helps individuals conduct advantageous assessments of leaving consequences, as high self-efficacy individuals are more likely to believe that their economic conditions and basic safety can be adequately secured after leaving the original partner, concluding that the benefits of leaving the unhealthy relationship outweigh the costs and ultimately making rational disengagement decisions. Moreover, enhanced self-efficacy helps individuals break free from dependence on partners and family relationships, thereby promoting IPV disengagement (Estrellado & Loh, 2016).

Motherhood. Although research indicates that women may remain in abusive relationships to provide complete families for their children (Bruton & Tyson, 2017; Storer et al., 2018; Taherkhani et al., 2019), when partner violence endangers children's safety, it may motivate mothers to implement IPV disengagement behaviors. For example, some women may choose to disengage from abusive relationships to protect their children from domestic violence impacts (Heron et al., 2022; Tello & Suárez, 2020). Moreover, Sani and Pereira (2020) conducted a qualitative study of 15 mothers who actively disengaged from IPV, with results showing that children's demands for their mothers to leave abusive relationships actively promoted women's IPV disengagement processes. In summary, although motherhood may contribute to some degree of IPV entrapment, individuals may simultaneously decide to leave abusive relationships based on considerations of protecting children's best interests and safety (Ahmad-Stout et al., 2021; Sani & Carvalho, 2018; Sani & Pereira, 2020; Shah et al., 2024; Tello & Suárez, 2020), demonstrating the double-edged sword effect of motherhood on IPV entrapment.

Specific Attachment Styles/Emotional States. Specific attachment styles and emotional states may actively promote IPV disengagement. For example, research examining attachment style effects on IPV disengagement found that secure and dismissing attachment patterns serve as positive factors for IPV disengagement. This may be because securely attached individuals possess high-

level self-esteem and self-worth, making them less likely to remain in abusive relationships, while dismissing individuals have less investment in intimate relationships, making disengagement easier (Henderson et al., 1997). Conversely, preoccupied and fearful attachment pattern individuals are more likely to remain in abusive relationships (Shurman & Rodriguez, 2006). Regarding emotional states, research shows that lower levels of depression and hopelessness, as well as increased anger, promote individuals' readiness to disengage from abusive relationships. These emotional changes may signal victims' termination of feelings for partners and anticipation of life after disengagement (Shurman & Rodriguez, 2006).

2.2.2 Environmental-Level Protective Factors

Strong Social Support. Research finds that obtaining family support or external recognition constitutes an important protective factor promoting disengagement from abusive relationships (Heron et al., 2022; Howell et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2024; Tello & Suárez, 2020; Zukauskienė et al., 2021). For example, support from family members helps victims overcome adverse effects of abuse experiences and enhances their self-regulation and adversity-overcoming capacities (Sani & Pereira, 2020). Additionally, under certain circumstances, non-core interpersonal networks such as friends, community members, and extended family can serve as important protective resources for IPV disengagement (Grych et al., 2015; Sabri et al., 2018). Moreover, for women with children, children's understanding and support for their disengagement intentions also promote IPV disengagement (Sani & Pereira, 2020; Tello & Suárez, 2020).

Adequate Structural Resources. Individuals possessing economic resources, legal protection, and other social security measures constitute key distal protective factors for IPV disengagement. Research demonstrates that socioeconomic status of individuals and their families significantly positively correlates with individual mental health levels (Wickrama & Noh, 2009), suggesting that high-resource individuals possess better material and psychological conditions for IPV disengagement. Meanwhile, support and assistance from professional protection agencies, shelters, police, and legal systems also serve as positive facilitators for disengagement from abusive relationships (Sabri et al., 2018). For example, the introduction and implementation of anti-IPV laws and regulations can enable victims to obtain corresponding assistance in judicial practice. Additionally, overcoming language barriers and better cultural adaptation help immigrant populations achieve IPV disengagement (Sabri et al., 2018).

3. Classic Theoretical Frameworks of IPV Disengagement

IPV victims' disengagement from violent intimate relationships involves numerous influencing factors and complex internal mechanisms. Currently, the transtheoretical model of change (TTM; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984) and the psychosocial readiness model (PRM; Cluss et al., 2006) provide theoretical explanations for this process from personal, interpersonal, and sociocultural per-

spectives. TTM focuses on stage-based divisions of IPV disengagement, while PRM describes the IPV disengagement process and the interaction of internal and external influencing factors from a continuous perspective.

3.1 Transtheoretical Model of Change (TTM)

TTM is one of the most influential theories in health behavior change, generally used to describe different stages individuals experience when changing behavior. Based on empirical data from long-term behavior tracking (e.g., smoking, weight loss) and relapse risk probability statistics, this model proposes that when people attempt to change unhealthy or problematic behaviors, they experience five stages: Precontemplation, Contemplation, Preparation, Action, and Maintenance (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984; Prochaska & Velicer, 1997). The Precontemplation stage involves denial of the problem behavior's existence, where individuals do not consider (within the next 6 months) taking measures to change their problematic behavior. Individuals in the Contemplation stage begin weighing the pros and cons of changing unhealthy behavior and making decisions about whether to change (within the next 6 months). In the Preparation stage, individuals initially overcome unhealthy behavior by changing behavioral habits, living environments, and cognitive beliefs (within the next 1 month). The Action stage involves implementing behavior change and shaping healthy behavior through enhancing personal capabilities and obtaining external support (within the past 6 months). The Maintenance stage includes consolidating newly learned healthy behavior (for more than 6 months) and actively taking measures to prevent unhealthy behavior recurrence when interference or obstacles arise (Larkin, 2008; Lenio, 2006; Reisenhofer & Taft, 2013). This five-stage process is typically cyclical, and individuals may experience several cycles of progression and regression before achieving complete successful change (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997). Currently, TTM is widely applied as a diagnostic framework in IPV research, helping researchers parse victims' unique psychological and behavioral trajectories during IPV disengagement and identify key "turning points" marking phase transitions. For example, Lenio (2006) found that individuals in the Precontemplation stage generally "deny abuse existence" and "take no action," with the core issue (i.e., "turning point") for crossing into the Contemplation stage being "recognizing and acknowledging the abuse problem." Subsequent research further conceptualized the IPV disengagement process as a linear stage sequence based on the TTM framework, extracting stage-specific indicators (e.g., "plan formulation" in the Preparation stage, "concrete action" in the Action stage). However, Khaw and Hardesty (2007) discovered through qualitative interviews that IPV disengagement pathways may exhibit nonlinear characteristics: for instance, some victims "leap" directly from the Contemplation stage to the Action stage due to sudden violent incidents. Thus, while TTM provides a foundational stage framework for IPV disengagement research, its linear nature may not align with the real-world complexity of the disengagement process.

In summary, current research based on TTM conceptualizes IPV disengagement as a cross-stage linear movement process, which helps reveal continuous transition mechanisms between stages and explore unique psychological and behavioral indicators at each stage. However, TTM remains a general behavior change framework that cannot precisely qualify key factors existing at each stage of IPV disengagement, explain triggering mechanisms for non-continuous transition movements, or address the dynamic effects of cross-stage influencing factors (e.g., sudden changes in social support, crisis events). Moreover, TTM itself does not address influencing factors and their processes across stages, which limits clarification of IPV disengagement mechanisms.

3.2 Psychosocial Readiness Model (PRM)

Cluss et al. (2006) proposed the psychosocial readiness model (PRM), suggesting that IPV victims' behavioral intentions exist in a constantly changing process wherein victims are dynamically influenced by the balance of internal and external factors, moving toward either maintaining the status quo or changing behavior. This model focuses on three factors emerging from interview studies: awareness that partner behavior constitutes abuse, perceived support, and self-efficacy to overcome difficulties. These three factors and their interrelationships can explain why individuals occupy different positions in this process at different times. PRM posits that individuals' readiness to change is influenced by the balance of internal factors, with the direction of internal factor balance determining change likelihood. For example, when only one of the three internal factors is strong (positive valence, moving toward change) while other factors are relatively weak (negative valence, moving toward status quo), overall readiness for behavior change decreases (total valence negative). Specifically, even if individuals can recognize partner abuse, if they do not perceive support from trusted individuals like parents and friends and have low self-efficacy for change, victims' behavioral states will still tend toward maintaining the status quo. Conversely, when all internal factors are strong (total valence positive, moving toward change), readiness for behavior change increases, ultimately facilitating IPV disengagement. Additionally, the model describes how external positive factors (e.g., friends, professional agency help, external attitudes) and negative factors (e.g., unemployment, lack of housing, economic factors) promote or hinder the change process.

In summary, the psychosocial readiness model (PRM) simultaneously considers the dynamic balance of internal and external factors, focusing not only on individuals' internal psychological states but also on external environmental and social influences, thereby providing a more comprehensive framework for understanding IPV victims' behavior change processes. Moreover, PRM conceptualizes behavior change as a continuous rather than discrete process, which better aligns with IPV victims' complex real-life experiences. That is, behavior change is often not linear but influenced by multiple factors with nonlinear and non-sequential characteristics. Currently, this model has received empirical

support in several studies (Chang et al., 2010; Tarzia et al., 2016). For example, Tarzia et al. (2016) emphasized PRM' s importance in understanding and supporting victims' behavior change processes and developed an online intervention tool (I-DECIDE) for IPV victims based on this model, aiming to help victims conduct self-assessment and self-decision-making to enhance their safety and well-being.

3.3 Summary

It is evident that TTM and PRM each have distinct emphases and are theoretically complementary in explaining the IPV disengagement process. Specifically, TTM' s stage-based model deconstructs the behavior change process through temporal sequences, with its core advantage being the provision of a diagnostic framework for stage-specific characteristics of IPV disengagement (e.g., psychological representation differences between Precontemplation and Contemplation stages). In contrast, PRM as a continuum model reveals nonlinear developmental characteristics of behavior change under the interaction of internal and external factors through a dynamic balance perspective. However, both models have limitations: First, regarding stage movement mechanisms, although TTM establishes a standardized stage division system, its linear progression assumption struggles to explain the complexity of individual behavior change processes found in empirical research. For example, studies have found that nearly 37% of victims exhibit nonlinear characteristics with multiple stages coexisting (Reisenhofer & Taft, 2013). While PRM has received some empirical support and is suitable for explaining reciprocal movements between stages, its descriptions of specific processing details during change are relatively general, making it difficult to identify concrete action processes of IPV disengagement and locate specific intervention targets. Second, regarding influencing factor pathways, while TTM can identify stage-specific influencing factors (e.g., cognitive distortion in the Precontemplation stage), it fails to clarify synergistic effects of influencing factors across stages. Although PRM explains rapid changes in behavior readiness through dynamic balance mechanisms of internal/external protective/risk factors, it struggles to demonstrate the specific efficacy of each factor at different stages.

In reality, IPV disengagement is a complex process possessing both process-based stage characteristics and continuity in psychological and behavioral changes. Clear description of this process requires a comprehensive model that incorporates both stage characteristics in process and continuous movement between stages. As previously discussed, TTM' s diagnostic function helps clarify victims' disengagement processes and identify their specific stages, while PRM' s continuum concept helps explain dynamic fluctuations within and between stages (e.g., inter-stage transitions and leap phenomena). Meanwhile, TTM' s exploration of stage-specific influencing factors helps clarify movement mechanisms for individuals to achieve stage transitions, while PRM' s discussion of pervasive influencing factors in IPV disengagement

helps illuminate the stage-sensitive intensity and mode of action of general influencing factors throughout the overall movement process. Furthermore, TTM conceptualizes IPV disengagement as a linear progressive stage process, while PRM characterizes the complexity of psychological and behavioral changes in IPV disengagement from a continuous perspective. Thus, TTM and PRM are both indispensable for describing stage anchoring and continuous change, specific and general influencing factor mechanisms, and progressive processes versus cyclical pathways in IPV disengagement. Based on this, our study combines TTM and PRM to integrate stage and continuity in the IPV disengagement process, proposing the Staged-Continuum Dynamic Interaction Model (SCDIM), which possesses both TTM' s stage structural validity and PRM' s dynamic explanatory power.

4. Staged-Continuum Dynamic Interaction Model (SCDIM) of IPV Disengagement

4.1 Theoretical Proposal and Core Viewpoints

Within the foundational framework of PRM' s change continuity, this paper elaborates on internal and external risk/protective factors affecting the disengagement process and integrates TTM' s five-stage division of IPV disengagement (i.e., Precontemplation, Contemplation, Preparation, Action, and Maintenance) along with core issues requiring resolution for cross-stage movement (i.e., problem awareness, pros/cons weighing, confidence enhancement, situation improvement, and change adaptation), thereby explaining mechanisms for achieving cross-stage movement. Therefore, while retaining the basic viewpoints and theoretical advantages of TTM and PRM, this paper proposes the Staged-Continuum Dynamic Interaction Model (SCDIM) of IPV disengagement (Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]). Its core viewpoints are as follows:

- 1. Integration of Staged and Continuous Processes.** This model posits that IPV disengagement is a complex process possessing both disengagement process stage characteristics and continuity in psychological and behavioral changes under the influence of multiple internal and external factors. During this process, victims exhibit specific psychological and behavioral characteristics at different stages, and stages are not completely independent but mutually influential and dynamically associated, manifesting as stage boundary ambiguity (e.g., Contemplation stage may embed Precontemplation features) and universality of transitional states (e.g., “turning zone” shaded areas).
- 2. Real-Time Interaction of Internal and External Factors.** This model simultaneously emphasizes the real-time dynamic interplay of internal psychological factors (e.g., IPV awareness, self-efficacy) and external environmental factors (e.g., social support, resource access) in the IPV disengagement process. This interactive effect not only influences behavioral choices within stages but also directly triggers cross-stage progression or

regression through the waxing and waning intensity of “risk-protective” factors.

- 3. Dynamic Mechanisms of Movement Pathways.** This model defines dynamicity as the spatiotemporal evolution characteristics of disengagement pathways, with its essence lying in the fact that disengagement pathways are not preset fixed trajectories but emergent results of real-time interaction between internal and external factors. The model focuses on victims as adaptive agents in continuous interaction with their environment and clearly demonstrates the morphological diversity of IPV disengagement complex pathways (e.g., linear progression, nonlinear transition, multi-stage cycling), directional variability (e.g., victims may produce differentiated pathways such as progression or regression due to internal/external factor changes), and trigger sensitivity (e.g., sudden events may induce “stagnation→leap” pathways).

4.2 Mechanisms of SCDIM

As shown in Figure 1, SCDIM is a dual-arrow model divided into five stages. The right arrow contains internal and external protective factors promoting IPV disengagement, such as awareness of abusive relationships and external support and recognition. This arrow represents the forward disengagement process, where protective factors help victims achieve cross-stage progression. The left reverse arrow contains internal and external risk factors inhibiting IPV disengagement, including low IPV cognition and lack of social support networks, which hinder individuals from achieving IPV disengagement. These influencing factors universally exist across all stages, and the opposing effects of different risk and protective factors influence the process of cross-stage movement. Meanwhile, under the influence of key factors at each stage, individuals achieve forward or backward cross-stage continuous movement in the model’s central portion. Additionally, nine unidirectional arrows in the model describe possible cross-stage pathways in IPV disengagement (i.e., pathways \sim), representing victims’ potential cross-stage progression, regression, and multi-stage leaps during IPV disengagement. Finally, four “turning zones” (i.e., shaded areas $\text{ }_1, \text{ }_2, \text{ }_3, \text{ }_4$) represent possible transitional states between adjacent stages during crossing processes. In summary, SCDIM presents the developmental stages of IPV disengagement and their influencing factors, summarizing key factors and specific pathways for achieving stage progression, regression, or stagnation. The following sections introduce the linear/nonlinear pathways and their mechanisms that IPV victims may achieve in SCDIM.

4.2.1 Linear Pathways and Mechanisms First, individuals in the Precontemplation stage typically lack awareness of being in abusive relationships and have no intention to change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984). Therefore, the core issue facing individuals at this stage is whether they can acknowledge abuse problems in their relationships, i.e., “problem awareness.” Individuals may ratio-

nalize abusive behavior, so movement to the next stage requires an identifiable inducing event to prompt acknowledgment of partner abuse (Burke et al., 2001). Consequently, in the Precontemplation stage, high-level IPV cognition—awareness of being in an abusive relationship—constitutes the key protective factor for achieving stage transition. Inducing events that promote IPV cognition typically include sudden incidents (e.g., severe abuse), seeking others' opinions, and increased anger. On this basis, once individuals possess high-level IPV cognition, they may achieve the transition from Precontemplation to Contemplation (pathway). Conversely, risk factors such as low IPV cognition and partner dependence cause individuals to stagnate in the Precontemplation stage.

In contrast, individuals entering the Contemplation stage have recognized problems in their relationships and begun considering change but have not yet made change decisions (Shurman & Rodriguez, 2006). The core issue in the Contemplation stage involves evaluating relationship termination consequences and weighing pros and cons of leaving partners based on factors such as economic security and personal safety; thus, the core issue is “pros/cons weighing.” Accordingly, in the Contemplation stage, factors such as abuse escalation, endangerment of self and children's safety, and greater benefits for children from leaving actively promote IPV disengagement. Meanwhile, risk factors such as childhood abuse experiences, high responsibility for marriage and family, and sociocultural stigma phenomena hinder individuals from leaving. Through decisional balance of risk and protective factors, when individuals evaluate leaving outcomes as “benefits outweigh costs,” they are prompted to achieve transition to the Preparation stage (pathway). Conversely, individuals continue stagnating in the Contemplation stage.

The next stage is Preparation, where individuals plan to take leaving action in the near future (Prochaska et al., 1992; Prochaska & Velicer, 1997; Velicer et al., 1998). The core issue in the Preparation stage is whether individuals possess confidence to successfully disengage from abusive relationships, i.e., the core issue is “confidence enhancement.” Therefore, individuals at this stage must actively prepare for IPV disengagement to enhance confidence, which may include obtaining social resources and using family, friends, and external others as support in change plans. If individuals believe action is beneficial and can produce good outcomes, can obtain others' recognition and support, and possess high personal and family socioeconomic status, these factors facilitate IPV disengagement. Additionally, according to the theory of planned behavior (TPB), perceived behavior control independently predicts behavior (Ajzen, 1985). For example, when Preparation-stage individuals obtain adequate social resources, their perception that disengagement actions can succeed increases, i.e., high-level self-efficacy prompts individuals to actively take disengagement actions. Therefore, some researchers consider high-level self-efficacy a key protective factor for crossing the Preparation stage (Kraft et al., 1999). When victims obtain adequate social resources and external support, formulate feasible plans, and possess self-efficacy to implement plans, individuals more easily enter the Action stage (pathway). Conversely, risk factors such as fear of

leaving consequences (e.g., losing child custody, inability to support self and children), inability to obtain support from others and police/legal protection, and fear of stigmatization hinder IPV disengagement. Moreover, when individuals cannot overcome the key risk factor of fear of leaving consequences, they may regress to the Contemplation stage (pathway).

In the Action stage, individuals have formulated plans and implemented IPV disengagement actions. They typically work over extended periods to enhance their capabilities and seek support to change their current situations (Prochaska et al., 1992; Prochaska & Velicer, 1997; Velicer et al., 1998). Unlike the Preparation stage, Action-stage individuals have made substantive efforts toward change, i.e., executing change plans formulated in the Preparation stage and 致力于 transforming problematic behaviors to acceptable states. For example, victims take concrete actions such as calling the police or seeking help from family and friends (Shurman & Rodriguez, 2006). Therefore, the core issue in the Action stage is whether victims can significantly improve their abused situations through enhancing personal capabilities and obtaining external support, i.e., “situation improvement.” At this point, protective factors such as actually possessing adequate and stable resources, continuously obtaining external support, and continuously increasing self-efficacy promote IPV disengagement. Lenio (2006) believed that when individuals see beneficial action outcomes, maintain positive emotional states, and receive positive social feedback, they enter the Maintenance stage. That is, obtaining social recognition as a key protective factor promotes individuals’ transition from Action to Maintenance (pathway). Additionally, as risk factors in the Action stage, structural barriers (e.g., lack of economic resources, absence of relevant laws), learned helplessness, inability to obtain family support, and cultural stigma hinder IPV disengagement. Due to dependence on partners and families, the sense of responsibility for maintaining family integrity becomes a key risk factor at this stage, i.e., individuals unable to relinquish this sense of responsibility during action may regress from Action to Preparation (pathway).

In the Maintenance stage, individuals strive to prevent returning to abusive relationships and have greater confidence in maintaining their current state (successful IPV disengagement) (Lenio, 2006; Velicer et al., 1998). Individuals at this stage have entered a safe state of disengagement from abusive relationships, so the core issue is whether they have achieved independence from the original partner and adapted to new lifestyles, i.e., “change adaptation.” Research shows that Maintenance is a continuation of Action, requiring individuals to have the capacity to adopt and maintain behavior change over longer periods (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997; Velicer et al., 1998). At this point, protective factors such as having trustworthy relationships, obtaining external support, and adapting to new (abuse-free) lifestyles promote maintenance action continuation. Conversely, risk factors such as lacking external support and pessimism and anxiety about future life may lead to maintenance failure, where individuals’ established sense of security is threatened again, forcing them to regress to the Action stage where they must re-evaluate and take measures to protect

themselves (pathway).

4.2.2 Nonlinear Pathways and Mechanisms In addition to the aforementioned continuous transition movements, some individuals may experience “leapfrogging” between stages during IPV disengagement. Reisenhofer and Taft (2013) noted that leaps between stages are often passive and spontaneous. For example, when sudden major abuse incidents occur or individuals realize partner abuse behavior will not change, they may achieve transitions from Precontemplation/Contemplation stage () to Action stage (pathway). Factors promoting leaps from Precontemplation to Action may stem from sudden severe violent events in life (e.g., children experiencing violence, violence endangering life safety). Additionally, when Contemplation-stage victims recognize the persistence of partner abuse, they may achieve leaps from Contemplation to Action (Khaw & Hardesty, 2007). Meanwhile, when IPV disengagement actions yield negative outcomes, such as individuals believing their IPV situations cannot change after failed action attempts, reverse transitions from Action/Preparation stage () to Precontemplation/Contemplation stage () occur (pathway) (Reisenhofer & Taft, 2013). For example, victims may experience decreased self-efficacy after failed disengagement attempts, leading them to believe they cannot disengage from partners and regress from Action to Contemplation. Individuals with severely insufficient self-efficacy may even develop self-doubt and regress to the Precontemplation stage of denying IPV situations. Simultaneously, if Preparation-stage individuals cannot successfully obtain resources or information supporting IPV disengagement (e.g., family opposition to disengagement or encouragement to forgive abuse), they may regress to the Precontemplation stage.

Notably, due to the complexity of behavior change itself, individuals may simultaneously occupy multiple stages during IPV disengagement. This model explains this phenomenon through two forms. The first manifests as “turning zones” between adjacent stages closely related to the disengagement process (shaded areas , , ,). Due to boundary ambiguity between stages, victims exhibit transitional states simultaneously occupying two adjacent stages during cross-stage movements, displaying inherent characteristics of both stages. For example, individuals in the Contemplation stage may already begin attempting small behavioral adjustments, such as investigating whether relevant legal policies can facilitate their disengagement (“pros/cons weighing”), but these behaviors actually resemble the Preparation stage’s “actively obtaining external resources.” The second form manifests as victims’ leaps across multiple stages (e.g., pathways and). Specifically, due to IPV disengagement process complexity, individuals simultaneously occupy multiple different stages throughout the entire leap process, which both forms the final leap outcome and possesses characteristics of multiple stages during the leap. For example, Khaw and Hardesty (2007) found through interviews that mother victims may “leap” from the Action stage of deciding to divorce to the Precontemplation/Contemplation stage due to considering children’s welfare (pathway). At this point, the woman is already

in the Action stage of improving personal situations while simultaneously being in the Precontemplation/Contemplation stage of considering children's welfare. Additionally, based on existing research findings, this model only details leap states possible during IPV disengagement (pathways and), as leaps from other stages are difficult to achieve (Khaw & Hardesty, 2007). Thus, SCDIM provides a more comprehensive description and explanation of this complex process while retaining the respective advantages of TTM and PRM.

5. Limitations and Future Directions

Based on integrating existing research and combining TTM and PRM, this paper proposes SCDIM, providing a systematic framework for parsing complex pathways of IPV disengagement. To better advance research progress and practical applications in this field, this paper also discusses future research directions and application scenarios.

5.1 Model Validation and Boundary Effects

SCDIM's construction is based on summarizing previous research findings (Burke et al., 2001; Khaw & Hardesty, 2007; Lenio, 2006). However, past research predominantly employed qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews, so data collection primarily relied on victims' self-reports, while data coding, classification, and interpretation may also be influenced by researcher subjective biases. Thus, the model's scientific validity requires further verification through dynamic longitudinal research. Future research could design tracking studies using mixed methods (quantitative tracking + qualitative interviews) to capture victims' stage transitions, regressions, or leaps during disengagement processes and quantify dynamic weights of core influencing factors (e.g., self-efficacy, social support) at each stage. For example, experience sampling methodology (ESM) could be employed to frequently collect victims' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral data, combined with machine learning analysis to identify predictors of stage transitions (e.g., triggering effects of sudden violent events on stage crossing) [see: Zhang et al. (2016) for systematic review of ESM application characteristics in organizational behavior; Myin-Germeys et al. (2018) for detailed ESM research guidelines and prospects]. Furthermore, this model's internal mechanisms for individuals to achieve stage transitions remain unclear. Current research has revealed internal mechanisms of IPV disengagement from the perspective of "culture of pretence." Culture of pretence is a state where abuse is not acknowledged and is difficult for those outside the relationship to identify or recognize, i.e., individuals present everything as "normal." Research shows that culture of pretence hinders individuals from recognizing abuse and taking action to disengage from IPV through its internal factor—violence normalization (Francis et al., 2017). Thus, internal psychological mechanisms of IPV disengagement are complex and extensively influential. Future research could draw on health behavior neuroscience paradigms, integrating physiological indicators (e.g., cortisol levels, prefrontal activation)

with psychological and behavioral data to explore how “culture of pretence” affects Precontemplation stage stagnation through cognitive dissonance, or how neural mechanisms (e.g., brain network characteristics of post-traumatic stress responses) regulate disengagement decisions, thereby revealing biopsychosocial interaction mechanisms of the disengagement process [see: Niu et al. (2024) for TMS-EEG data analysis technology that effectively improves sensitivity and reliability of multimodal physiological-behavioral data integration]. Finally, this model’ s boundary effects should also be emphasized. Research shows that factors such as unemployment and economic difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic increased IPV frequency and severity, while family isolation measures and closure of protection agencies severely hindered IPV disengagement (Fawole et al., 2021; Lyons & Brewer, 2022; B. Sabri et al., 2018). Although the model includes “leap” pathways, its depiction of disturbance effects from sudden public events (e.g., pandemic lockdowns) is insufficient. Future research could purposefully examine potential moderating effects of external situational variables such as sudden public events (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic) and supplement stage “leap” mechanisms in crisis contexts to test SCDIM’ s external boundary effects and enhance the model’ s comprehensiveness and applicability [see: Bliese et al. (2017) for methodological framework based on discontinuous growth models (DGM) suitable for dynamic evolution analysis of cross-level subjects in acute events].

5.2 Expanding Research Subjects and Deepening Cultural Adaptation Analysis

Current research in this field predominantly focuses on female victims, with only limited studies investigating male, older adult, and sexual minority IPV victims. Therefore, some specific influencing factors in SCDIM currently only apply to female populations (e.g., mother/wife identity), creating certain limitations in the model’ s applicability. Moreover, research has found gender differences in IPV disengagement processes between male and female victims, with women more likely to maintain relationships due to fear, lack of economic resources, and shame about leaving partners, while men more frequently cannot disengage due to commitment to partners and socially prescribed tough images (Bates, 2020; Eckstein, 2019). Accordingly, future research should include male, non-binary gender, and older adult populations to explore how unique factors such as “male fear of losing custody” or “older adult economic dependence” embed within the model. Additionally, existing theoretical models are primarily constructed based on Western cultural backgrounds and mainstream samples, while collectivist cultural characteristics of East Asian societies such as China may systematically moderate disengagement processes and pathways. Specifically, Western culture’ s emphasis on individualism may lead individuals to rely more on personal decision-making and social support systems when disengaging from IPV, whereas IPV disengagement mechanisms in Chinese contexts are nested within complex “family-based” ethical networks, causing victims to face greater family pressure and social stigma when disengaging. Research shows that family values and gender role norms in East Asian cultures may create greater psychological

and social barriers for women disengaging from IPV (Rai & Choi, 2018). Meanwhile, religious beliefs may have different impacts across cultures. For example, Christianity in Western culture may encourage victims to seek church support, while Confucianism in Eastern culture emphasizes forgiveness and forbearance, potentially making it more difficult for victims to disengage from abusive relationships (Afrouz et al., 2020; Chan & Sachs, 2023). Thus, research on IPV disengagement processes in Chinese cultural contexts must emphasize factors such as family responsibility (e.g., obligation to maintain “family harmony”), gender roles (male economic dominance and female “virtuous wife and good mother” role expectations), social support (e.g., social support networks may be constrained by “face” culture) and stigmatization (e.g., collective subconscious of “don’t air dirty laundry in public”), and Confucian thought (e.g., moral responsibilities emphasizing “forgiveness” and “forbearance”) (Shen, 2024; Cao et al., 2022). In summary, future research should test SCDIM’s applicability in non-Western contexts (e.g., East and South Asia), particularly focusing on cultural variables’ moderating effects on stage pathways and exploring influencing factors and unique pathways of IPV disengagement across different cultural backgrounds.

5.3 Developing Stage-Specific Intervention Strategies and Expanding Application Prospects

Although the SCDIM model demonstrates certain practical application prospects, its implementation must be based on scientific validation of the model’s effectiveness and generalizability. Regarding interventions, SCDIM’s stage divisions provide a theoretical basis for developing more precise intervention protocols, and future research could explore possibilities for designing targeted support strategies based on core issues at each stage. For example, research shows that AI-based psychological support applications or chatbots can improve individual mental health levels (Gaffney et al., 2019). Therefore, in the Precontemplation stage, attempts could be made to use digital tools to provide low-threshold information and psychological support to assist victims in enhancing IPV awareness. However, the effectiveness, ethical boundaries, and applicability of such AI tools in sensitive contexts (e.g., IPV) require rigorous empirical evaluation (Torous et al., 2021). In the Contemplation stage, motivational interviewing (MI) techniques could be considered for developing auxiliary tools or professional training protocols to help victims weigh pros and cons and quantify disengagement risks and benefits (Saftlas et al., 2014). Additionally, such intervention strategies could be compared with traditional measures to validate stage-specific strategy effectiveness while attending to cultural adaptation.

In application, SCDIM emphasizes the critical role of structural resources (e.g., legal and economic security), offering implications for policy formulation. For example, legal and social service systems could explore providing differentiated support schemes based on stage characteristics revealed by the model. In public

services, multi-sectoral collaborative networks (e.g., police, community, medical institutions) could be established to optimize collaboration mechanisms for early identification of high-risk individuals and effective resource allocation. Meanwhile, in interdisciplinary integration, SCDIM's theoretical foundations derive from classic models in behavior change (Burke et al., 2001; Lenio, 2006; Reisenhofer & Taft, 2013), thus possessing cross-disciplinary and cross-domain application potential. For example, future research could combine intersectionality frameworks to analyze how structural factors such as race, class, and sexual orientation dynamically interact with SCDIM stage pathways, revealing differential mechanisms of disengagement trajectories across populations. Moreover, the model could be extended to other persistent behavior change research domains (e.g., smoking, substance addiction withdrawal, chronic disease health management) or applied to research on disengaging from unhealthy interpersonal relationships (e.g., family, peer, and colleague relationships), thereby verifying theoretical generalizability and expanding its application scope.

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