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Domestic Violence: Assessment of Attributions, Types and Reactions

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Abstract: The present research discusses various aspects, e.g., the attributions, the types and the reactions to domestic violence by their partners, of domestic violence in some families in Tehran. Specifically, one hundred couples were randomly selected from couples referring to four family courts in Tehran seeking divorce due to family violence. The present results showed that while men believed spouses' indifference and spouses' complaints about food were two factors which caused disagreement between them and their wives, women believed that men's lack of cooperation in home-related matters were the main causes of their differences with their husbands. Regarding the types of violence, the study indicated that, when stress levels were high for a couple, women resorted to physical violence more than men. Also, regarding reactions exhibited by husbands and wives towards their spouses' violence, the present results showed that women, mostly, adopted psychological strategies in response to their husbands' violence. These results are discussed in the context of Iranian culture and some possible explanations for their occurrence are offered.

Key words: Domestic violence, types of violence, reactions, attributions of violence, cultural settings, psychological violence, physical violence

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: ASSESSMENT OF ATTRIBUTES, TYPES AND REACTIONS

Domestic violence is common in all cultures across the world. Because of various cultural differences and values and the fact that most of the research findings pertain to western European countries and sets of rules of behavior vary from culture to culture, the exact nature of domestic violence, e.g., its causes and types and reactions exhibited by each spouse towards its occurrence remains unknown. Yet, there is a common agreement among experts that domestic violence can take at least two forms, physical and psychological (Coker *et al.*, 2002), ranging from severe physical abuse, e.g., kicking, hitting, biting, beating up, threatening with a gun or knife, using a gun or knife, throwing things and pushing (Benedictis *et al.*, 2006) to mild verbal abuse, insulting, ridiculing, accusing, degrading, humiliating, threatening to abandon and threatening violence (Garbarino *et al.*, 1986; Hart and Brassard, 1987, 1991; Benedictis *et al.*, 2006).

Due to the complicated nature of domestic violence and the fact that a number of factors play a role in its occurrence, the exact determination of causes of domestic violence is a major challenge for researchers and people working in this field. The literature identifies a number of causes for domestic violence that encompass various factors including cultural (Homel *et al.*, 1999) social, individual and familial (Gelles and Cornell, 1990). A

summary of the literature by Hotaling and Sugarman (1986) has shown that broad cultural and social factors such as low income, low educational achievement and low occupational status (Jewkes, 2002), family and relational factors such as frequent arguing, poor marital adjustments and incompatible religious beliefs (Berkel *et al.*, 2004), individual and individual and personality factors such as history of witnessing domestic violence as a child, unemployment, low self-esteem and abuse of alcohol can contribute to the occurrence of domestic violence.

Straus and Gelles (1986), in a study conducted from 1975 to 1985, have reported that wives hit husbands as frequently as husbands hit wives. They showed that the overall rate of marital violence including minor acts of violence such as throwing objects, pushing and slapping and severe acts of violence such as kicking, hitting, beating, threatening with or using a gun or knife and using a gun or knife, was higher for wives as perpetrators than for their husbands.

Domestic violence occurs most of the time between husbands and wives and the attributions, the types and the reactions towards violence exhibited by each spouse can, potentially, vary depending on many factors, including the culture (setting) in which it occurs. As indicated before, due to the complicated nature of domestic violence and the fact that such study has not been carried out in Tehran before, therefore, the purpose of the current study is to identify the causes, the

reactions and the types of violence between couples in Tehran. This will be done by utilizing questionnaires designed specifically for the Iranian culture.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants: In order to determine and rate responses regarding domestic violence, a pilot study was conducted with 100 couples who were randomly drawn from couples referred to family courts by marriage councilors in Tehran seeking divorce due to family violence. Accordingly, questionnaires were constructed to assess the types of violence, the causes of violence and the reactions of each spouse exhibited against violence received. The average age of the wives was 29 years (SD = 0.64) and the average age of the husbands was 35 years (SD = 0.70). Couples had been married an average of 4 years (SD = 0.77). Sixty percent of the man had less than a high school diploma, 35% had a high school diploma and 5% had education above a high school diploma. Sixty five percent of the women had less than high school, 28% had a high school diploma and 7% had above high school diploma. All couples were informed of the purpose of the study and were told that they were free to discontinue their participation at any time during the study, should they decide to do so. Also, they were told that their information would be kept confidential.

Procedure

Materials: The questionnaire pertaining to the attributions of violence included 15 items assessing the attribution of violence on a 5-item Likert-type scale with anchors of 5 = Always and 1 = Never. The validity of this questionnaire was assessed by co-administering it with the Conflict Tactic Scale (Straus, 1979) in 100 couples and the correlation obtained between the two tests was $r = +0.85$, which is indicative of high validity of the self-constructed questionnaire. Consistency of the self-constructed questionnaire measured by Cronbach's Alpha was +0.82.

The questionnaire pertaining to the reactions each spouse exhibited against violence included 15 items assessing the types of reactions against spouses' violence on a 5-item Likert-type scale with anchors of 5 = Always and 1 = Never. The validity of this questionnaire was assessed by co administering it with the Conflict Tactic Scale (Straus, 1979) in 100 couples and the correlation obtained between the two tests was $r = +0.91$, which is an indicative of high validity of the self-constructed questionnaire. Consistency of the self-constructed questionnaire measured by Cronbach's Alpha was +0.87.

The questionnaire pertaining to the types of violence included 10 items the content of which was drawn from the available literature (Schechter and Ganley, 1995) assessing the types of violence on a 5-item Likert-type scale with anchors of 5 = Always and 1 = Never. The validity of this questionnaire was assessed by co-administering it with the Conflict Tactic Scale (Straus, 1979) in a group of 100 couples and the obtained correlation between the two tests was $r = +0.89$ which is an indicative of high validity of the self-constructed questionnaire. Consistency of the self-constructed questionnaire measured by Cronbach's Alpha was +0.81.

The study was conducted in four family courts in Tehran, in 2004-2005. Each spouse was asked to voluntarily participate in the study and to fill out the questionnaires alone and away from the presence of the other spouse.

RESULTS

To analyze present results, t-tests were performed on the means of scores obtained for both, women and men, in order compare the perceived causes of disagreement, the types of violence and the types of reactions against spouses' violence. The t-tests were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) and indicated that men and women differed in terms of factors causing disagreements between them. These factors included: Spouses' Indifference, Spouses' Complaint About Food, Spouses' Lack of Verbal Communication, Spouses' Lack of Cooperation in Doing House Chores, Spouses' Lack of Cooperation in Caring for Children and Spouses' Drug Dependency. Specifically, among the largest causes of husband-wife disagreements were Spouses' Indifference and Spouses' Complaint about Food. On the other hand, the largest causes of wife-husband disagreement were Spouses' Lack of Verbal Communication Spouses' Lack of Cooperation in Doing House Chores, Spouses' Drug Dependency and Lack of Cooperation in Caring for Children with the latter cause being the largest one (Table 1).

Results showed that among the types of violence exhibited by women such as Kicking (Hitting, Slapping), Cursing, Using a Knife to threaten and Choking. Kicking was the most common type of violence used by women (Table 2). There was no significant difference between men and women in other types of violence.

Similar to the type of violence, the reactions toward spouses' violence were different in men and women. Specifically, our results showed that women's reactions towards husbands' violence such as pulling hair, tolerance and cutting off relations were significantly higher than men, respectively (Table 3).

Table 1: Comparison of the causes of disagreement in men and women

Causes of disagreement	Women		Men		df	t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Spouses' indifference	1.91	0.78	1.57	0.67	198	2.30**
Spouses' domination	2.2	0.71	2.00	0.62		1.29
Spouses' lack of verbal communication	2.52	0.54	2.73	0.50		2.24*
Spouses' complaint about food	2.64	0.59	2.34	0.61		2.25*
Spouses' complaint about cleanliness	2.16	0.71	2.26	0.67		0.76*
Spouses' complaint about children	2.42	0.51	2.36	0.65		0.38*
Spouses' lack of cooperation in doing house chores	1.94	0.65	2.61	0.76		4.94**
Spouses' lack of cooperation in caring for children	1.84	0.53	2.61	0.65		5.20**
Spouses' Indifference towards Religious Matters	1.48	0.50	1.69	0.67		1.37
Spouses' religious over sensitivity	1.34	0.25	1.34	0.30		0.05
Spouses' Second marriage	1.06	0.30	1.25	0.25		1.89
Spouses' drug dependency	1.04	0.28	1.31	0.19		2.80*

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01

Table 2: Types of violence in men and women toward their spouse, when stress levels are high

Type of violence	Men		Women		df	t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Kicking (hitting, slapping)	1.36	0.61	2.34	0.72	198	7.66**
Cursing	2.34	0.55	2.70	0.46		3.22**
Verbal cut off	2.73	0.53	2.73	0.43		0.001
Cessation of intercourse	2.53	0.49	2.32	0.51		1.78
Pulling hair	1.81	0.46	1.71	0.58		0.86
Using knife	1.02	0.45	1.18	0.52		2.09*
Chocking	1.06	0.61	1.37	0.50		3.21**
Burning	1.02	0.64	1.10	0.57		1.45
Throwing objects	1.79	0.75	1.79	0.65		0.61

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01

Table 3: Types of reactions against spouses' violence

Type of reactions	Men		Women		df	t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Reprisal	2.04	0.55	1.95	0.60	198	0.78
Cutting off relations	2.25	0.55	2.46	0.50		2.29*
Tolerance	2.02	0.50	2.40	0.61		3.15**
Attempt to resume relations	1.72	0.45	1.71	0.37		0.15
Pulling hair	1.20	0.42	1.56	0.50		3.61**
Using knife	1.04	0.50	1.04	0.60		0.03
Strangling(choking)	1.06	0.45	1.10	0.34		0.62
Burning	1.08	0.35	1.06	0.40		0.37
Throwing objects	1.41	0.44	1.54	0.51		0.94

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01

DISCUSSION

Previous findings negate sets of rules about behaviors taking place in other countries and cultural settings and ignore cultural traditions which potentially contribute to the development and occurrence of domestic violence. Very few studies have been conducted regarding the assessment of the causes of domestic violence (Nayak *et al.*, 2003). Findings of Nayak *et al.* (2003) from India, Japan, Kuwait and the United States suggest points out the importance of examining differences within the larger sociocultural context of political, historical, religious and economic influences on attitudes toward gender roles and violence against women.

Up to now, no studies have been conducted to assess various aspects of domestic violence, e.g., its attributions, types and reactions in Tehran. Therefore, given the scarcity of research in the area of domestic violence in Tehran, the present study attempted to investigate the causes, types and the reactions towards domestic violence between couples in Tehran. My results revealed that men believe spouses' indifference and spouses' complaints about food were two factors which caused disagreement between them and their wives. These factors fall into the category of family and relational factors, identified by Hotaling and Sugarman (1986) and Feiring and Furman (2000) which makes our results consistent with their results. Women, on the other hand, believed that factors such as spouses' lack of verbal

communication, spouses' lack of cooperation in doing household chores, spouses' lack of cooperation in caring for children and spouses' drug dependency were the main causes of their differences with their husbands. Similar to men's belief of the cause of disagreement, these factors also fall into familial and relational category. One possible explanation for why women believed that the above-mentioned reasons were causing disagreement between them and their husbands is that family is considered the cornerstone of Iranian culture and that one of the major roles and responsibilities of women (mothers) is to maintain and preserve the integrity and cohesion of the family. So, anything that might somehow threaten this responsibility could be considered problematic. Furthermore, women might interpret their husbands' lack of participation in home-related matters as a lack of emotional intimacy with them. This may, in turn, affect their ability to manage their family and therefore might result in the disintegration of their family. So, they may consider these factors a source of tension between them and their husbands. This explanation is consistent with those of Nayak *et al.* (2003) who reported that, when attempting to assess the causes of domestic violence, the role of larger sociocultural factors which influence attitudes towards domestic violence, must be emphasized.

One interesting finding of the present study was that in terms of the types of violence taking place between spouses, women more than men reported resorting to physical violence (kicking, using a knife to threaten and choking) in times of trouble. These results are consistent with the findings of Gelles' (1995) who report that the rate of serious husband-to-wife violence was 38 per 1000 while the rate of serious wife-to-husband violence was 46 per 1000, indicating that women can be equally as violent as men and perhaps even more. Also, present findings are consistent with that of Straus' (2005) who reported women initiate and perform physical assaults on their partners as often as do men (Straus and Gelles, 1986). One possible explanation of our findings could be due to the fact that women are trying to protect their children against the violence occurring between them and their husbands (Kay *et al.*, 2003).

From the viewpoint of the Western culture, the present findings with respect to the types of violence might seem unusual for a traditionally-oriented society such as Iran and to a certain extent it may contradict Western views about women's behaviors in this type of culture. Such similar results might indicate an overall change in cultural atmosphere within some families in Tehran which has, in turn, altered women's views and attitudes towards violence. Specifically, it might have made them aware that they too can act just as aggressively as their husbands do.

In terms of reactions exhibited by husbands and wives towards their spouses' violence, the results indicated that except for one reaction (pulling hair) women adopted mostly psychological strategies in response to their husbands' violence, i.e., they tolerated the violence and cut off their relationship with their husbands which is contrary to the findings of Straus (2005) that reported women commit physical assaults just as often as do men.

One possible explanation for such reactions could be that, again, women are inclined to preserve the unity of the family and protect it from falling apart a situation that might otherwise occur if they resorted to physical reactions. Hence, they may be more apt to resort to psychological means against their husbands' violence thereby preventing the situation from escalating to a more critical level. A second possible explanation could be that in order to protect their children from being physically harmed, women prefer to adopt psychological rather than physical means in response to their husbands' violence and not run the risk of physical injury to their children. This is consistent with author's previous findings that when stress levels are high, women tend to resort to psychological reactions than physical ones (Pournaghash, 2005).

Although the current results are only preliminary and may not be generalized to all cases of domestic violence, it is a first step towards exploring the nature of this phenomenon. Furthermore, given the diversities among cultures and that every country has its own cultural settings and practice different ways of life, makes the task of identifying various aspects of domestic violence, investigating and classifying various causes of domestic violence, an important challenge.

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