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Research Paper

Predicting Violence against spouse based on childhood maltreatment experiences in divorce seekers in Isfahan



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ABSTRACT

Objective: Violence against spouse is an important and serious social damage that exists between couples and nowadays it is still observed despite cultural advances and changes in thinking style. Therefore, the present study was conducted with the aim of predicting violence against spouse based on childhood maltreatment experiences of divorce seekers in Isfahan.

Methods: The method of this study was descriptive-correlational. In addition, the statistical population of the study included all divorce seekers who were referred to the counseling centers under the contract with Isfahan court of law. These people had already registered in an online divorce platform named Tasmim from May to July in 2021. 211 people were selected by available sampling method for the study and answered the questionnaires. The instruments used in this study were Strauss et al.'s Conflict Tactics Questionnaire (CTS2) and Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ). Data analysis was performed by SPSS 22 software, Pearson correlation test and multiple regression analysis.

Results: Pearson correlation findings indicated that all types of maltreatment including physical neglect, emotional neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse and sexual abuse had a positive and significant relationship with violence against spouse. Furthermore, the results of regression analysis showed that among different types of maltreatment, emotional neglect and emotional abuse predict violence against spouse in divorce seekers in Isfahan.

Conclusion: Therefore, it can be concluded that child maltreatment can lead to violence against spouse in the future.

1. Introduction

Family is one of the basic systems of human societies that, despite fundamental changes, has remained constant in its goals and functions and is still essential in all societies. Family is the most suitable system for meeting the physical, mental and spiritual needs of human being and provides the best context for the

security and mental peace of the members, raising the new generation, socializing the children and fulfilling their needs. However, nowadays the family system has faced major problems and challenges (Salarifar, 2017).

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Violence against spouse is an important and serious social damage that exists between couples and nowadays it is still observed despite cultural advances and changes in thinking style (Tavassoli Kafrani & Mehdizadegan, 2018). The women victims of domestic violence do not have a favorable situation in terms of psychological, emotional, marital and overall quality of life (Taherifard, Mikaeili, 2019). Violence against spouse as an important risk factor for physical and mental health is highly prevalent and is one of the most common forms of dysfunction and pathology in the family (ValipourSheikhy, Mirdrikvand & Gholamrezaei, 2017). Violence against spouse is defined as the exertion of physical, sexual, moral, and psychological violence by a current or ex-spouse (Breiding, Basile, Smith, Black & Mahendra, 2015). Physical violence is the most characteristic form of violence that includes all kinds of body injuries, from minor pain caused by slapping to murdering (Mafi, Akbarzadeh & Khosravi, 2002). The violent behavior which damages the honor, dignity and self-confidence of a person is considered as psychological violence and ultimately sexual violence is a kind of abusive behavior that leads to sexual misuse and damage (Jazayeri, Etemadi, Mortazavi & Fatehizadeh, 2013).

Violence against spouse has many short-term and long-term consequences for victims, children, the family system, and the social context in general. These include the physical consequences such as bruises, fractures, concussions, etc. (Valipour Sheikhi et al. 2017) and psychological consequences such as depression, anxiety, decreased self-esteem, post-traumatic stress disorder, etc. (Craheh, 1955, NazariNejad translation, 2011) for the victims.

Numerous complex and intertwined factors are involved in the occurrence of familial violence specifically violence against spouse, and different theoretical perspectives from different aspects have explained it. One of the effective factors in violence against spouse is the experience of childhood maltreatment. According to Alexander, Levitt, and Smith (2001), child maltreatment includes any physical or psychological harm, sexual abuse, and negligent or violent behavior toward a child that is perpetrated by a person responsible for the child's comfort and welfare (Mousavi & Baghooli, 2017).

Violent and traumatic events in childhood have major impacts on physical and mental health and lead to immediate and long-term damage to the child's self-esteem, growth and development (World Health Organization, 2016). In addition to the physical harm that results from physical abuse of a child (Hampton and Galt, translated by Karbalaei Mohammad Migoeei,

2009), the results of researches indicate that there are a lot of psychological consequences for victims of childhood maltreatment, including aggression, anxiety, depression (Springer, Sheridan, Kuo & Carnes, 2007), anxiety, depression & symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Lansford, Dodge, Pettite, Bates, Crosier & Kaplow, 2002, Kendall-Tackett, Williams & Finkelhor, 1993), interpersonal conflicts and problems (Christ, De Waall, Dekker, Vankuijk, VanSchaik et al., 2019) and so on.

Webermann, Brand, and Chasson (2014), in their research, concluded that the experience of physical and emotional abuse as well as neglect in childhood are related to physical and psychological violence against spouse; moreover, McMahon and Blanco (2015), showed that more types of childhood maltreatment increase the risk of victimization, perpetration, and reciprocal partner violence. Zare Shahabadi and Nadrpour (2014) also deduced that if a person observes the violence of his parents towards each other or towards himself during his childhood, he will commit violence towards his wife and children in the future too.

The statistics show an escalation of divorce in society, its rising negative effects and consequences for families and society. Furthermore, divorce seekers point to violence against each other as one of the reasons of divorce. Hence, this research has been conducted so as to identify the underlying factors which contribute to violence against spouse. Accordingly, the present study intends to predict violence against spouse on childhood maltreatment by focusing on divorce seekers in Isfahan.

2. Materials and Methods

The method of the present study was descriptive-correlational. The statistical population of the study included all male and female divorce seekers who were referred to the counseling centers under the contract with Isfahan court of law. These people had already registered in an online divorce platform named Tasmim from May to July in 2021. A sample group of 211 people was selected by using the available sampling method in addition to obtaining their consent to participate in the research.

The tools used in this study included two questionnaires:

Strauss et al.'s Conflict Tactics Questionnaire (CTS2): This questionnaire measures the physical and psychological violence of couples against each other in the last 12 months. The main type of this questionnaire consists of 78 questions and includes 5 subscales:

Negotiation (6items), psychological aggression (8items), physical assault (12items), sexual coercion (7items) and injury (6items). Half of the items describe the aggressive acts (aggressive form) and the other half evaluates the spouse's actions towards the aggressive person (victim form). This questionnaire was developed by [Strauss et al. \(1979\)](#), reviewed in 1990 and 1996, and translated into Persian in 2011 by [Panaghi, Dehghani, Abbasi, Mohammadi and Maleki](#). Persian form of this questionnaire has 52 items and three subscales of negotiation (6 items), psychological violence (8 items) and physical assault (12 items). In this questionnaire, the subjects indicate their level of agreement in a range of 8 points from never (score zero) to more than 20 times in the last year (score 7). The aim of the present study was to measure the level of violence against spouse (and not to measure the level of being a victim to the spouse's violence), therefore, the items of the aggressive form as well as the subscales of psychological and physical violence were utilized. Various researches have used the sum of these two subscales to measure violence against spouse (for example, [BahramiVazir et al., 2020](#) and [Sharps et al., 2016](#)). Various studies have provided evidence of acceptable reliability and validity of this questionnaire. [Strauss et al. \(1996\)](#) examined the reliability of the questionnaire subscales in a sample of students and showed that internal consistency ranged from 0.79 to 0.95. Moreover, 41 other studies have examined the internal consistency, the results of which indicate that the alpha coefficient varies from 0.34 to 0.94 with an average of 0.77 ([Panaghi, et al, 2011](#)). Studying the validity and reliability of this scale, they specified that three-factor analysis using three subscales of negotiation, psychological violence and physical assault are more appropriate than other analyses in the Iranian sample. Besides, this scale and its subscales have good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha of subscales in aggressive form,

respectively 0.74, 0.81 and 0.77).

Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ): This questionnaire was developed by [Bernstein, Stein, New Camp, Walker, Pogg et al ,\(2003\)](#) to assess childhood trauma and harms and is a screening tool to identify people with experiences of abuse and neglect in childhood. The questionnaire can be used for both adults and adolescents and it measures five types of childhood maltreatments: sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, as well as emotional and physical neglect. The questionnaire has 28 questions, 25 of which are used to assess the main components of the questionnaire and 3 of which are used to identify people who deny their childhood problems. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of questionnaire on a group of adolescents for the dimensions of emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional neglect and physical neglect were equal to 0.87, 0.86, 0.95, 0.89, and 0.78 respectively. Also, its concurrent validity with the therapists' rating of childhood traumas has been reported within the range of 0.59 to 0.78 ([Bernstein et al., 2003](#)). In Iran, [Ebrahimi, Dejkam and Seghatoleslam \(2013\)](#) reported Cronbach's alpha of this questionnaire from 0.81 to 0.98 for its five components.

Data analysis was performed by SPSS 22 software, Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis.

3. Results

Demographic data indicated that the mean age of the participants in this research was 35.7 years. Furthermore, 58.8% (124 people) of the participants were female and 41.2% (87 people) were male. 15.2% had less than diploma degree, 43.6% diploma, 6.2% associate degree, 28.4% bachelor's degree and 6.6% master's degree or higher.

The mean and standard deviation of the research variables are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. mean and standard deviation of the research variables

research variables	Mean	standard deviation
Emotional neglect	10.33	4.65
Physical neglect	7.31	2.95
Emotional abuse	7.25	2.98
Physical abuse	6.08	2.30
Sexual abuse	5.60	1.83
Violence against spouse	14.84	12.92

According to Table 1, among the types of maltreatment, the highest mean was related to emotional neglect with a value of 10.33 and the lowest

mean was related to sexual abuse with a value of 5.60. Pearson correlation test was used to investigate the relationship between research variables.

Table 2. Correlation matrix of research variables

	Violence against spouse	Emotional neglect	Physical neglect	Emotional abuse	Physical abuse	Sexual abuse
Violence against spouse	1					
Emotional neglect	.47**	1				
Physical neglect	.31**	.69**	1			
Emotional abuse	.58**	.58**	.46**	1		
Physical abuse	.37**	.48**	.39**	.55**	1	
Sexual abuse	.23**	.30**	.16**	.44**	.25**	1

Table 2 shows the results of the correlation test between violence against spouse (physical and psychological violence) and childhood maltreatment (physical neglect, emotional neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse and sexual abuse); accordingly in Isfahan divorce seekers, emotional and physical

neglect, physical, emotional and sexual abuse have a positive and significant relationship with violence against spouse.

Afterwards, multiple regression analysis was utilized in order to investigate which types of childhood maltreatment predict violence against spouse.

Table 3. Results of regression coefficient analysis

Variables Entered	B	Beta	P-Value	R	R ²	F	P-Value
Emotional neglect	.69	.25	.004	.61	.38	25.08	.001
Physical neglect	-.37	-.08	.26				
Emotional abuse	2.14	.49	.001				
Physical abuse	.15	.02	.67				
Sexual abuse	-.423	-.06	.33				

According to Table 3, the common variance of emotional neglect, physical neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse with violence against spouse was 38%; i.e., emotional and physical neglect along with emotional, physical and sexual abuse predicted 38% of violence against spouse. Additionally, the results of regression analysis demonstrated that emotional neglect and emotional abuse had a significant effect size predicting violence against spouse in divorce seekers in Isfahan, but the effect sizes of other variables weren't significant.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this research was to predict violence against spouse considering childhood maltreatments in divorce seekers in Isfahan. The findings revealed that emotional and physical neglects, emotional, physical and sexual abuses, each one have a positive and significant relationship with violence against spouse; which means that, the more child maltreatment lead in (including emotional and physical neglects, emotional, physical, and sexual abuses), the greater level of violence against spouse in adulthood.

The results of this research are in line with those of Zareh Shahabadi and Nadrpour (2014) as well as Sen and Guoliang (2020) based on the relationship

between childhood maltreatment experience and violence against spouse. In addition, the results of this study are in accordance with those of Erturk, Kahya and Gor (2020) based on the relationship between childhood maltreatment experience and aggression in adulthood.

This finding can be clarified according to the intergenerational transmission theory, which is based on social learning theory: Individuals who belong to families in which violence is an accepted behavior, are more likely to communicate with others and solve their own problems by means of violence in adulthood and thus violence is passed on from one generation to another (Shams Esfandabad, 2006). According to the theory of social cognition, childhood experiences lead to the formation of social cognition in order to recognize different activities in the social world, understand the causes and intentions of others and accept moral cognitions, and these cognitive-social structures are very important in choosing the answers, including the aggressive ones (Abu al-Ma'ali & Musa Zadeh, 2012). Thus, it can be mentioned that people who have been maltreated as children, form cognitive frameworks based on which they interpret the behavior of others as hostile and are prepared to be aggressive towards them.

Moreover, the results of regression analysis for the purpose of predicting violence against spouse based on childhood maltreatment, indicated that emotional neglect and emotional abuse have a significant effect on predicting IPV in divorce seekers in Isfahan. The results of this research are in line with those of [Shid Anbarani, Gol, Farhadian, Tabibi & Namvar Tabatabaee \(2020\)](#), [Shariat & Monshei \(2017\)](#), [Afifi, Mota, Sareen & MacMillan \(2017\)](#) and [Crauford & Wright \(2007\)](#).

Emotional maltreatment, unlike physical abuse, does not have a visible effect on the child's body, however, it can leave a much deeper, more catastrophic and long-lasting impact on the psyche of the individual ([Bazrafkan, Akrami & Sajjadian, 2014](#)). Emotional maltreatment includes comparing children with others, humiliating the child, threatening, not kissing and hugging the child, and deprivation of any parental affection ([Tajiknejad & Mehrienjad, 2016](#)). Experiencing emotional maltreatment in childhood has numerous short-term and long-term consequences for individuals, including decreased self-esteem and depression ([Gross & Keller, 1992](#)), interpersonal problems ([Christ, Dewaal, Dekker, Vankuijk, VanSchaik et al., 2019](#)), anxiety ([Wright & Castillo, 2009](#)), aggression ([Erturk, Kahya & Gor, 2020](#)) and so on.

Therefore, people who were deprived of receiving love from their parents during their childhood and were repeatedly humiliated, blamed and compared, according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the third and then the fourth level of their basic needs (need for love and belongingness and the need for esteem) are not satisfied. According to Maslow, not satisfying any basic need brings about some kind of harm. Hence, unsatisfied need for love, as a result of experiencing emotional abuse in childhood, will lead to defensiveness and excessive aggression or passivity. Also, lack of respect leads to self-doubt, self-deprecation and lack of self-confidence ([Feist, Feist & Raberts, 2017](#)). Following that, an attempt to avoid this self-deprecation would result in increasing of aggressive behaviors ([SeteyeshiAzhari, Haji Aliloo & Habibzadeh, 2019](#)).

Although emotional maltreatment is one of the most common types of maltreatment in childhood, it is often

not considered, as a result of which, children are exposed to emotional abuse and neglect, more intensely and for a longer period of time compared to more obvious types of maltreatment (such as physical and sexual abuse). Also, emotional maltreatment has more negative psychological consequences and compared to the pain and damage caused by physical and sexual abuse, it leads to more negative evaluations of oneself ([Rameckers, Van Emmerik, Bachrach, Lee, Morina & et al., 2021](#)) and these negative evaluations may mediate the relationship between emotional maltreatment and interpersonal problems such as violence ([Arslan, 2016](#)). Also, emotional maltreatment may have intensifying effect through other factors such as maladaptive schemas ([Farazmand, Mohammadkhani, Pourshahbaz & Dolatshahee, 2017](#), [Farhang Esfahani, 2021 & Shid Anbarani, et al., 2020](#)) difficulty in regulating emotions ([Erturk et al., 2020 & Bradbury & Shaffer, 2012](#)), reduction of self-esteem ([Malik & Kaiser, 2016](#)) and insecure attachment styles ([Lassri, Luyten, Cohen & Shahar, 2016](#)).

In general according to findings of this study, it can be concluded that the experience of childhood maltreatment, has a positive and significant relationship with violence against spouse. This means that the more a child is maltreated, he/she is more likely to be violent against the spouse in adulthood. Also, based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the experience of emotional maltreatment in childhood is a predictor of violence against spouse in divorce seekers in Isfahan. This means that the more persons experience threats, humiliation, and emotional deprivation in childhood, the more violence against spouse is likely in adulthood. In this study, the sample included divorce seekers; therefore, caution should be exercised in generalizing the results to all individuals. In addition, the tools used in this research were of the self-report type, which raises the possibility of bias in the answers, especially in the questionnaire of violence towards the spouse. Furthermore, the research sample is taken from the city of Isfahan, thus as a suggestion such research should be done for divorce seekers in other cities of Isfahan and also in the other provinces of Iranian order to generalize the results better.

5. Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

In designing and compiling this research, ethical principles have been considered. The purpose of the research was explained to the participants and the information was received confidentially and used only for research purposes.

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Authors' contributions

All authors of this article participated in all stages of writing and conducting research.

Conflicts of interest

The authors of the article had no conflict of interest.

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