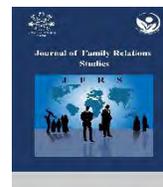




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Research Paper

Comparison of Communication Skills, Cognitive Emotion Regulation Strategies and Communication Patterns in Women with and Without Experience of Domestic Violence (An Analytical-comparative Study)



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ABSTRACT

Objective: Considering domestic violence occurs in the context of marital relationship, it seems necessary to examine the individual characteristics of each couple in the occurrence of this phenomenon. Therefore, the purpose of this study was Comparison of communication skills, Cognitive Emotion Regulation Strategies and Communication Patterns in Women with and Without Experience of Domestic Violence.

Methods: The present study was an analytical-comparative study. The statistical populations of this study were all women of Rasht city in the 2018 year. Among these women, 120 persons were considered as a research sample; of these, 60 people in the group of women with experience of violence were selected using available sampling method and 60 people in the group of women without experience of violence were selected using cluster sampling method. Data measurement tools in this study were Communication Skills Questionnaire (CSTRQ), Marital Relationship Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ) and Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ). The data of this study were analyzed using independent t-test in SPSS 21.

Results: The results showed that there was a significant difference between communication skills and communication patterns of constructive interaction and withdrawal-belonging pattern in women with and without experience of domestic violence ($P < 0.05$). However, no significant difference was observed between the two groups in terms of communication pattern of mutual avoidance and cognitive regulation of emotion.

Conclusion: Considering the important role of communication skills and patterns in the occurrence or prevention of domestic violence, communication skills training in premarital counseling and marital counseling seems necessary.

1. Introduction

Worldwide approximations indicate that women are the main victims of domestic violence; so that according to the outcomes of previous analyses, about 30 percent of women have experienced physical or sexual violence. Then, based on what was reported by

WHO (World Health Organization) in 2013, one woman among three has experienced physical or sexual violence in the past (Caridade et al., 2021). Physical, sexual, psychological and financial abuse, also acts of omission are all examples of domestic

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violence perpetrated by intimate partners and other family members (Big-Alabo & Itelimo, 2022). In addition to violence against women raises the vulnerability of families. In families with extreme violence, children will be self-opinionated, diffident, and unruly and the adults will also show mutinous manner in their workplace. Moreover, women experiencing violence show much weakness and distrust in their social interactions (Aliverdinia, Razi & Ayini, 2013). Researchers have shown that women who experience spousal violence have poorer mental health and have more suicidal thought (Navarro-Mantas, de Lemus & Megías, 2021).

Considering the fact that the ability to live safely, in a society free from the fear of crime, is a basic human right, investigate and identify the effective factors in the occurrence of violence against women seem necessary (D'Avanzato, Bogen, Kuo & Orchowski (2022). Previous have shown that some danger factors of domestic violence against women including individual, family, communicative, and social factors (Mondal D & Paul, 2021). Among these factors, one which has absorbed attentions of family experts about marital conflicts is communication skills which include skills by which people can get involved in interpersonal communications and communication process; a process through which people can share their information and thoughts via verbal or non-verbal exchanges (Jaberi, Etemadi & Ahmadi, 2016). Communication problems are key matters in communicative approaches such that these approaches regard marital conflicts as an incompatible relationship (Bahari, Fatehizadeh, Ahmed, Molavi & Bahrami, 2011). The results of previous studies showed that education in communication skills can substantially improve couple's relationships and their ability to deal with problems and also can be effective in reducing husbands' violence against wives (Yarinasab & Amini, 2022). Researchers have claimed that Assessing how communication goals and needs affect current relationship functioning has an important role in the treatment and prevention of marital distress (Farrell & Markman, 2021). Ansari, Golshiri, and Mostajaboldavati (2017) pointed out that women's communication skills has an inverse relationship with domestic violence from their husbands as that using communication skills lessens tensions and arguments between couples or at least postpones them to a better time. Holtzworth-Munroe, Bates, Smutzler and Sandin (1997), indicated in a research that sometimes violent manner of husbands shows lacks in self-assertion skills and communication skills in wives.

One of the factors that play an important role in both

the occurrence and continuation of violence in the family is the use of ineffective communication patterns by men and women (Ghazizadeh, Zaharakar, Kiamanesh & Mohsenzadeh, 2018). A communication pattern of couples is a process through which wife and husband interact verbally or non-verbally. Communication patterns of couples are categorized in 3 groups. The first one is mutual constructive pattern through which wife and husband try to discuss their communication problems, show their emotions and search for solution through negotiation. Mutual avoidance pattern is the second pattern through which both wife and husband try to evade any discussions about their problems and the third one is expectation/avoidance pattern through which one of the couples talks about the problem or tries to make the other talk by criticizing, nagging, or suggesting whereas the other one wants to put an end to the problem and avoid discussion. This one involves two patterns: one is the woman expecting/the man avoiding and the man expecting/the woman avoiding (Hasani-Moghadam, Ganji, Sharif Nia, Aarabi & Khani, 2019). Experts believe that unbalanced communication patterns have extremely negative effects on the mental health of family members (Siffert & Schwartz, 2011). Existing studies shows that the defective communication patterns reduce correct understanding of couples, impede spouse support, prevent the effort to satisfy the needs of each other, prevent one another from understanding conflicting views, and eventually lead to marital problems and dissatisfaction (Hasani-Moghadam, et al, 2022).

Cognitive emotion regulation strategies, another matter in psychological issues concerning women experiencing domestic violence, are adaptive or positive strategies and non-adaptive or negative strategies (Melero, Orgilés, Espada & Morales, 2021). Negative strategies include obsessive rumination, self-blame, blaming others, and devastating perception and positive strategies include positive refocusing, positive reevaluation, reception, refocusing on planning and extending viewpoint (Kamali Igoli, Abolmaali Alhoseini, 2017). Although, Emotion regulation plays an important role in our adaptation to stressful life events (Karami, Rafezi, Motavalli & Ayadi, 2022). Researchers have shown that women, who experienced violence, have less ability in using their emotional intelligence (Tsirigotis & Luczak, 2016). Sirus Jahedi, Akbari & Amir Sadeghi (2017) designated that women who have experienced domestic violence are much lower in skills controlling their emotions than those who have not.

A look at previous studies shows that domestic violence, despite having a negative impact on the

marital life of couples, can be moderated or increased under the influence of the personality and skill characteristics of each couple. Therefore, considering the existing research gap related to the role of individual characteristics of women victims of violence in the occurrence of violence against them, the purpose of this study objective of the present research was comparing communication skills, cognitive emotion regulation strategies and communication patterns in women who have/haven't not experienced domestic violence.

2. Materials and Methods

Methodology of the present study was retrospective (causal-comparative). Population of this study was comprised of two parts, one was all women who, in 2018, referred to forensic medicine in Rasht and the other was common women in Rasht. In the first section, 60 women among those who referred to forensic medicine in Rasht were chosen via convenient sampling and in the second section, 60 common women were chosen via multistage cluster sampling. Inclusion criteria were as follow: having Iranian nationality; having a female gender; Being literate in reading and writing, and willingness to participate in the research. Exclusion criteria also included; not being married; being Divorced or separated at the time of this research conduction; lack of willingness to participate in the study. The data were analyzed through SPSS in two descriptive and inferential statistics levels using independent t-test. Scales were used to collect data included:

Queendom Communication Skills Test-Revised Questionnaire (CSTRQ): this questionnaire was developed by Queendom in 2004. It has been invented so as to measure adults' communication skills and it contains 34 items describing communication skills. In order to complete the questionnaire, one should read each item and specify one's current status adaptability with its content on a five-degree Likert scale from *never* to *always*. Minor communication skills, which are measured on this scale, are composed of five skills including listening, sending and receiving messages, insight into communication process, emotional control and communication accompanied by certainty. In Iran, reliability and validity of the test was measured 69 percent by Hossein Chari and Fadakar (2006) using Cronbach's alpha method, which shows its internal consistency. This number was 71 percent for university students and 66 percent for high school students. Reliability of the test was measured 71 percent using bisection method (Hosseinchari & Fadakar, 2006).

Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ): this is a self-test one which has been prepared by Christensen & Salawi. It contains 35 items. Couples grade their behaviors on a 9-degree Likert scale set from 1 (extremely impossible) to 9 (extremely possible). CPQ is composed of three subscales including: 1. Mutual constructive communication 2. Mutual avoidance communication 3. Expecting/avoidance communication. Expecting/avoidance communication itself is composed of two parts; 1. The man expecting/the woman avoiding and, 2. The woman expecting/the man avoiding. The results of reliability of the test has been measured 44 to 85 percent by Christensen and Heavy (1990) and Heavy et al. (1993) using Cronbach's alpha method with the 5-scale CPQ. Moreover, Khojasteh Mehr et al. (2007) reported that the reliability of the questionnaire is between 60 to 73 percent using Cronbach's alpha method. The convergent validity of the questionnaire for the three scales mutual constructive scale, mutual avoidant scale, and expecting/avoidant were measured 46, 39, and 47 percent respectively (Honarvaran, Ghaderi & Ghobadi, 2011).

C- Cognitive Emotions Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ): this questionnaire has been developed by Garnefsky et al. (2001) in order to evaluate the cognitive strategies which are used by an individual after experiencing a sad event (an event which causes a negative emotion in the person). It has 36 items and Likert scale is set to answer the question and it holds 9 subscales, each of which evaluates a cognitive strategy. Subscales are positive refocusing, planning refocusing, positive reevaluation, getting perspectives, reception, self-blame, obsessive rumination, catastrophizing, and blaming others. Each scale has 4 clauses, and the score of each subscale (from 4 to 20) is calculated by summing up the given scores to each clause. The sum of all scores ranges from 36 to 180 (Garnefski, Kraaij & Spinhoven, 2001). Garnefsky et al. (2001) measured the reliability of the test as 91, 87, and 93 percent respectively using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. In Iran, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 82 percent and in investigating the validity of the questionnaire through correlation of negative strategies with depression and anxiety rates in general health questionnaire, coefficients were resulted 35 and 37 percent respectively and both were significant (Yousefi, 2007).

In the data analysis stage, two descriptive (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistical methods (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, Levenes test and independent t-test) were used in SPSS21 software.

3. Results

The demographic characteristics of the members of the two groups are presented in the table below:

Table 1. Demographic features of the participants

Variables	Women Without Experience of Domestic Violence		Women with Experience of Domestic Violence		
	frequency	Percentage	frequency	Percentage	
Age	20-29	29	24.2	21	17.05
	30-39	28	23.3	28	23.3
	40-49	3	2.5	10	8.3
	+50	0	0	1	.8
	Total	60	50	60	50
Education	-Diploma	31	25.8	46	38.3
	Associate's degree	5	4.2	2	1.7
	Bachelor's degree	20	16.7	9	7.5
	+Master's degree	4	3.3	3	2.5
	Doctoral degree	0	0	0	0
	Total	60	50	60	50

Based on the findings, in the both groups, the frequency of 30-39 ages was higher than another age ranges. Also, this information shows that the both group members were in under diploma part.

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation of variables in two groups

Variables	group	Mean	standard deviation	
communication patterns	constructive	women with experience of violence	21.22	8.76
		women without experience of violence	30.83	7.83
	expecting/avoidance	women with experience of violence	35.79	7.18
		women without experience of violence	29.23	8.25
	mutual avoidance	women with experience of violence	17.20	4.25
		women without experience of violence	15.87	4.88
communication skills	women with experience of violence	110.83	10.91	
	women without experience of violence	119.68	9.43	
cognitive emotions regulation	women with experience of violence	128.91	11.43	
	women without experience of violence	131.13	11.64	

According to the tables above, the mean score of variables (constructive communication patterns, communication skills and cognitive emotions regulation) in women who experienced less violence was lower than those women who did not experienced

any domestic violence. Nonetheless, the mean score of expecting/avoidance communication pattern and mutual avoidance was higher in women who experienced violence.

Table 3. Independent t-test results in comparing variables scores in two groups

Variables	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	T	D.F	p	
communication patterns	constructive	9.61	1.51	6.23	118	0.000
	expecting/avoidance	-6.55	1.43	-4.55	118	0.000
	mutual avoidance	-1.32	0.85	-1.54	118	0.125
communication skills	8.85	1.86	4.75	118	0.000	
cognitive emotions regulation	2.21	2.10	1.05	118	0.295	

The above table shows that the difference between means of two groups in constructive expecting/avoidance of communication patterns and communication skills were significant regarding the amount of t and significance of each variable ($p < 0.05$). This means that there was a significant difference between the two groups. However, statistically, there was no significant relationship between the two groups in the variable cognitive emotions regulation and mutual avoidance patterns ($p > 0.05$).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed comparing communication skills, communication patterns and cognitive emotion regulation in women who did and did not experience domestic violence. Findings indicated that there was a significant difference between women who experienced domestic violence and those who did not in terms of communication skills, meaning that women who never experienced domestic violence got higher mean scores in communication skills compared to women who suffered from domestic violence. This is in line with research results of [Ansari et al. \(2017\)](#), [Holtzworth-Munroe, Bates, Smutzler and Sandin \(1997\)](#) and [Delsouz Khaki, Kafi, Moazzami, and Tahmasebi \(2020\)](#).

Investigating the findings, it is worth saying that communications lead to enhancements in communications between couples due to giving chances to couples in sharing worries and favorites, hopes and dreams. Without sharing these, couples cannot experience intimacy and will not come close together emotionally and mentally. In such way, if one or both couples lack effective communication skills, it will be so hard for them to solve their problems because not understand together viewpoints and not knowing much about this necessary skill will cause much misunderstanding, conflicts and tensions ([Yalcin & Karahan, 2007](#)). On the other hand, women with sufficient communication skills are better at expressing their emotions, needs, requests, and concerns; and this will give significant insight to their husband/wife to understand their psychological status. Then the chance of being understood and being responsible towards each other goes up. As researchers have claimed, having great communication skills decreases daily stresses and will provide couples with comfort ([Ansari et al., 2017](#)).

Other findings showed that women who encountered violence got lower scores than women who did not experience violence in terms of constructive

communication pattern; while their expecting/avoidance pattern score was higher than those women who did not experience violence. These findings are in line with what [Sepehri Shamloo and Keramati \(2016\)](#) and [Ghazanfari \(2010\)](#) found in their studies.

Using mutual constructive pattern enables couple to spend their time discussing constructively about problems and issues in their marital life and this enriches the family emotionally by making couples get closer and increasing the time spent together and following that, violence may not appear in family. Findings of studies in this area show that the more couples use practical communication skills, the more will be the intimacy between them and the less will be the conflict between them ([Fatehizadeh & Ahmadi, 2005](#)). Furthermore, emotion-focused strategy can be used in order to investigate upon avoidance/belonging pattern in women who endured domestic violence. Supporters of this strategy believe that conflict appears in the family when couples cannot prepare each other with their attachment needs such as safety, security, and availability. These people believe that using unhelpful communication patterns such as avoidance/belonging pattern hinders having relationships accompanied by secure attachment pattern between couples. Then, couples experience secondary emotional reactions such as rage, hostility, avenge, or extremely feeling guilty. These harsh and mutual patterns, which help these conflicts persist, occur repetitively since couples hopelessly want their attachment needs to be met, but unfortunately, couples' endeavor at absorbing each other's attention is unsuccessful. Hence, couples enter relationships compulsorily which brings about more and more failures at meeting attachment needs and increases the possibility of rage and conflict ([Javidi et al., 2013](#)).

Other findings showed that there was no significant difference between women who did and did not go through domestic violence in terms of cognitive emotion regulation strategies. This one is not similar to findings of other studies. For instance, [Sirus Jahedi, et al. \(2017\)](#) did some research on women who faced domestic violence and women who did not and they found out that there exists a significant difference between emotion regulations in women who experienced violence compared to women who did not. [Tsirigotis and Luczak \(2016\)](#) in a study on women who experienced violence specified that these women were much feeble at using their emotional intelligence. To explicate the findings of this hypothesis it is said that regulating more emotions are investigated in two frameworks, emotion regulation strategies which are

activated before the incident or emotions or at the beginning of the day prevent extreme emotions; and strategies which are activated after the incident or after the emotion appears (these strategies cannot prevent extreme emotions). Emotion regulation strategies which are activated before any stressful incident expresses the situation in a manner that decreases the emotional responses to that situation. This process is called reevaluation. For instance, one regards an occurring event as a challenge rather than a threat (Aminzadeh & Bagheri, 2021). One rejecting factor might be the fact that women who experienced violence use strategies which are activated after the occurrence of the incident or after the emotion appears. However, these strategies cannot prevent extreme emotion.

Regarding the findings of the present study, it can be concluded that communication skills and patterns play a paramount role in whether domestic violence occurs or not and concerning this, it is pretty important that family and marriage counselors pay attention to teaching communication skills to people who are on the verge of marriage and married couples in order to prevent domestic violence and marital conflicts.

5. Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

All ethical principles are considered in this article. The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and its implementation stages. They were also assured about the confidentiality of their information and were free to leave the study whenever they wished, and if desired, the research results would be available to them.

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Authors' contributions

All authors have participated in the design, implementation and writing of all sections of the present study.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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