

Prevalence of Physical and Sexual Abuse in Women and Children

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Article information	Abstract
<p>Article history: Received: 9 Dec 2011 Accepted: 16 Feb 2012 Available online: 24 Oct 2012 ZJRMS 2012; 14(10): 92-96</p> <p>Keywords: Physical Abuse Sexual Abuse Women Children Medical and Health Centers</p> <p>*Corresponding author at: Department Nursing, Islamic Azad University of Birjand E-mail: Tahereh.farhadian@gmail.com</p>	<p>Background: The purpose of this study is to investigate the prevalence of physical and sexual abuse and its respective factors in women and children referring to medical and health centers of Birjand county.</p> <p>Materials and Methods: A number of 301 women referring to medical and health centers of Birjand were entered into this analytical-descriptive study. Based on the research objectives, a self-administered questionnaire was prepared and approved in terms of content validity by experts of the field. The data were analyzed using SPSS-15, at a significance level of $p \leq 0.05$.</p> <p>Results: Results showed that 58.8% and 25.3% of the subjects experienced physical abuse and sexual abuse, respectively. 24.3% confirmed physical abuse and 1.7% confirmed sexual abuse of their children by their husbands. There was a significant relationship between physical and sexual abuse, and the education level, husband's education level, addiction and commitment of husband, economical disputes, husband's job, disputes over rearing children, mental disorders of husband, and the weakness of husband in controlling his motions ($p=0.001$).</p> <p>Conclusion: The prevalence of physical and sexual abuse in women and children is relatively high, and based on the investigated related causes, it is necessary to reduce such prevalence through an appropriate planning.</p> <p>Copyright © 2012 Zahedan University of Medical Sciences. All rights reserved.</p>

Introduction

Domestic violence is a worldwide misfortune that ruins the body of family and society and threatens individuals' health. Such violence occurs in privacy, and women, children and girls are its major victims [1]. The WHO defines abuse as any gender-related harsh behavior that harms or is likely to lead to physical, sexual, emotional damage or agony to women. Such women are more prone to the threat of resorting to alcoholic drinks, addiction to drugs, and suffering from chronic pains and depression estates [2].

The UNICEF yearly report indicates that every day 3 children die due to violence or abuse [3]. Based on the Welfare Organization of Iran's 2005 statistics, 66% of child abuses in Iran were committed by men [4]. In Namdari report, the most prevalent abuse was emotional abuse directed towards the studied individual, committed respectively by the father, mother, sister, and brother, in two groups of girls and boys [5].

Since children need kindness of their parents to properly establish their mental and emotional foundations and make a healthy personality, the absence of such emotions and being misbehaved will have adverse effects on their behavior and personality [6]. Thus, according to the mentioned negative effects, this study was conducted aiming at investigating the prevalence of physical and sexual abuse and determining the respective factors in women and children referring to medical and health centers of Birjand.

Materials and Methods

In this analytical-descriptive study, sampling was performed using quota sampling, where the medical and health centers of Birjand were listed initially, and then the sample was determined proportionate to the number of referrers of those centers, based on the existing statistics. Then, in each center, convenience sampling was performed for the women referring to medical and health centers of Birjand who, at the time of sampling, had at least one child covered by the services of the center.

In investigating the physical abuses directed at women and children, conducts such as pushing, severe punching or kicking, hitting with tools such as belt, throwing objects, threatening with a knife, squeezing the throat to death, and burning the child with hot water, were considered. And in studying the sexual abuses with respect to women, items such as forcing the woman to have sexual intercourse and incurring physical damage were regarded. Rape was investigated as the sexual abuse towards children.

In order to collect the data, based on the objectives of the research, a self-administered questionnaire was used which content validity was approved by some experts of the field. The information of the questionnaire was arranged in five sections, including information about physical and sexual abuse towards women, factors leading to abuse towards women (addiction of husband, distrust of husband towards the wife, economical factors, social

factors, cultural factors, personal factors, mental factors, incapacity in controlling motions), physical and sexual abuse against the children and factors affecting the abuse (features relating to parents, features relating to child). In order to examine the questionnaire, test-retest reliability method was used. Thus, the questionnaire was handed to 20 persons not included as subjects of the study in two sessions in 10-days intervals.

After measuring the correlation among responses, the required reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed at 98%. In order to determine the amount of physical and sexual abuse, the information about the indices of the questionnaire was collected from the participants and, after scoring, was arranged based on an interval scale. Then, based on the resulted scores, 0 was set to "no", 1-2 to "little", 5-8 to "average", and 9 and above to "high".

In order to collect data, referrers were asked for their permission, presented with required explanations, and were assured of privacy in collecting the data. If the individual met the decided criterion and gave her consent, she was selected as a member of the sample. Data were analyzed using SPSS-15 and 2-test, at a significance level of $p \leq 0.05$.

Results

In this research, 301 women referring to medical and health centers of Birjand were studied. The majority of the referring women were housewives (78.1%), had a high school diploma or a higher degree (60.1%), lived in a rented house (54.5%), had an income of 200,000-400,000 toman (54.5%), with a nuclear family consisting of the father, mother and unmarried children (86.4%), with 4-5 members (45.5%).

Most of the subjects had husbands with a high school diploma or a higher educational degree (54.8%), who were freelancers (41.9%), and 59.8% of them experienced economical disputes with their husbands. 8.3% stated that their husbands used drugs such as amphetamine, cocaine, heroin, etc. and 4.3% reported daily alcohol use by their husbands. Most of them (88%) stated that they had no problem with their husbands with regards to working outside.

Based on the results obtained from this study, 58.8% of women were subjected to physical abuse and 25.3% were influenced by sexual abuse. With regard to child abuse, 24.3% and 1.7% indicated physical and sexual abuse of children by their husbands, respectively.

In this study, there was a significant relationship between physical and sexual abuse, and subjects education level, husbands education, husbands addiction and commitment, economical disputes, husbands job, disputes over rearing children, mental disorders of husband, and motions control inability of husband ($p=0.002$). More instances of abuse was seen among the illiterate mothers whose husbands had low education level, were addicts, suffered mental problems and movement weaknesses. In addition, such abuse was more

prevalent in mothers whose husbands had less trust in them and disputed with them over rearing of children and economical issues (Table 1).

A significant relationship was observed between physical abuse and the number of members of the family, income level, and living with other ethnicities ($p=0.004$), whereas in families with more members, lower income and extended type, such abuse was seen more.

There was no significant relationship between physical abuse and housing status, problems due to working outside home, age difference between the couples, and couples' personal willing for marriage ($p=0.03$), whereas such abuse was more in mothers living in rental houses, those having problems with their husbands concerning outside work, having a high age difference with their husbands and who were unwilling to marry.

Comparing sexual abuse with the study variables, such as the number of family members, income level, subjects job, and living with other ethnicities showed no significant relationship.

Comparison of frequency distribution of physical and sexual abuse against the studied children based on the features of parents shows that there is a significant relationship in this concern ($p=0.001$). 81.5% of women whose husband had been physically abused in childhood stated that their children were abused, and 11.1% indicated sexual abuse against their children.

The husband being abused in childhood by his parents, low self-esteem, lack of emotional control, having high expectations of children, and the perception of husband of being unwanted in his family were among the investigated variables concerning the parents. Comparison of frequency distribution of physical abuse against the studied children based on the children's characteristics showed a significant relationship ($p=0.001$) (Table 2). Nevertheless, there was no significant relationship between sexual abuse against children and their characteristics.

Discussion

In this study, of 301 investigated women 58.8% were physically abused and 25.3% were sexually abused. In other studies conducted in other cities of Iran, too, physical and sexual abuse against women is also highly prevalent; a fact that is in line with this study's results [7].

The results of the investigation of physical and sexual abuse against children referred to medical and health centers of Birjand showed that 24.3% of children were physically abused and 1.7% were sexually abused by their fathers. In a study conducted in Khorram Abad, results showed that 58.2% of secondary school students were abused, mostly by their parents and their brothers [5]. Also, in another study administered on street children of South Tehran, findings showed that 20.9% of children were sexually abused [7]. This confirms the results of the present study.

Table 1. Comparison of frequency distribution of physical abuse instances in study subjects based on the study variables

Physical abuse	No N(%)	Little N(%)	Average N(%)	High N(%)	Total N(%)	Results	
Heroin abuse	no	121(43.8)	95(34.4)	58(21)	2(0.7)	276(100)	$\chi^2=119.85$ df=3 $p<0.001$
	yes	3(12)	3(12)	7(28)	12(48)	25(100)	
	total	124(41.2)	98(32.6)	65(21.6)	14(4.7)	301(100)	
Alcohol consumption	no	123(42.7)	96(33.3)	62(21.5)	7(2.4)	288(100)	$\chi^2=119.85$ df=3 $p<0.001$
	yes	1(7.7)	2(15.4)	3(23.1)	7(53.8)	13(100)	
	total	24(41.2)	98(32.6)	65(21.6)	14(4.7)	301(100)	
Distrust	no	64(58.2)	31(28.2)	15(13.6)	0	110(100)	$\chi^2=121.44$ df=9 $p<0.001$
	low	47(40.5)	43(37.1)	26(22.4)	0	116(100)	
	average	12(22.6)	21(39.6)	16(30.2)	4(7.5)	53(100)	
	high	1(4.5)	3(13.6)	8(36.4)	10(45.5)	22(100)	
	total	24(41.2)	98(32.6)	65(21.6)	14(4.7)	301(100)	
Mental problems of the husband	no	10(71.4)	2(14.3)	2(14.3)	0	14(100)	$\chi^2=87.63$ df=9 $p<0.001$
	low	52(48.1)	38(35.2)	18(16.7)	0	108(100)	
	average	61(38.9)	54(34.4)	37(23.6)	5(3.2)	157(100)	
	high	1(4.5)	4(18.2)	8(36.4)	9(40.9)	22(100)	
	total	124(41.2)	98(32.6)	65(21.6)	14(4.7)	301(100)	

Table 2. Comparison of frequency of physical abuse against children in the study population according to the child's profile

Physical abuse variable	No N(%)	Yes N(%)	Total N(%)	
High levels of crying of the child	no	173(82.8)	36(17.2)	209(100)
	yes	55(59.8)	37(40.2)	92(100)
	total	228(75.7)	73(24.3)	301(100)
Unwanted pregnancy	no	99(80.2)	49(19.8)	248(100)
	yes	29(54.7)	24(45.3)	53(100)
	total	228(75.7)	73(24.3)	301(100)
Suffering from disability of disease	no	222(75.8)	71(24.2)	293(100)
	yes	6(75)	2(25)	8(100)
	total	228(75.7)	73(24.3)	301(100)
Inappropriate appearance	no	228(76.5)	70(23.5)	298(100)
	yes	0	3(100)	3(100)
	total	228(75.7)	73(24.3)	301(100)

In this research, 88% and 92.3% of people whose husbands used heroin and alcohol, respectively, stated that they were physically abused by their husbands. Moreover, there was a relationship between sexual abuse against women, and heroin and alcohol use by the husband, whereas sexual abuse was more observed among women with addicted husbands. Other studies also have shown that husbands addiction is among the factors that are accompanied by physical violence [8]. Alcohol use, undoubtedly, weakens behavior control and this provide the basis for violence of husbands against women. In this study, physical and sexual abuse of women were higher among women whose husbands had lesser trust in them and there was a significant relationship between these two. Therefore, it can be concluded that paranoid thoughts, suspicion, and pessimism are related to violence among men [9].

With respect to the relationship between economical issues and emergence of abusive behavior, several studies have shown that there is a connection between environmental stressors, such as job related problems, and unemployment, and violence [10]. In this study, too, 73.3% of women having a family monthly income of less than 200,000 Toman were physically abused. However, no significant relationship was seen between sexual abuse and income level, which asks for more studies. The more economical problems an individual has, the more limitations he would have, and will exercise more violence against his family, particularly his wife.

The results of the present study indicates the relationship between (physical and sexual) abuse and some social factors, such as housing status, employment status, family

type, and members living in the family, whereas in women living in rented houses, the prevalence of physical abuse was 61.1%. In addition, 63.4% of housewives and 73.1% of women whose husbands were workers were physically abused by their husbands. The prevalence of abuse among women with extended families of 6 members or more was 82.9%. In other studies, too, there has been a significant relationship between the number of children and abuse, which is in line with the present study's results.

In the present study, there was a significant relationship between the frequency of physical and sexual abuse, and education level of the studied individuals. 76.4% of illiterate women were physically abused. In a research conducted in Tehran, a significant statistical relationship was also seen between education level and violence against women, which is in conformity to the present study's results. The author believes that low education level of women can be a reason preventing them from knowing their social rights and therefore be represented in form of being abused by husbands and entourages.

With respect to the relationship of education level of husbands and physical and sexual abuse against women, the results show that women whose husbands have low education level are more abused and there was a significant relationship with this respect [10]. In line with these results, studies by Inanlo et al. also confirm that low education level of either of the couples, unemployment and economical issues are accompanied with a higher percentage of wife abuse [11].

In terms of the relationship between personal factors and abusive behavior, the results of the present study showed

no significant relationship between physical abuse and age difference of couples in the studied subjects. 52.9% of women with 6-7 years of age difference with their husbands reported that they had not been physically abused by their husbands. However, in couples with an age difference of 2 years or less, this accounts for 37.4%. In other studies, also, no significant relationship was seen between the age difference of couples, and age at pregnancy and pregnancy intervals, which is in line with the present study's results [12].

A point about the age that should be considered is that, at an individual and personal level, it is not possible to predict that what types of men reduce violence while aging, and what type will continue as such. Therefore, investigating the relationship between age and age difference of couples with violence can only be effective in a macro perspective. As a result, in domestic violence prevention programs, there should more investment for young couples.

On the other hand, data analysis showed a significant relationship between frequency of sexual abuse and age difference of couples, whereas the lowest percentage of sexual abuse was connected to couples with an age difference of 2 years or less. It seems that the more the age difference is, the less the probability of agreement and adaptability between the couples with respect to sexual issues would be, because reaching a consensus about this issue is more difficult.

The comparison of physical and sexual abuse frequency in the studied persons in terms of mental disorders of the husband (obsession, depression, anxiety, hostility, suspicion, and psychosis) shows that an increase in mental disorders has a direct relationship with an increase in violence and there is a statistically significant relationship. The study conducted by Mohammad Khani also confirm this notion [13]. In comparing the prevalence of physical and sexual abuse in the subject of the study in terms of weakness of husband in controlling his motions, a significant relationship existed, which is in line with other studies [14].

With respect to the relationship between the frequency of physical and sexual abuse against children and husband's characteristics, the results show that there is a significant relationship with this respect, whereas fathers who were abused by their parents were more likely to abuse their children. In a study by Aein et al., there was a significant relationship between physical and sexual abuse against children, and exercise of severe disciplinary methods and the history of physical and emotional punishment in childhood, which is line with the results of the present study [14].

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The comparison of the physical and sexual abuse against children in the subjects in terms of high levels of crying by children shows that 40.2% of children who frequently cry, were sexually and physically abused. And there was a significant relationship between the frequency of physical and sexual abuse against children, and the frequency of children crying. In other studies, too, there have been a significant relationship between health status and obedience of children and abusive behavior [14].

The comparison of frequency of physical and sexual abuse against children in the study subjects in terms of unwanted pregnancy showed a significant relationship, whereas with an increase in unwanted pregnancy percentage, the percentage of child abuse also increases. In the study conducted by Namdari, there is a significant relationship between the number of family members and unwanted pregnancy, and abusive behavior, which is in line with the present study [5].

The comparison of frequency of physical abuse against children in the study subjects in terms of child age showed a significant relationship, whereas 4-7 years old children received the highest level of abuse. Similarly, in other studies conducted in other countries, abusive behavior have been observed more among 3-6 years old children and the abusive behavior is reduced as the age of the children is increased [15].

Probably, due to inability of children of this age to report the abusive behavior, parents are less cautious when exercising disciplinary methods. Also, more suffering from some diseases at this age interval can have an important role in increasing family entanglements and presence of abusive behavior. Findings showed that the prevalence of physical and sexual abuse in women and children were relatively high, and based on the investigated reasons, it is necessary to be reduced through appropriate planning.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors had equal role in design, work, statistical analysis and manuscript writing.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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