

## Gender Differences between Violence and Intimacy Patterns in Married Iranian College Students

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(Received: 30 July 2008 ; Accepted: 5 March 2009)

**Objective:** It is an established fact that violence co-occurs with intimate partners in families. The aim of this study was investigation of similarities and differences between intimacy and violence patterns in married college students.

**Methods:** Three questionnaires were used: 1. Marital intimacy questionnaire-Persian form. 2. Aggression questionnaire and 3. General demographic questionnaire. 198 married college students were randomly selected from Tehran Universities. They answered individually to the questionnaires. The data were analyzed by t-test, chi-square and correlation coefficients.

**Results:** There were no significant gender differences in total score of intimacy and other dimensions of intimacy. But there were significant differences between genders according to total the score of violence ( $p < 0.05$ ), physical ( $p < 0.05$ ), sexual ( $p < 0.05$ ) and verbal patterns of violence ( $P < 0.0001$ ). There were also correlations between some dimensions of intimacy and violent patterns.

**Conclusion:** Gender differences revealed important similarities and distinctions in husbands and wives' patterns of intimacy and violence. Couples with increasing intimacy dimensions can control the violent patterns of behavior. Satisfaction in close relationships depends on active participation of both partners.

*Iranian Journal of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences (IJPBS), Volume 3, Number 1, Spring and Summer 2009: 57-61 .*

**Keywords:** Aggression • Gender differences • Intimacy • Violence

### Introduction

It has become increasingly apparent that stable and happy relationships play a pivotal role in physical and mental health (1). Therapists usually attempt to better understand the interactional dynamics of normal marriage and they believed it has implications for marital and relational distress (2). Today, it is an established fact that violence-verbal, psychological, sexual, and so on co-occurs with intimacy. Most reported offenses are between intimate partners (3). A study of domestic violence conducted in 28 cities of Iran has rendered a prevalence of 66.3% (4). Although societal patriarchy may be the bedrock of husband-to-wife-aggression, it remains unclear why some men brought up amid the same societal pressures do not. Despite the widespread publicity of male

violence toward women, some research show that men are similarly victimized of violence, for example, Flynn (5) examined evidence from many studies and concluded that the rates of violence toward intimate partners are similar for men and women, yet the patterns differ.

Anger may appear early in life in response to various kinds of the threat, but for many individuals it becomes an emotional theme maintained by patterns of externalizing attributions. Anger has connection with violence. Certain positive dimensions in family life are shown to be primarily important for mental health and a good marital relationship; these include intimacy and communication that is relatively free from aggression and the capacity to appraise stressful situations (6).

Intimacy in couples is a protective factor that can moderate earlier deprivations and many kinds of social adversity (7). Despite the variety of definitions of intimacy that appear in the close relationships literature, all have at least one important aspect in common a feeling of closeness and connectedness that develops

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through communication between partners. Intimacy also has multiple components and is a process (8, 9). It has been conceptualized as a very important pattern of behavior with a strong aspect of emotion and social relationships of acceptance, joy and happiness, and love (10). Every couple relationship exists in broader contexts that affects their opportunities for intimacy and or exert violence in romantic relationships.

Gender is a contextual variable that is both present with in the dyad reflected in the broader culture within which the couples live. Intimacy has come to be associated with female and femininity (11). Numerous researchers have examined gender differences in marital quality, with mixed results (12). Having a better understanding of gender differences in marital relationships can improve treatments of distressed marriage and influence on prevention and control of mental dysfunctions.

The aim of the present study is looking for gender differences between intimacy and violence patterns of Iranian married college students.

### Materials and Methods

Data were collected from 198 undergraduate married college students (99 females, 99 males). They randomly selected from the lists of all married undergraduate college students of three universities of Tehran (Alzahra University, AllamehTabatabaie and Tehran University). Thirty five couples from each university have been selected, but 12 couples of this sample could not complete the questionnaires, therefore the analysis has been done with 99 couples. Ages of participants ranged from 18-35 years (Mean=22.8, SD=5.6). The mean duration of their marriage was 2.4 years. The participants were assessed through three questionnaires: 1. Marital Intimacy Questionnaire (MIQ)-Persian form. 2. Aggression questionnaire and 3. General demographic questionnaire. MIQ (13) is a 56-item Scale. The 5- Point likert-type scale ranges from a great deal to not at all. This scale assesses different dimensions of intimacy such as closeness (14 items), agreement (12 items), honesty (12 items), affection (8 items) and commitment (10 items). This inventory was found to have

adequate reliability (test-retest reliability: 0.85 and Cronbach's alpha coefficient: 0.65) (14). The Validity of the MIQ was calculated by using Pearson product moment correlation coefficient with Marital Intimacy Needs Questionnaire (MINQ) ( $r=0.65$ ,  $p<.001$ ) (9).

Aggression questionnaire is also a 4-point rating scale instrument comprised of 32 items. It is divided to four subscales: psychological, (16 items), Physical (10 items), sexual (3 items) and economic violence (2 items). This inventory has adequate reliability and validity. (The reliability for each subscale: 0.92, 0.93, 0.86 and 0.71 respectively, and Cronbach's alpha: 0.97) (15). The convergent validity of this questionnaire was assessed with a sample of 30 married students using Pearson product moment correlation coefficient with Haj-Yahia aggression questionnaire (11), and the correlation was statistically significant ( $r=0.73$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Aggression scale measures the frequency with which the respondent attempts to harm their partners through behaviors such as kicking and beating. In addition to the aggression questionnaire, we asked the couples to answer to the following question: Whether your spouse exerts verbal and/or physical aggression. Their response again was consistent with the results obtained by aggression questionnaire, which could be considered as an evidence for convergent validity.

The general demographic questionnaire consists of the personal information such as age, sex, education, duration of marriage, and socio-economic status. The mean duration of marriage was 2.4 years. Couples did not have any significant differences in terms of high, average and low socio economic status ( $\chi^2=1.39$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.52$ ). These questionnaires were administered first followed by MIQ and aggression questionnaire. In order to control the possible impact of the spouses in responses; we asked the couples answer the questions separately. Participants completed questionnaires individually in the classrooms and/or in the dormitory. All of the subjects agreed to participate in this study.

Data were analyzed by SPSS soft ware (version 12) using t-test, Pearson product-moment correlations and non-parametric test (i.e. Chi-Square test).

## Results

Scores on MIQ and aggression questionnaires (total and sub-scales) are shown in table 1 and 2.

Results show that there are not any significant differences between female and male in total score of the intimacy and other subscales of intimacy. But significant differences were found by gender for the total score of violence ( $P < 0.05$ ), physical ( $P < 0.013$ ), and sexual ( $P < .034$ ) scales of violence. The mean scores of the males group in these scales were higher than females group. Also the mean scores of the economic violence in males are higher than females, the difference is not statistically significant, but marginal ( $P < 0.06$ ).

Although the mean score of women psychological violence (e.g. verbal violence and silence) was higher than men, the difference was not statistically significant. But for the purpose of further analyses on the possible differences that did not show them for any reason in the t-test, non-parametric test (Chi-Square) was also used on verbal and physical violence in two groups. In fact, the responses of the sample to the question that before mentioned in the materials and methods section of this study: "Whether your spouse

exerts verbal and/or physical aggression", were analyzed using Chi-Square test.

Physical and verbal violence ranked with according to their frequency in two groups are presented in table 3. (Twenty four students from the total sample have not answered to this question.)

As table 2 shows 74.3% of husbands classified as physically aggressive. This rate is higher than the prevalence rates of 25.7% reported by females, but more wives (85.5%) than husband (14.5%) were aggressive in verbal violence. This difference is statistically significant ( $P < .0001$ )

Correlations among different scales of intimacy and violence for the entire sample are presented in table 4.

Correlational results indicate that overall, total score of violence was significantly and negatively related to total score of intimacy ( $r = -0.27$ ), closeness ( $r = -0.21$ ), agreement ( $r = -0.27$ ), honesty ( $r = -0.22$ ), affection ( $r = -0.26$ ) and commitment ( $r = -0.24$ ). Psychological violence also was significantly and negatively related to closeness, agreement, honesty, affection, and commitment ( $p < 0.01$ ). Economic and sexual violence also indicate significantly and negatively correlation with total score of intimacy, agreement and affection ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 1.** Scores on MIQ for Married College Students (N=198)

	Female	Male	Statistical Tests for Comparing Females & Males	P
<b>MIQ, Mean (SD):</b>				
Total	160.1 (29.06) (N=96)	157.19 (28.84) (N=97)	t = -0.69 df=191	0.17
Closeness	38.1 (7.13) (N=96)	37.11 (7.56) (N=96)	t = -0.93 df=190	0.35
Agreement	34.06 (7.53) (N=96)	34.71 (7.09) (N=97)	t = 0.61 df=191	0.53
Honesty	32.61 (7.01) (N=96)	32.99 (6.8) (N=97)	t = 0.38 df=191	0.7
Affection	25 (5.45) (N=96)	24.88 (5.24) (N=97)	t = 0.16 df=191	0.87
Commitment	30.21 (5.7) (N=96)	29.86 (5.94) (N=97)	t = 0.42 df=191	0.68

**Table 2.** Scores on aggression for married college students (N=198)

	Female	Male	Statistical Tests for Comparing Females & Males	P
<b>Aggression, Mean(SD):</b>				
Total	35.3 (6.09) (N=97)	37.81 (10.83) (N=98)	t=-1.99 df=193	0.05
Psychological-violence	21.47 (6.53) (N=98)	21.34 (4.86) (N=97)	t=-0.15 df=193	0.87
Physical violence	7.3 (1.16) (N=97)	8.19 (3.32) (N=98)	t=-2.51 df=193	0.013
Sexual violence	2.27 (0.76) (N=96)	2.57 (1.16) (N=98)	t=-2.13 df=192	0.034
Economic violence	2.13 (0.57) (N=97)	2.34 (0.94) (N=97)	t=-1.84 df=192	0.06

**Table 3.** Prevalence of physical and verbal violence in the total sample (N= 174)

Variable	Female	Male	Total	Statistical tests for comparing females & males
Physical violence N (%)	25 (25.7%)	73 (74.3%)	98	$\chi^2= 61.75^*$
Verbal violence N (%)	65 (85.5%)	11 (14.5)	76	
Total	90	84	174	

\* P&lt;.0001

**Table 4.** Pearson product-moment correlation's among violence and intimacy variables (N=191)

Variables	Psychological Violence	Physical Violence	Sexual Violence	Economic Violence	Total violence
Closeness	-0.29**	-0.06	-0.12	-0.12	-0.21**
Agreement	-0.4**	-0.08	-0.19**	-0.19*	-0.27
Honesty	-0.29**	-0.07	-0.12	-0.16	-0.22**
Affection	-0.4**	-0.07	-0.16*	-0.19**	-0.26**
Commitment	-0.33**	-0.02	-0.11	-0.14	-0.24**
Total intimacy	-0.38**	-0.07	-0.16*	-0.18*	-0.27**

\* P&lt;0.05

\*\* P&lt;0.01

## Discussion

The data analyses indicate that the range of variability in marital intimacy did not differ depending on the gender of couples. These results diminished the whole system of gender stereotypes about that intimacy is associated with female and femininity (11). The men's relationships are as intimate as women's. In other words, men's and women's relationships are equally intimate, but their definitions of intimacy may be different. So, as other researchers note, all human beings have the basic need to be intimate and close with another person (16). These findings corroborate previous research (17) and suggest that males and females report similar levels of intimacy. There are number of potential explanations for this result. First both men and women have equal need to intimacy with their couples, but men may be resist applying this label and women's relationship appear to be more intimate only because intimacy has been conceptualized in a female-biased way. Second both couples rely on relational intimacy because they are in early romantic relationships (the mean scores for duration of their marriage is 2.4 years), but may develop different patterns of intimacy overtime. The current study is in the direction of Bowlby's attachment theory (16) indicating that intimacy is a human necessity through life span. It is a human natural state as a species, our birth right as well. Data suggests also that there are significant gender differences in the extent to which males and females use relational aggression. These finding are consistent

with other studies that indicate women are more likely to be attacked and injured by male than men's (18). Differences that have been found between husband and wife's marital violence can be attributes to differences in socialization of men and women. It is a logical extension of the gender roles of men and women. In fact wife-beating is both cause and effect of inequality of power between women and men in our society. We can find also another more intrapsychic explanation of family violence that is found in family systems theories that suggest all family members play role in maintaining a status quo (homeostasis), even in violent and destructive families (19).

Consideration of gender differences in the present study also revealed distinction in verbal violence. Consistent with previous studies (5) more wives than husbands were aggressive in verbal violence (85.5% vs.14.5%). It seems wives were as likely as husband to use aggressive tactics, but their patterns differ.

Findings from the correlational coefficient show that violence was significantly and negatively associated with intimacy. One possible factor that may influence violence may be regarded as low level of intimacy. So increasing intimacy in marriage can decreases the different types of violence.

## Conclusion

Marital violence and intimacy are not independent constructs. It appears that intimacy may provide valuable information about risk

factors in the development of violence between married couples. Finding also demonstrated the importance of gender differences in violence patterns in marriage. Intimacy and violence can be experienced at many levels. Couples can work together for nurturing their intimacy thereby control and handling their conflicts.

The current study suggests that college counselor centers be aware of the risks involved with violence in married students and offer appropriate mental health services and teach the anger management strategies.

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