

Personality Traits and Severity of Wife Abuse among Iranian Women

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to determine the relationships between personality traits and severity of wife abuse among Iranian women in Tehran city in Iran. The study involved 398 women who sought treatment at 4 selected hospitals by using multistage stratified sampling technique. Conflict Tactic Scale (CTS2) and Five-Factor Personality Inventory (NEO-FFI) were used to measure severity of wife abuse and personality traits respectively.

Findings showed that out of 398 women studied, 42.5% received minor abuse and 43.5% received severe abuse. Severity of total wife abuse was positively related to neuroticism personality and negatively related to extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness. However, no significant relationship was note for total wife abuse and openness personality. The result of multinomial logistic regression indicated that neuroticism personality trait was a significant predictor of minor and severe total abuse. The results of the current study highlighted the importance of personality traits in explaining the severity of wife abuse in Tehran, Iran. Therefore, strategies to prevent and intervene cases of abuse among wives in Tehran, Iran should take into consideration individual's personality traits.

Keywords: wife abuse, personality, CTS2, NEO-FFI

1. Introduction

For some people, family is a place of hope, love and support; for others, it is paradoxical mixture of aggression and tenderness (Bengtson, Acock, Allen, Anderson, & Klein, 2005). Home should be the safest place for a woman and the husband should be her best protector. However, for some women home is the most dangerous place for them, and husbands are found to be the main abuser (Wiehe, 1998).

Wife abuse refers to violence against wife or wife battering (Oladeji & Adegoke, 2008; Records, 2007; Thabet, Tawahina, Sarraj, & Vostanis, 2011). Wife abuse occurs in different forms such as physical, sexual, psychological, fiscal, and social (Ezazi, 2002; Hegarty, Hindmarsh, & Gelles, 2000; Records, 2007). Wife abuse is a social problem in the world (Alio, Nana, & Salihu, 2009; Tokuc, Ekuklu, & Avcioglu, 2010); for instance, there were over 102,500 victims of intimate abuse in Canada in 2010 (Sinha, 2012). Nagae and Dancy (2010) reported physical, psychological and sexual abuse among women in Japan. Walby and Allen (2004) stated that 54% of rapes against women in England were committed by their partners or ex-partners; and there were also more than 1,300 calls of daily domestic violence against women. However, the police estimated that calls are just 23% of all cases of domestic violence, because most of the victims do not report the incidents (Walby & Allen (2004). Ludermir et al. (2008) showed that a substantial number of women in Brazil experience physical abuse (10% to 56%) and sexual abuse (10% to 30%) at least once during their lifetime.

The level and rate of wife abuse in less developed countries is higher compared to developed countries (Ahmadi & Alimardi, 2005; Faqir, 2001). For example, a study by Ruikar and Pratinidhi (2008) in India reported the rate of wife abuse was 61.5%. In a different study, Haj-Yahya (1999) noted that Palestinian women faced higher levels of psychological, sexual, physical, and economical abuse. A national study by Ghazitabatabayi et al. (2005) revealed that 66% of Iranian women have been abused by their husbands from the beginning of their married life. A study

by Nohjah et al. (2011) found that the rates of psychological, physical and sexual wife abuse in Iran are 41%, 20.2% and 10.93% respectively.

Wife abuse has negative effect on women, their families, and consequently the whole society (Kyu & Kania, 2005). Setarefrouzan, Dejman, and Baradaraneftekhar (2006) found that 18% of women referred to Tehran legal medicine centers suffered from wife abuse which in turn increased financial cost to them, family and also society.

The negative effects include negative attitude toward marriage, depression, suicide, addiction, social isolation, child battering, retaliatory violence, increase extramarital sex and loss of interest in sex, poor psychological and emotional well-being, low self-esteem, stress, and psychosomatic disorders (Hampton & Gullotta, 1993), chronic fatigue and tension, intense startle, disturbed sleep, have a bad eating pattern, nightmares, self-blame, physical injury and death (Ezazi, 2002). Abuse also can have negative influence on the women's job (Ashouri & Moazami, 2001; Kyu & Kania, 2005; Wiehe, 1998).

Abuse incurs financial and time cost to wives, families, and governments. In Canada, government spent about \$1.3 billion for intimate violence in 1992 (Ferris, McMain, & Silver, 1997). In the U.S., government spent 3 to 5 billion dollars annually for intimate violence (Crandall, Schwab, Sheehan, & Esposito, 2009). According to learning theory, abusive behavior is learned. Thus, children who live in an abusive family may learn to do or become victims of abuse during their adulthood.

The consequences of wife abuse are related to its severity (Belfrage & Rying, 2004; Mignon, Larson, & Holmaes, 2002). The more severe the abuse, the more negative effects will be imposed on the women's psychological and physical health (Records, 2007). Fakhari et al. (2011) in a study among 600 women who visited the health center in Tabriz (Iran) showed that 5.5% of the respondents had experienced the blue or black bruises on the eyes due to abuse during their marriage time, and 3.3% experienced during the last year, and 3% of them visit a doctor because of the injuries. About 1% of the respondents reported broken hand/leg or ear injury. Kaldi, Hajbabayi and Kiyanfard (2005) interviewed 50 incarcerated women and men who killed their spouse. Results showed that for both genders, wife abuse was the main reason of the crime. Men were incarcerated due to severity of abuse and for the women, the act was to stop the husbands from abusing them.

Women's characteristics may also affect the level or severity of the abuse. Women's personality is perceived as one of the significant factors that determine their behavior, such as stay with abuser husband and being exposed to more abuse or leave them (Shoultes, 2008). Women with certain personality traits may try to seek help to decrease the severity of abuse (Panaghi, Pirouzi, Shirinbayan, & Ahmadabadi, 2011). Narimani and Aghamohamadian (2005) stated that introversion/extraversion dimensions of personality may relate to abuse while psychological aggression may lead to neuroticism (Burton, Hafetz, & Henninger, 2007; Rampersad, 2008).

Personality trait approach pays attention to differences between individuals as well as identifying and measuring individual's personality characteristics (Mischel, Shoda, & Smith, 2003). Traits are defined as routine patterns of emotion, thought, and behavior (Kassin, 2003), in relation to one's acceptance of minor or severe wife abuse. In other word, personality traits are the most important factor of people's adaptation (Hayes & Joseph, 2003).

Talbot, Duberstein, King, Cox, and Giles (2000) showed that there is a significant relationship between dimensions of personality and child abuse. Colémont, Hiel, and Cornelis (2011) showed that personality traits is related to punitive attitude and based on this attitude, women think they deserve to be abused. Sharma (2011) showed that neuroticism did not have significant relationship with wife abuse. However, extraversion had significant positive relationship with verbal and physical wife abuse, while openness had significant negative relationship with wife abuse. She also found that agreeableness personality had significant positive relationship with physical and sexual wife abuse, while conscientiousness had positive relationship with verbal abuse.

Panaghi et al. (2011) reported a positive relationship between neuroticism and psychological, physical, and sexual abuse among women in Kermanshah (Iran). The result of the study by Panaghi et al. showed that extraversion had negative relationship with psychological, physical, and sexual abuse. Conscientiousness had negative relationship with psychological and sexual abuse. Neuroticism was a strong predictor for physical and psychological wife abuse and conscientiousness was a strong predictor for sexual abuse. Rampersad (2008) showed that there is a significant relationship between psychological aggression, neuroticism, and social support. Study by Vittengl, Kraft and Jarrett (2003) and Sharma (2011) showed that five dimensions of personality are important elements among women which in turn are related to severity of wife abuse.

2. Methodology

2.1 Population and Sample

The population of this study was all women who sought treatment in 4 hospitals in Tehran due to medical problems.

Respondents were selected by using a multistage stratified sampling technique. A total of 398 women were selected as the respondents of the study.

2.2 Instruments

Conflict Tactic Scale: CTS2 scale was developed by Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy and Sugarman (1996). This scale has 78 items that measured five dimensions which are negotiation (6 items), injury (6 items), psychological (8 items), physical (12 items), and sexual (7 items) as well as wife abuse (total score). Half of the items measure the wife's behavior and the rest belongs to the husband's behavior against wife. In this study, researcher excluded the husband's behavior as well as the negotiation dimension from the scale. Acceptable validity of the instrument was reported by Straus, Hamby, and Warren (2003) and Sharma (2011). Hemati (2005) showed that CTS2 has good reliability coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha=.78), and Pournaghashtehrani (2006) reported Cronbach's Alpha of .92 among Iranian respondents. The reliability of the scale for the current study was good (Cronbach's Alpha= .86).

The Five-Factor Personality Inventory (NEO-FFI): The NEO-FFI is a short form of five factors personality scale that developed by Costa and McCrae in 1983 (John & Srivastava, 1999). It has 60 items with a 5-point Likert options ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". Garousifarshi and Soufiyani (2008) showed acceptable reliability of NEO-FFI among Iranian in their study (Cronbach's Alpha= .86). the reliability of the NEO-FFI in the current study was acceptable (Cronbach's Alpha = .71).

3. Results

3.1 Descriptive Findings

Respondents were between 18 and 64 years ($M = 32.5$, $SD = 8.39$). Majority of the respondents was in the age category of 26 to 31 years (31.7%) follows by the category of 32 to 37 (25.1%). Most of the respondents had education at college level (38.4%), which is followed by Bachelor level (33.2%). Majority of the respondents was housewives (62.6%). Length of marriage among respondents was between 1 and 52 years ($M = 10.71$, $SD = 8.8$). More than one third of the respondents had been married between 1 and 5 years (37.4%). More than half of the respondents (54.7%) had 1 to 2 children, while 31.2% had no children.

Based on Table 1, majority (85.9%) of the respondents experienced at least one type of wife abuse during the last year. Only 56 respondents (14.1%) did not experience any types of wife abuse. Majority (63.58%) of the respondents obtained abuse score between 1 and 50, and about half of the respondents (48.50%) reported abuse score between 1 and 25.

Table 1. Distribution of total abuse score among respondents (N=398)

Score	n	%
No abuse	56	14.1
Score 1 – 50	253	63.58
Score 51 – 100	38	9.55
Score 101 – 150	22	5.53
Score 151 – 200	9	2.26
Score 201 – 250	6	1.50
Score 251 and more	14	3.52
Mean=44.48; SD=82.42		
Minimum=0; Maximum= 650		

Based on Table 2, the mean for neuroticism was 34 ($SD=7.0$). Based on this mean score of neuroticism, 51.8% of the respondents had low neuroticism score. The mean for extraversion was 39 ($SD=6.0$) and 58% of the respondents had high extraversion score. The indexes for openness were $M=38$ and $SD=4.0$, and based on the mean scores, 51.8% and 47.9% of the respondents were categorized as low and high openness respectively. The indexes for agreeableness were $M=44$ and $SD=5$, and 51.8% of the respondents was classified as high in agreeableness. For conscientiousness, the index was $M=46$ and $SD=6.0$, and 45.4% of the respondents were in the low category.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents by personality scores (N=398)

Personality	Mean	SD	n	%
Neuroticism	34	7.6		
Low			206	51.8
High			189	47.5
No response			3	.7
Extraversion	40	6.0		
Low			165	42.0
High			231	58.0
No response			2	.5
Openness	38	5.0		
Low			206	51.8
High			191	47.9
No response			1	.3
Agreeableness	44	6.0		
Low			206	51.8
High			190	47.7
No response			2	.5
Conscientiousness	47	7.0		
Low			181	45.4
High			215	54.02
No response			2	.5

3.2 Inferential Findings

Table 3, reveals that four of five personality traits was significantly related to total wife abuse. The significant relationship was found for neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness. The result showed that respondents with high score on neuroticism experienced more abuse ($T_s = .3$, $p < .0001$). Wives who were extravert, agreeable, and conscientious tend to experience less abuse. Openness personality trait did not indicate significant correlation with severity of wife abuse.

Table 3. Relationship between personality and severity of wife abuse (N=398)

Personalities	Neuroticism		Extraversion		Openness		Agreeableness		Conscientiousness	
	T_s	p	T_s	p	T_s	p	T_s	p	T_s	p
Total abuse	.30	.00	-.16	.00	.00	.98	-.165	.00	-.168	.00

A multinomial logistic regression analysis was performed to determine the unique predictors of severity of total wife abuse. Based on Straus and Douglas (2004), severity of wife abuse was divided to three categories which are non-abused, minor abuse, and severe abuse. Non-abuse category was used as the reference category to predict the chance of minor or severe abuse received by women. Since the dependent variable has three categories, present study used multinomial logistic regression technique to determine unique predictors of wife abuse.

Table 4 presents the B, Standard Error, as well as Wald, Exp (B) or Odds Ratio (OR), and 95% Confidence interval around the estimated OR. According to Table 4, neuroticism [$B = .063$, $OR = 1.065$ (95% CI 1.009 to 1.123, $p = .02$)] significantly predicted minor abuse than non-abuse among respondents. The OR for neuroticism shows that one unit increase in neuroticism among women increases 6.5% ($1 - 1.065 \times 100$) of their chance to experience minor abuse. In other word, the OR of neuroticism who got minor abuse was about 1.06 than non-abused.

Neuroticism also significantly predicted severe abuse than non-abuse [$B = .092$, $OR = 1.096$ (95% CI 1.036 to 1.161, $p = .00$)]. Thus, with one unit increase in neuroticism among women, their chance to experience severe abuse

increases up to 9.6% of. It means the OR of neuroticism among the group who experienced severe abuse was 1.096 than the non-abuse group.

Table 4. Results of multinomial logistic regression on severity of total wife abuse

Variable	B	SE	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% Confidence Interval for Exp(B)	
							Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Minor abuse								
Intercept	-1.16	2.67	.189	1	.66			
Neuroticism	.063	.027	5.321	1	.02	1.065	1.009	1.123
Extraversion	-.014	.034	.170	1	.68	.986	.922	1.054
Openness	.027	.038	.521	1	.47	1.028	.954	1.107
Agreeableness	.053	.036	2.121	1	.14	1.054	.982	1.132
Conscientiousness	-.006	.032	.039	1	.84	.994	.933	1.059
Severe abuse								
Intercept	1.062	2.81	.142	1	.70			
Neuroticism	.092	.029	9.990	1	.00	1.096	1.036	1.161
Extraversion	-.019	.037	.266	1	.60	.981	.913	1.054
Openness	.028	.040	.490	1	.48	1.028	.951	1.111
Agreeableness	.029	.038	.569	1	.45	1.029	.955	1.108
Conscientiousness	-.014	.033	.181	1	.67	.986	.923	1.053

Reference: non abuse group

4. Conclusion

This study found a significant positive relationship between neuroticism personality trait and severity of total wife abuse. Studies by Burton et al. (2007) and Rampersad (2008) also showed significant relationship between high level of aggression and neuroticism. Panaghi et al. (2011) found a significant relationship between neuroticism and wife abuse. Women with neuroticism personality trait may receive more severe abuse by the husbands. Individual with neuroticism personality trait is usually moody, anxious, and emotionally not stable (Garusifarshi, 1998). So, wife with more neuroticism personality might not be able to do her duty well and may be subjected to more abuse by husband. The results also showed significant negative relationship between extraversion and severity of total wife abuse. The finding is consistent with Burton et al. (2007) who found that respondents with high level of extraversion tend to be less abuse. Women with extraversion personality have characteristics such as sociable, assertive, active, exuberant, excitement seeking, sexual arousal, cheerful, optimism and talkative (Atashrouz, Askeri, & Pakdaman, 2008). Wife with these characteristics may establish close relationships with the husband and may influence husband to be more gentle and kind to her; and consequently reduced husband's tendency to be abusive.

This study found a significant negative relationship between agreeableness personality trait and severity of total wife abuse. This finding strengthened previous study by Burton et al. (2007). Respondents who had high score of agreeableness personality trait received less severe abuse. Agreeableness refers to a continuum from compassion to antagonism and the quality of social interaction with others. Women with this type of personality tend to be warm, considerable, kind, and cooperative (Thompson, 2008) and these characteristics may mellow down husband's aggressive instincts. Significant negative relationship found between conscientiousness personality and severity of total wife abuse. Women with high conscientiousness personality may receive less severe abuse. Women who are conscientious are more organized, thoughtful and have higher control on their impulses (Garusifarshi, 1998). So, she can analysis her husband abusive behavior and chooses best strategy to control her and her husband behavior to decrease the wife abuse. Multinomial logistic regression showed that neuroticism is a significant predictor of minor and severe wife abuse. Previous study by Hines and Saudino (2008) and Panaghi et al. (2011) also found neuroticism as the strongest predictor of family abuse particularly for women.

The findings of this study have important implications for theoretical perspective that address the relationships

between personality traits and severity of wife abuse. This study provides evidence for Heise ecological perspective (1998). Personality is one of the factor of personal layer of ecological perspective. Personal layer affects person's behavior. So, personality traits influence woman's behavior and act and determine to what extent they will be subjected to abuse by the husbands. The present finding also support trait personality theory that explains how personality traits affect abuse.

Based on the result of the current study, type and level of personality has significant relationship with severity of wife abuse among women in Tehran-Iran. Women who are more neurotic, less extraversion, less agreeable and less conscientious are more likely to receive severe wife abuse. Thus, it is recommended that women in Iran be educated to understand their own personality. So they can control their behavior in close relationship in order to minimize the possibility of being abuse. The information obtained in the present study has important implications to the Ministry of Health, Welfare Organization and family consulting centers of Iran to better understand the factors which have strong influence on severity of wife abuse.

Although it is difficult to change the type of personality, but woman can decreases severity of abuse by some strategy. At first women should be careful about their marriage. Because type of personality of man and woman effects on their conflict. For example, if woman and man have less score of extraversion, it is difficult for them to cope. Also, woman should know about her and her husband personality, and meet counselor to get guidance.

Family and parents should know about personality of their girl and try to help them to marry with appropriate personality person, because some man and women are not appropriate for each other to marry based on the types of personality.

Administration and policy makers should have programs such as workshops, movies on TV, or information through newspapers about the women who are more neuroticism, or less exterior, agreeable, and conscientious. They can inform couples to know their personality, and give information to women and men to choose best strategies against this issue. Administration and policy maker should make plans for neurotic wife to treat them. So, neurotic women can do their duty in family and conflict will decrease and finally wife abuse may decrease.

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