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The employed women's experience of spousal violence: A qualitative study

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Introduction: **spousal violence (domestic violence) is the most common type of violence against women. Violence against women is not merely a health problem affecting the family members. Rather, it is also an extensive serious problem associated with social and public health. Violence against women seriously threatens their quality of life and their children.** ***Materials and methods:*** **in the present qualitative study using conventional content analysis approach, the women's experiences of spousal violence was investigated. Ten women were chosen through purposeful sampling method. The data collection method was deep semi-structured interview using open-ended questions. The data analysis was performed through conventional content analysis approach.** ***Results:*** **the data analysis culminated in extraction of three main classes and eight subclasses including domination (deprivation of privacy, deprivation of freedom in personal affairs), negligence (repressing beliefs, sense of loneliness in the marital life, the woman's deprivation of spouse's expression of affection, neglecting the woman's desires in sexual relationship, no precedence of spousal role, compulsion to fill the emotional vacuum by the child), and evading divorce consequences.** ***Conclusion:*** **the results of the present study suggested that the employed women were subject to their spouse violence, however in order to prevent negative social consequences against this violence, they indicated a passive behavior and did not consent to terminating their marital life through divorce. Thus, it is recommended that the necessary training be given by authorities with regards to the proper method of interaction with spouse.**

INTRODUCTION

Violence is a prevailing action which threatens the life, health, and happiness in the daily life of every human (1, 2), which has existed throughout history for different reasons. The men's violence against women has been no exception to this rule either. The superior physical power in men sometimes changes into permission for applying violence, where the most allowable form of violence in the customary way is applied in the family and by the man (3). Everyone has essential rights to live peacefully at their home, but sometimes the essential rights of women are neglected due to violence (4). Domestic violence against women refers to any kind of damaging behavior towards a girl or woman by her special family members such as spouse, which is the most common type of violence against women (5). Systematic review study showed that the prevalence of domestic violence has been 1.9%-70%% in 2010 (6). Generally, it is estimated that one out of three women who is beaten is compelled to consent to sexual relationship, or will be abused in her life in some other ways (7). The findings of the national project of investigating domestic violence conducted in 2001-2004 indicated that almost % of Iranian women experienced different kinds of domestic abuse and violence at least once throughout their marital life (8). Investigation of domestic violence against women among university students in Iran also showed that out of 327 married students, 93.6% were victims of spousal misbehavior, out of home 91%, 55%, and 42% had experienced emotional misbehavior, physical misbehavior, and sexual misbehavior, respectively(9). The results of the studies showed that from among different types of domestic violence, Iranian women are mostly subject to verbal and psychological violence (4). Violence against women begins even before the birth, and involves their infanthood, childhood, adolescence, youth, and adulthood, which even continues up to old age periods, to such an extent that the desire to have a male child has traditionally existed among most nations especially in the East and southeast of Asia (10). Violence against women has mental, social, and economic roots(11). Even in most cases, violence is considered a disciplinary action against women (12), which is historically the incarnation of unequal power between men and women, resulting in dominance and discrimination against women by men and disruptions in their complete development (13). Violence against women seriously threatens the quality of life of women and their children, their ability, independence, and generativity of their routine life and impairs them (14). However, violence against women is not merely a health problem affecting the family members; it is also a serious extensive problem related to social and public health, which personally leads to both direct psychological and physical effects as well as gradual decline of the body and mind (8). Violence is also considered as a serious obstacle against progress. Its effects on health and welfare have

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indicated that it results in diminished generativity, high treatment costs, legal and criminal process, and indirect costs on other family members (15).

Considering the importance of this issue and the high prevalence of violence in the world and Iran as well as the adverse effects of violence against women and since most studies have been quantitative, while deeper and qualitative studies to understand this phenomenon and women's description of spousal violence are sparse, the present research has been conducted with the aim of examining women's description about spousal violence.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study, conventional content analysis method was used as one of the qualitative research methods. This method is suitable to understand hidden feelings and meanings in the experiences of human life (16). Thus in the present study, in order to discover the women's life experiences of spousal violence, conventional content analysis method was used. The participants of this study were Iranian women, married, native, living in Zabol City with at least one year of marital life. The exclusion criteria included having speech and hearing problems in the interviewee. In the present study, the sampling method was purposeful and the data collection instrument consisted of deep and semi-structured interviews through open-ended questions, such as "describe your experiences of marital life".

The sample size was determined based on the collected data and their analysis. Accordingly, 10 married women qualifying for the inclusion criteria were interviewed. The participants of this research were chosen according to the researcher's familiarity with married women available considering the inclusion criteria. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the participants also introduced other married women. The sampling continued until reaching data saturation. The saturation involved repetition and confirmation of the previously collected data. In other words, repetition of previous information or repetition of themes suggests adequacy of sample size.

In this research, first the interviewer invited married women for the research. The aim of the research was then explained to them and then the interview was done in a quiet and peaceful environment as desired by the participant and according to the discretion of both the researcher and participant. The duration of interviews ranged from 45 to 60 min given the conditions and patience of the participants. All interviews were recorded, typed word by word, reviewed, coded, and immediately analyzed by the researcher. Indeed, data analysis was conducted concurrently and constantly with data collection. The data analysis process was done according to the proposed stages of Landman and Granheim (2004) including 1. Writing down the interview immediately after it 2. Reading the entire text of the interview to achieve a general understanding of its content 3. Determining the meaning units and preliminary codes 4. Classifying similar preliminary codes in more comprehensive classes 5. Determining the hidden content in the data (17).

To interpret the direction and robustness of data, four criteria including validity, reliability, confirmability, and transferability were used (18). To ensure the validity, after analyzing each interview, the researcher referred again to the participants, where the accuracy of the points was confirmed and the necessary modifications were done. In order to interpret the confirmability, the researcher has tried not to introduce his presumptions into the data collection and analysis as much as possible. In order to achieve reliability, the researcher has benefited from the guidance and supervision of expert professors. Finally, to interpret the transferability, the experiences of participants were corresponded against the experiences of other married women who had not taken part in this study. The ethical considerations of this research included acquiring informed consent from the participants to take part in the research and recording their interview, not writing the name of the interviewees on the tapes and implemented transcripts, adhering to the principle of confidentiality of information, and reserving the right of quitting the research at any stage of the research. The present study approved by ethics committee of Zabol university of Medical Science. Oral and written consent obtained from patients before starting the interview (ETHIC CODE: IR.ZBMU.REC.1397.077).

RESULTS

Personal characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1. Figure 1. Analysis of the collected data from the participants culminated in extraction of three main classes and eight subclasses including dominance (deprivation of privacy, the provision of freedom in personal affairs), negligence (repressing beliefs, sense of loneliness in the marital life, the woman's deprivation of spouse's expression of affection, neglecting the woman's desires in sexual relationship, no precedence of spousal role, compulsion to fill the emotional vacuum by the child), and evading divorce consequences (Table 2).

1. Dominance

Presence of some factors and conditions implied the concept of dominance in the participants. These factors included:

1.1. Deprivation of privacy

The experiences of women indicated that they are deprived of privacy due to constant presence of the spouse family. A 28-year-old housewife described deprivation of privacy as follows: "my house is exactly next to my spouse mother's house. The door is always open and any time they enter our house without permission and I should have complete Hijab. When I complain, my husband gets angry and wrangles or takes revenge when my parents come". A 32-year-old with bachelor's degree described the situation as follows: "my problem is that my spouse mother lives with me. She may be at her own home for only 2-3 hours. Other times she's with me which means that she doesn't sleep even in a separate room. My main problem is that my husband welcomes this and expects me to both cater for her and be happy".

1.2. Deprivation of freedom in personal affairs

Participants had experienced lack of freedom in personal affairs due to factors such as the spouse control over the type of clothing and the spouse family control over personal affairs. A 3-year-old woman with master's degree described the spouse family control over her personal affairs as follows: "my husband's family meddles with anything. My husband's mother says why you bought this thing for the child, why you had him wear this piece of clothing, this is ugly, put the furniture there, make your food in that way, etc., and my husband follows these and get's on my nerve". A 29-year-old married woman also stated the spouse control over her clothing as follows: "in any gathering where my husband does not feel comfortable, she doesn't like me to wear anything I want. Because I usually liked to make him satisfied and thus listened to him. I have never told him that I don't wear this because you said".

2. Negligence

The experiences of participants suggested factors which developed sense of negligence in them:

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Table 1 The personal characteristics of the participants

variable	Number
Age (year)	32.8 ±6.5
Level of education	
Master	2
Bachelor	6
Diploma	2
Type of occupation	
Housewife	3
Research officer	3
Officer	2
Office affairs	1
Administrative affairs	1

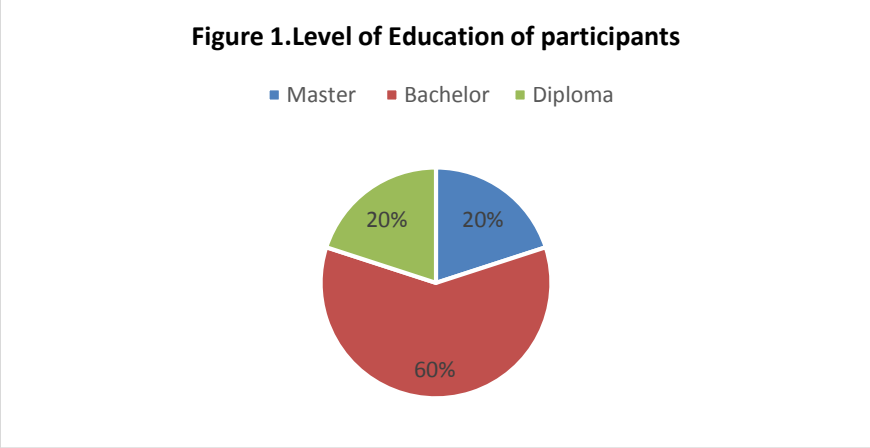

Table 2 The main classes and subclasses extracted from data analysis

Subclasses	classes
- Deprivation of privacy deprivation of freedom in personal affairs	Dominance
- Repression of beliefs sense of loneliness in the marital life the woman's deprivation of the spouse expression of affection ignoring the woman's desire in sexual relationship lack of precedence of spousal role compulsion to filling the emotional vacuum with the child	Negligence
	Evading divorce consequences

2.1. Repressing the woman's beliefs

Investigation of the experiences of participants suggested that neglecting and ignoring their opinions by the spouse or paying attention to the opinions of others such as the spouse mother or sister has resulted in development of sense of repression of opinions in the women. A 30-year-old employed woman with bachelor's degree stated that: "my husband always says that you should be very careful about what to say with regards to my family. You should not say you [second person singular] to them, rather you should say you [second person plural]. I follow this point. I don't interfere in their stuff very much. When they talk, I set in a corner and just watch. My husband says when we talk, when we the siblings talk to each other, have discussion, or even have fun, you should sit quietly in a corner and don't say anything". A 25-year-old housewife also said that: "in many cases I have told my husband that we do something, he then says I don't feel like it and I don't have time".

2.2. Sense of loneliness in the marital life

The excessive attention of the spouse to his mother or sister has resulted in development of sense of loneliness in the participants. A housewife with bachelor's degree considered extreme attention of her spouse to his family as a reason of her loneliness and stated that "… Without coordinating with me, my husband goes to her mother's house they say and laugh, while I stay alone. I feel I have some kind of deficiency. I'm tortured why my husband does not stay at home. I wonder maybe I lack something that causes him to prefer his mother's house". A housewife with diploma level of education also described this situation as follows: "when his sister comes from the town, regardless of what time it is, they call my husband, he should go and remain there up to anytime at midnight. Meanwhile, I sleep alone at home.

2.3. Woman's deprivation of the spouse's expression of affection

The experiences of the participating women suggested that the cultural factors of the region prevent expression of their spouse emotions to

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them. A 28-year-old woman with diploma level of education considered cultural factors as obstacles against expression of her spouse emotions and stated that: "my husband pays attention to me, but his upbringing has taught him not to express that. He has emotions towards me, but when I say why you don't express that, he says I have never expressed my feelings in my life". A 30-year-old woman with bachelor's degree stated that: "psychologically, I have numerous needs. A woman likes to hear from her husband that he loves her, but he says that is for young boys and girls".

2.4. Neglecting the woman's desires in sexual relationship

Most participants made sexual relationships without desire and merely out of duty and due to religious beliefs. A 28-year-old housewife considered her sexual relationship with her husband merely out of duty and stated that: "my husband is a high sexual drive, but I'm sexually-cold and I'm really bothered, but I never say no because of my husband. Because I'm afraid of many things: one is that they say it is a sin, also I don't like my husband to look at any other person. I bear any difficulties just to make him satisfied". A 30-year-old woman also considered her sexual relationship with her spouse only for religious beliefs and stated that" from the very beginning I was sexually cold and I am still so. I talked to him so that whenever I don't have the desire, we don't have sex. Sometimes he accepts and sometimes says I'm a man and what should I do? After that he becomes unfriendly: in his behaviors and actions, he shows that he's upset about this issue. In Islam we also have this rule that the woman should deign to what the husband wants. After that I wonder he's right to have such a request. But when you don't desire or you are tired or bored, I wonder what I should do, I'm also a human, and I can't do that out of force".

2.5. No precedence of the spousal role

Investigation of the experiences of the participant women suggested that their spouses play other roles and responsibilities such as brother or child roles in a bolder way, while the expectations of the spouse family and cultural issues are also influential. A 32-year-old woman with master's degree described her husband's negligence to her and paying attention to others as follows "… I had recently delivered a baby. It was the third or fourth day when I called him to get stomachache syrup for the baby. Surprisingly, I saw him going to the park with his mother family. I cried behind the phone. I said I'm alone at home, the baby has stomachache, then you've gone to the park? I cried a lot but when he came, he said he didn't mean anything. They were alone at home I picked them up to go to the outside for improving their spirit. Then I said what should I do I also need spirit". A 30-year-old woman with master's degree described the situation as follows: "I don't spend any money for my family, but why he does. As he says these are banal issues. He says when they want something I can't say I don't buy. Whenever my husband's family buys us something, they count the expenses to the last penny, but my husband doesn't do it. Whenever he wants to buy something for us, he buys more in order to give the rest to his family".

2.6. Compulsion to filling the emotional vacuum with the child

The experiences of the participants suggested that they compensated for their emotional vacuum and complexes as well as sense of loneliness by spending time for their children. In this regard, a 30-yer-old woman stated that: "in the early days of marital life when life problems were far greater for me, presence of the child brought me a great deal of peace. When my daughter came, my situation improved and I spent my loneliness with her." A 28-year-old housewife also stated that: "when I got a baby, our life gradually sweetened. When my daughter turned one year old, I was really enjoying my life".

3. Evading divorce consequences

The experience of the participating women suggested that in spite of the difficult conditions and problems they had in their marital life, the reason causing them to remain in those conditions and to bear those difficulties has been evading divorce consequences (social, psychological, legal, financial, etc.). A 30-year-old housewife stated evading divorce consequences as follows: "the only thing that I have never thought of is divorce; I felt I've been humiliated, but I never thought about divorce. I felt this relationship should continue and I should not break it up, because I will lose respect and I will lose everything, and the public will see me in a bad way". A 28-year-old woman with diploma level of education stated that: "with divorce, the social aspect of a woman is lost. Her legal aspect is also lost. When a woman returns to her father's family, she does not have the esteem and honor she used to have. She's a kind of failure and she should make her life on her own as much as she can".

DISCUSSION

The results of the present study suggested that the participants had experienced spousal violence. Possibly, the cultural atmosphere governing the geographical region of this research, in which a kind of patriarchy governs, has contributed to achieving these results. Zarei M et al reported high prevalence of different types of violence against women in Sanandaj (7). In the present study, this violence had manifested itself as dominance through deprivation of privacy, deprivation of freedom in personal affairs, negligence as repressing beliefs, sense of loneliness in the marital life, the woman's deprivation of spouse's expression of affection, neglecting the woman's desires in sexual relationship, no precedence of spousal role, compulsion to fill the emotional vacuum by the child. Both the dominance and negligence experiences, according to violence definitions, belong to psychological violence. The results of other studies also suggested that the average psychological violence is greater than the average of other types of violence (5, 11, 19). However, analysis of the interviews showed that in spite of experiencing this type of violence, the women did not make any attempt to free themselves from the situation of "evading divorce consequences". In this part, the themes of this study will be discussed.

Dominance

One of the themes extracted from the statements of the participants regarding spousal violence was dominance. The factor of masculine authority and dominance in the family has a long tradition in the human history and over many years, it still plays a significant role in the violence against women. Such beliefs and inducing them to men based on which they are allowed to punish the spouse and make her obey without considering her beliefs and desires causes persistence of violence against women. Under such conditions, when treating their spouses, men adopt a standpoint of power and consider their spouses as their belongings, and through violence and misbehavior as well as controlling financial resources, they try to control her (20). Raeisi Sartizi considered patriarchal attitude to be effective in incidence of spousal abuse (21). Ghazanfari also reported a significant relationship between the domineering conception of men and domestic violence (22). Kiani also states that globally, violence against women originates from the belief of men's superiority over women (23). The results of the study by

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Laeheem and Boonprakarn also showed that there is a relationship between the power and dominance of men over women among victims of domestic violence (24). In the present study, deprivation of freedom in personal affairs was found as one of the instances of spousal violence. Panaghi also mentioned illogical compulsions regarding clothing as one of the forms of violence against women (9). Different studies also mentioned lack of freedom in personal affairs as part of the definition of spousal violence (11, 25, 26). Furthermore, WHO has also considered compulsory or optional deprivation of freedom in public or private life as instances of violence against women (27).

Negligence

Another theme resulting from the experience of women with regards to spousal violence was negligence, which manifested itself especially in psychological and sexual dimensions. In the study by Rashidi et al, again one of the women's experiences was negligence of their spouses towards them (28). In the present study, neglecting the woman's desire in sexual relationship was found as one of the instances of negligence. The results of the qualitative study by Panaghi et al (2006) also showed that the participants had considered ignoring women and performing sexual relationship when the woman is not prepared as instances of violence(9). In the study by Sohrabzadeh et al (2017) again one of the women's experiences was their spouse negligence towards them, lowering their value, and domineering treatment. In this regard, they stated that they had no role in decision-making and developing change in the family, or at best their role was minor and their spouses prevented listening to them. Their spouses also prevented expressing their emotions towards them and had no sympathetic reaction to them. All these points are instances of negligence (29).

Evading divorce consequences

The last theme extracted from the interviews was invading divorce consequences. In this regard, the studied women, although being employed and having financial independence, did not consent to leaving the violent situation they had been stuck in to prevent social and legal consequences resulting from divorce. Similarly, in their qualitative study in India, Kaur et al stated that the women they studied remained silent when facing violence by their spouses in order to prevent development of social isolation (30). In this regard, different write that women remain in violent relationships due to different reasons including economic dependence, social problems, lack of legal supports, hopefulness, and fear of post-divorce conditions (9, 31, 32). Further, the study by Ansari et al (2009) also showed that their studied women, although being dissatisfied with their marital life, continued to live with their violent spouse due to different reasons such as economic dependence on the spouse, fear of losing her children, and adhering to cultural and traditional customs. Further, many women who were victims of violence refrained from complaining to judicial and disciplinary bodies as they knew patriarchic reactions (33). Costa (2015) also showed that level of education and employment were important predictors of domestic violence (13). Further, the results of the study by Bolhari et al (2011) indicated that woman's unemployment is one of the predictor variables of physical misbehavior experience at an extreme level (34). According to the researcher, possibly the different studied population and cultural differences have contributed to acquiring this different result. However, the results of a study in Ghana showed that the financial independence of women only decreases their economic dependence on their spouses, but it will not lead to diminished incidence of violence against them (35). Mentioning the results obtained by Dobash, Kiani stated that violence exists in all families and across all levels of socioeconomic bases (23). In the study by Zareshahabadi and Nadrpour (2014), no significant relationship was found between employment and domestic violence against women (10), which is in line with the results obtained from the present study.

CONCLUSION

The results of the present study suggest that employed women were subject to violence by their spouses, which manifested itself as dominance and negligence. However, they showed a passive behavior against this violence to prevent negative social consequences, and they were not ready to terminate their marital life through divorce. For this reason, it is recommended that their relevant organizations and institutions train the proper ways of life and interaction in marital life by creating family consultation and working centers, so that we do not observe such kind of violence in the society anymore.

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