The Social Factors of 'Wife Abuse'
"A Study Conducted in Tehran"

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ABSTRACT

'Wife abuse' is regarded as a widespread social problem. This study aimed to identify factors associated with 'wife abuse' in Tehran, Iran. A cross-sectional survey method was carried out on 200 married women whom were randomly chosen by multi-stage sampling method based on data collected from questionnaires and interviews of all family courts in Tehran. The data were analyzed by using ordinal logistic regression. The results of this research revealed that 'wife abuse' was associated with drug addiction, polygamy, family size, socio-economic status (SES), decision making power, education and unemployment of the husband. In conclusion, women are at a greater risk of abuse from the husband than any other type of perpetrator. Therefore, restricting and abolishing this social phenomenon requires a number of actions including: performing more research on this issue in a cultural context, raising awareness among people in a society, supporting Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOS), and assessing the situation of victims in order to develop interventions as well as policies to prevent 'wife abuse'.

Keywords: *Wife abuse, decision making power, socio economic status, drug addiction*

1. INTRODUCTION

'Wife abuse' is a wide spread problem [1-3] which is increasing in both poor and wealthy countries [4, 5]. The prevalence of 'wife abuse' varies between 15 to 17 % in different cultures [6]. Violence against women may take different forms and vary in degree. There is a common agreement among experts that 'wife abuse' can take at least two forms: physical and psychological [7, 8]. A number of factors that each plays a role in the occurrence of 'wife abuse' are major challenges for researchers working in this field [9-11]. Hotaling and Sugarman [11] have shown that cultural and social factors such as lower income, educational level, occupational status are involved in 'wife abuse'. Jewkes [12] and Barkel et al, [13] have shown that verbal abuse and addiction to drug can contribute to the occurrence of 'wife abuse'. Only a few studies have been conducted in Tehran-Iran regarding this important social issue. For example Eftekhari et al, [14] focused their studies on economic and educational factors. However, Ezazi et al, [15] studied physical and psychological status of men who were involved in 'wife abuse'.

Tehran is one of the most culturally diverse societies in Iran, therefore 'wife abuse' in Tehran is a very complicated problem. This research extends the 'wife abuse' study by examining the factors such as drug addiction, polygamy, family size, socio-economic status (SES), decision-making power, education and unemployment of husbands who were involved in 'wife abuse'.

Although there is a general consensus that no single factor adequately accounts for 'wife abuse' and a combination of multiple factors leads to 'wife abuse', here we focused on a cultural framework in which we studied the risk factors at individual as well as societal levels.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Sample

Using a cross-sectional survey developed by Ruan [16], two hundred married women were randomly chosen by multi-stage sampling method from all of family courts in Tehran.

2.2 Measures

The research was carried out on the basis of descriptive research procedure using a survey method [17]. The survey is a research instrument that allows us to gather critical information by posing questions. In general, we follow one of the two paths in survey research. We asked our questions via interviews or questionnaires. An interview is a more personal form of survey research. Questions were posed either by face-to-face meetings or telephone conversations with the victims [16]. For survey research, we statistically evaluated the results. For drawing the conclusion from this research, we needed to interview as many victims as possible, as the survey research relies on statistical evaluation that leads to a generalization in a given population. Our questions from victims were related to specific behaviors of their abusive husbands, such as physical, psychological, sexual and verbal abuse as well as their financial or social privations. The questionnaires pertaining to these attributions included 25 items on a likert-scale with a natural ordering of the possible values, eg; low, medium and high. The measured values by Cronbach's alpha was +0.84.

3. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The analysis was focused on selected potential risk factors related to abused women and are presented as percentages. Ordinal logistic regression analyses were performed to assess the association between dependent and independent variables. Ordinal analyses were

ARPN Journal of Science and Technology

estimated from the regression coefficients and probability value of 0.05 or less was considered significant. All analyses were performed by using the statistical package for the social sciences, SPSS version 15 (SPSS Inc.).

4. RESULTS

Table [1] presents descriptive statistics on prevalence of types of 'wife abuse' that are related to each of the social factors. Descriptive cross-tabulation were done for each of potential risk factors and the lifetime experience of physical, psychological, sexual, threatening environment and financial or social privation as independent variables that are related to the dependent variables such as drug addiction, polygamy, family size, socio-economic status (SES), decision-making power, education, employment status of the abusive husband. These values are given as numbers (percentages).

Table [2] shows that unemployment and drug addiction were at 66.5% and 44.5%, respectively, low income and large family size were at 90% and 57% respectively, which partly explains the high cohabitation. Furthermore, polygamy and decision-making power (male-dominance) were at 51.5% and 43%, respectively. This table represents the associations between each of the social factors and the respondent's experience of abuse. The results of the ordinal logistic regression that were used to explore these variables as potential risk or protective factors of 'wife abuse' are also shown in this table. This table provides a support for the hypothesized relationship between all above mentioned factors with 'wife abuse' phenomenon that are statistically significant in all of the datasets.

As hypothesized, drug addiction of the husband is related to the wife's likelihood of being abused is supported by these data. The hypothesized relationship between husband's education and 'wife abuse' is also partially supported by these data. Women whose husbands had only primary or secondary education were significantly at higher risk to experience abuse than women whose husbands have higher education. As hypothesized, women who do not participate in making decisions with their partners (male dominancy) are at a greater risk of males being abusive than women who participate in the decision making process (egalitarian). Male's decision-making power was statistically significant in this study.

As hypothesized, there is a relationship between family size and 'wife abuse'. Women who live in smaller families with fewer children, are less likely to experience abuse.

The hypothesized correlation between employment status and 'wife abuse' is supported by these data and was significant. The social factors in datasets show that unemployed men are more abusive toward their wives than working men.

As hypothesized, correlation between polygamy and 'wife abuse' shows that women who live in monogamy families are less likely to experience abuse than women who live in polygamy families.

Table 1: Prevalence of Types of 'Wife Abuse' Associated with Social Factors

Wife abuse / Social factors	Physical n (%)	Psychological n (%)	Sexual n (%)	Threatening environment n (%)	Verbal n (%)	Financial privation n (%)	Social privation n (%)
Drug addiction	43(21.5)	45(23.5)	29(14.5)	16(8)	17(8.5)	24(12)	26(13)
polygamy	25(12.5)	23(11.5)	28(14)	18(9)	29(14.5)	3.5(14.5)	42(21)
family size	23(11.5)	33(16.5)	38(19)	27(13.5)	26(13)	37(18.5)	16(8)
Socio-economic status (SES)	28(14)	24(12)	28(14)	19(9.5)	20(10)	38(19)	43(21.5)
Decision-making power	24(12)	29(14.5)	35(17.5)	14(7)	18(9)	31(15.5)	49(24.5)
education	21(10.5)	36(18)	41(20.5)	28(14)	22(11)	24(12)	28(14)
Employment status of man	25(12.5)	14(7)	29(14.5)	22(11)	38(19)	41(20.5)	31(15.5)

n= 200

ARPN Journal of Science and Technology

Table 2: Socio Demographic Data Concerning the 'Wife Abuse'

Social factors	Type of wife abuse n (%)
Drug Addiction	
Never	67 (33.5)
Sometimes	48 (24) *
Often	85(42.5)* **
Polygamy	
One	110 (55) **
Two	86 (43) ***
More than two	4(2)
Family Size	
0-1	114(57) **
2-4	77 (38.5) ***
5+	9(4.5)
Socio Economic Status (SES)	
Low	90 (45) ***
Medium	68 (34)*
High	42 (21)
Decision-Making Power	
Egalitarian	38 (19)
Divided power	47 (23.5) *
Male-dominance	103 (51.5) ***
Female-dominance	9(4.5)
Others	3 (1.5)
Education of man	
Primary education	155 (77.5) ***
Secondary education	35 (17.5) **
Higher education	10 (5)
Employment Status	
Working	58 (29) **
Unemployed	133 (66.5) ***
Retired	9(4.5)

n=200   Statistical model: ordinal logistic regression $p^* < .05$ $p^{**} < .01$ $p^{***} < .001$

5. DISCUSSION

'Wife abuse' is a social problem and many women experience psychological or physical violence [8]. Studies worldwide attempted to identify factors associated with 'wife abuse' problem [18-20]. This study indicates that factors such as drug addiction, polygamy, unemployment, lower socio-economic status (SES), decision-making power, larger family size and lower education of abusive male partner lead to 'wife abuse' as shown in Table [2]. Data from this study show strong correlation between husband's unemployment, drug addiction, low income and larger family with 'wife abuse' behavior at 66.5%, 44%, 90% and 57% respectively [Table 2]. This may partly explain the high prevalence of cohabitation. Polygamy and decision-making power (male-dominance) were 51.5% and 43% respectively, which in comparison to the other patriarchy cultures like China is very low [21]. Altogether these factors have the most effects on the likelihood of women being victims of abuse by their husbands. The findings of this research suggest that if couples do not make decision together, there is a greater likelihood of domestic violence by the

man than if they share power in making decisions. Socio-economic factors such as unemployment, lower income and larger family size have been shown to be associated with 'wife abuse' [19, 22, 23], which is consistent with the results of this study. Limited access to funds and employment leads to argument and physical violence between a couple [19, 22, 23]. Studies by Gil-Gonzales et al, [24] showed that exposure to violence in a male's childhood e.g., witnessed that his mother was beaten by her spouse is associated with violent behavior later in his life. Nguyen [25] investigated the prevalence of both current and lifetime physical partner abuse in Vietnamese women. He reported that different forms of violence e.g., throwing objects at their wives, pushing, beating, twisting their arms or pulling their hair are the most common abusive tactics by Vietnamese men.

As the results from this study show, there is a significant correlation between male drug addiction and domestic violence. As drug addiction in a society has to be addressed by implementing policies for drug addicts, in the case of domestic violence of a drug addict husband

toward his wife, this should be addressed by educating both husband and wife about risks and forms of domestic violence that accompanies male drug addiction.

6. CONCLUSION

'Wife Abuse' is a global problem however the factors that cause this problem are different in each society. It is believed that certain characteristics put a family or a couple at risk for violence. Conditions such as low socio-economic status, unemployment, addiction and the traditional dominance of men in the society are the causes of conflicts. Therefore, special attention should be given to remove the conditions that lead to 'wife abuse'.

Although 'wife abuse' is a serious and widespread problem in Iran, this study examines the magnitude and characteristics of 'wife abuse' in Tehran, where people are more culturally diverse.

The findings of this research provide some guidance for family violence researchers and policy makers as it was done on the current cultural context of Tehran where we witness very high criminal violence toward women.

Therefore, limiting and eliminating this social phenomenon requires a number of actions e.g.; 1) Declaring and recognizing that 'wife abuse' is a crime 2) Performing more research to fully understand as how the cultural context of the society influences 'wife abuse' 3) Raising awareness among people in the society in general, and in men in particular for the need of eliminating this phenomenon 4) Supporting non-governmental organizations (NGOS) by offering protection, support and consultation to the women whom are at risk of abuse from their husbands 5) Emphasizing that 'wife abuse' phenomenon has public health implications and public health care institutions should implement the routine screenings and assess the situation of victims of domestic violence and if necessary develop interventions, policies and programs for preventing this problem.

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