

Consequences of Domestic Violence against Women Referred to Health Centers in Zanjan: Qualitative Research

Ebrahimi L^{1*}, Mohamadlou M²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of psychology, University of Zanjan, Zanjan, Iran

²PhD student of Psychology, Faculty of Educational Sciences and Psychology, Islamic Azad University, Semnan Branch, Semnan, Iran.

***Corresponding Author:** Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Zanjan, Zanjan, Iran

Email: L.ebrahimi@zun.ac.ir

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Abstract

Background: The World Health Organization has declared domestic violence against women as an important health priority.

Objectives: This study aimed to identify the psychological, familial, and social consequences of domestic violence against women who referred to health centers in Zanjan province.

Methods: The present study was conducted using a qualitative approach and the grounded theory method. In addition, the purposeful sampling technique was performed among married women who were subjected to violence and referred to the health centers of Zanjan province in 2019. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed by thematic analysis.

Results: Domestic violence against women in different dimensions including emotional problems, biological problems and psychological trauma, emotional divorce, children's problems, economic violence, verbal and physical violence, the lack of support, social rejection, and social incompatibility had devastating effects on the psychological, family, and social status of women.

Conclusion: Considering the destructive effects of domestic violence against women, taking serious measures is necessary regarding preventing and reducing these consequences through psychological interventions, educational programs, and counseling for families exposed to violence. Finally, pre-marital workshops should further be provided for young couples by relevant institutions.

Keywords: *domestic violence, psychological, familial, social Consequences, qualitative research*

Introduction

According to the World Health Organization (2013), violence refers to the intentional use of physical force or power or threatened action against other people that results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation. The evidence suggests that domestic violence is more prevalent among women than men due to unequal power relations between men and women [1] and the poor social status of housewives, as well as socio-cultural factors [2]. Domestic violence could be observed as physical, psychological, and verbal violence in addition to economic violence and sexual violence [3]. The World Health Organization statistics indicate that

16 to 52% of women are abused by their sexual partners. Further, one physical abuse is at least reported for 28 and 18-67% of women in developed and developing countries, respectively [4]. Similarly, research in 28 provinces of Iran shows that about 60% of Iranian women have experienced violence at least once in their marital life [5]. Various factors are considered effective in the occurrence of domestic violence against women, including poverty [6], addiction [7,8], psychiatric disorders [9,10], female gender [11, 12], and low education [13,14]. The findings of several studies demonstrated that domestic violence against women is always accompanied by physical consequences [15], psychological consequences, including anxiety as the most

common and prevalent outcome of violence [16-19], the feelings of helplessness, along with shame and inferiority and ultimately suffering from depression disorders [20]. Furthermore, the other consequences are severe aggressive reactions [21], post-traumatic stress disorder, dissociative identity disorder (multiple personality disorder), low self-esteem and self-confidence [22] substance and alcohol abuse [15,23], along with family and social complications such as tension in relationships and security instability [23]. Moreover, the other studies reported consequences such as the weakening of family relationships and an increase in the collapse of families and divorce [24], the negligence of children [25], the presence of anomalies in social relations, the commitment of delinquency and crime, the use of psychotropic drugs, alcohol, and drugs, and finally, involvement in prostitution and gambling [26]. These effects can be divided into individual, familial, and social levels. Clearly, there is no differentiation between the levels and the effects of each level have a series of consequences that affect the other levels. At the individual level, domestic violence against women leads to threatening their physical and psychological health, demonstrating a desire for serious self-harm and harm to family, threatening women's psychosocial security, lowering their self-esteem and self-worth, and many other negative consequences [24]. At the familial level, it can lead to a divorce, a woman's deviance, a woman's escape from home, and disorders in children's mental health. At the social level, it can cause the loss of women's human dignity in society and the emergence of helplessness in them, the deprivation of human fundamental rights, and, similarly, the persistence of discrimination and violence in future generations [21].

Previous studies on the consequences of violence against women focused more on the physical and psychological consequences of violence against women. It should be noted that these consequences are not limited to physical and psychological issues but include a wider range of dimensions. Accordingly, examining various aspects of this issue in more depth is possible by conducting a qualitative study that lacks the limitations of quantitative research and helps to clarify the main themes and issues in women's

experiences of violence. Therefore, according to the expertise and clinical experience of the researcher and the existing research reports about domestic violence against women and its role in the prevalence and expression of quantitative and qualitative statistics of divorce in Zanjanian families and given the lack of a qualitative study concerning the various dimensions of violence consequences in Iran, the present study aimed to identify the psychological, familial and social consequences of domestic violence against women who referred to health centers in Zanjan.

Methods

Using a qualitative approach and the grounded theory method, the present study was conducted to identify the psychological, familial, and social consequences of violence against women who referred to health centers of Zanjan in 2019. Accordingly, the time and place of the interviews were determined after making the necessary coordination with the participants. More precisely, married women aged 22 to 47 years, who were violently abused by their husband in Zanjan, were referred to the Roshd Counseling Center of Zanjan by the health and medical centers (i.e., Divorce Crisis Intervention Center and Zanjan Welfare Centers) in order to receive counseling and psychological services. This study was performed in the Roshd Counseling Center of Zanjan through an interview with each woman in the counseling room. The participants included 32 women who were violently abused by their husbands. Additionally, the purposeful sampling method was used to achieve the research goals.

Based on the type of study, the project implementation method included a semi-structured individual interview with participants. In addition, a number of general questions were used to clarify specific issues and gather information. In the first stage, these questions were designed through reviewing the literature and consulting some experts (i.e., clinical psychologist, family counselor, and sociologist). Further, interview questions mainly focused on discovering the psychological, familial, and social consequences of domestic violence against women. Most interviews were initiated by explaining the research topic and asking the general question of "what is domestic violence?"

Furthermore, each interview lasted 45 to 60 minutes depending on the circumstances, tolerance rate, and interest of the participants and the data were collected within six months. Important notes were collected during the interview (about 42 hours). Moreover, the interviews were recorded with the full consent of the participants and the content of the recorded file was implemented immediately after each interview and used as a guide in the later stages of the study.

Additionally, the thematic analysis method was used to analyze the data. In this way, key concepts and themes were identified after getting acquainted with the scope and variety of content and a thematic framework was set up accordingly. Then, all the writings related to individual interviews were reviewed based on the thematic framework, followed by arranging a suitable thematic source. Next, the concepts, contradictions, theories, experiences, and the conducted studies were compared and the desired patterns and relationships were inferred from the findings [27].

Likewise, data collection and analysis were performed simultaneously. After several re-readings of each interview, texts related to each person's understanding of violence against women and its psychological, familial, and social consequences were included in a text to form an analysis unit. Then, the meaningful units of the general text were identified and the summarized meaningful units were extracted accordingly, followed by extracting the general categories of the themes. Thus, the overall text of the interview was arranged in a sorted manner from themes to meaningful units.

Further, four recommended criteria by Guba and Lincoln (as cited in Wood and Kerr, 2006) were evaluated to ensure the internal and external validity of research findings. Furthermore, the criteria of credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability for the qualitative research were used [28] and then the themes and categories were given to three counseling specialists on violence against women in order to examine the credibility of the findings.

Regarding checking the confirmability and dependability of the findings, data were provided to three qualitative analysts who coded and analyzed the data separately, indicating more than 95% similarity. As regards checking for transferability, the findings were provided to one of the executive agents of psychological and counseling services at the Welfare Counseling Center, who was outside the group of the cooperators.

Results

After interviewing 32 participants, who were violently abused by their husbands, open, axial, and selective triple coding was used to identify the consequences of domestic violence against women. Using the open coding method, each of the themes was identified and categorized based on the determined consequences and referral to the theoretical foundations of the subject.

After open coding and identifying all the themes, each code (theme) was placed in a related theme according to the nature and extent of their affinity. The axial coding was the finding of this step and the selected code was a more general and abstract code that reflected the axial and open codes. Three main themes and 11 sub-themes were identified for explaining the consequences of domestic violence against women, the main themes of which were individual (psychological), familial, and social consequences. Psychological consequences were identified in two general intrapersonal and interpersonal consequences, which were grouped into three categories of emotional and biological problems and psychological trauma. Familial consequences as a general factor called the "reduced quality of life" were identified and had five dimensions including emotional divorce, children's problems, as well as economic, verbal, and physical violence.

Social isolation was identified as the main social consequence of domestic violence against women, which was also categorized in terms of the lack of support from others, social rejection, and social incompatibility. These findings are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Consequences of Domestic Violence against Women

Open Coding	Number of Codes	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Feel guilty, the lack of security and peace of mind, helplessness, hatred of the husband, the fear of children, fear of father, hatred of the father, feeling of inferiority, fear of husband, anxiety, lack of intimacy, feeling of emptiness, and isolation	13	Emotional problems	Intrapersonal and interpersonal
Feeling of weakness, trembling, insomnia, use of medication, palpitations, and headache	6	Biological problems	
Depression, insanity, nervousness, worry, frustration, fear, restlessness, consent to death, boredom, aggression, stress, anxiety, self-conflict, and low self-esteem	14	Psychological trauma	Reduced quality of life
Lack of familial commute, suspicion, divorce, lack of comfort at home, forced living, and lack of communication with others	8	Emotional divorce	
Foul-mouthed kids, disinterest in education, enuresis, cowardice, stuttering and deprived children, children's violent mood, indifference to children, child anxiety, child stress, child physical weakness, and children's escape from home	12	Children's problems	
Financial deprivation of the spouse, lack of spending, the lack of financial obedience, and the necessity of working outside home	4	Economic violence	
Swears and curses of the husband at her spouse, the husband's insults at her spouse, as well as insult and defamation	4	Verbal violence	
Fights and quarrels, beatings, bruises, and conflicts	4	Physical violence	Social isolation
Unbelievable for relatives, defamation by relatives, feelings of loneliness, lack of support from others, feeling of shame, relatives distrust, and rejection by surrounding people	7	Lack of support from others	
Escape from home, fear of going to the community, pessimism of the community, insecurity in the community, pessimism towards men, boredom toward people, sexual harassment of people in the community, isolation, harassment, isolation, and homelessness	11	Social rejection	
Escape from school, hatred of men, drop out of the school, suicide, and beatings of children in society	5	Social incompatibility	

Psychological Consequences

The findings of interviews with women, who were abused by their husbands, on the psychological consequences of domestic violence against women identified two general intrapersonal and interpersonal consequences, which were classified into three categories including emotional and biological problems and psychological trauma. Each of these problems had several consequences. In other words, emotional and biological problems and psychological trauma had 13, 6, and 14 consequences, respectively. Approximately all participants indicated the following statements in response to the question of the psychological consequences of domestic

violence against women. It should be mentioned that all these women were referred to a counseling center due to violence.

Homa (pseudonym) declared that "When my husband got angry, I would raise my hands in fear and said, 'Excuse me, so that to calm him down.' I feel awful, there are tears in my eyes but I dare not to cry. Currently, I am very anxious and I am taking medicine..."

Zahra explained that "I was afraid of my husband's voice. I didn't have good times in my life, we have never opened our hearts to each other. I always blame myself... I don't like talking to anyone, I'm not in a good mood. I have severe headaches and I don't have restful sleep."

Familial Consequences

The data of an interview with the abused women on the familial consequences of domestic violence against women were identified as a general factor called the “reduced quality of life”. This factor had five dimensions including emotional divorce (with 8 consequences), children’s problems [12], economic violence [4], verbal violence [4], and physical violence [4]. Considering the levels and dimensions of the quality of life, the consequences of domestic violence against women can degrade the quality of life.

Approximately all participants indicated the following statements in response to the question of the familial consequences of domestic violence against women. These participants were referred to a counseling center due to violence.

Leila indicated that “I have no hope and no place. I pray to God for the kindness of my husband toward me, at least not to bother my children. We don’t have peace of mind, my child hates his father, my son wanted to run away from home several times. My children don’t have any communication for fear of their father, my son is no longer studying.”

Zahra mentioned that “My son is also nervous and aggressive and just stays at home and watches violent war movies. He has no youthful enthusiasm. My daughter has been stuttering for several years and is currently receiving treatment. My husband did not pay attention to me in life and I was not safe at home. My children are very skinny because they suffered from malnourishment.”

In this regard, Somayeh expressed that “I had a very bad temper, my body began to tremble when I heard the sound of his car or engine and even his voice or name. He just wanted to get married and didn’t care about me and the kids at all. There have always been fights and beatings at home and we didn’t have safety at home.”

Social Consequences

The findings of the interview with women, who were abused by their husbands, regarding the familial consequences of domestic violence against women showed that “social isolation” is the main social consequence of domestic violence against women. This consequence, like other consequences, had several dimensions and components such as the lack of support from others, social rejection, and social incompatibility, each of which had 7, 11, and 5 consequences,

respectively. Nearly all participants mentioned the following statements in response to the question of the social consequences of domestic violence against women. For example, the participants who were referred to a counseling center due to violence indicated the following statements.

Masoumeh stated that “Several times I wanted to take my children and run away from this house. However, I didn’t have anyone to help me. I didn’t trust anyone and nobody believed me when I described such problems at our home. In their view, it was a normal situation so that they mentioned that you must have done something that made him angry. In addition, my daughter had fights with her friends at school several times. She has also run away from school several times and she’s not interested in studying.”

Robab explained that “My siblings no longer support me since I fell out with my husband several times and then made up with him again. My little boy has been weak from birth and always cries. I have to think and go back to my house and endure them.”

Finally, Zahra commented that “I am helpless and lonely and I don’t trust anyone anymore. People also slander us a lot and we have no comfort.”

Discussion

The present study was conducted to identify the consequences of domestic violence against women who referred to health centers in Zanjan. Based on the findings, such consequences can be classified into three general psychological, familial, and social categories.

The findings of this study are in line with the findings of several other studies [1,2,15,16,19,20, 29] although these studies also included psychological factors, as well as physical, biological, and emotional problems. It is worth noting that the findings of previous studies are not inconsistent with the results of this research. One reason for explaining the findings of the study on the psychological consequences of domestic violence against women is that Zanjan is one of the provinces where men and women still have a traditional viewpoint toward each other’s position. In this way, women are viewed to be calm, emotional, and a passive being, and in most cases dependent on the opposite sex in traditional families. In some cases, it is also necessary and obligatory for men to use violence against women since the man is taught to draw an independent and strong image of himself. Therefore, these

issues force the woman not to protest against male violence and the man considers it as his right to show any violent behavior [11]. In addition, this domination sometimes goes so far as to lead to the physical abuse of women and the continuation of this situation makes women feel incompetent and ineffective in overcoming the violence imposed by the men. Accordingly, this lack of self-assertiveness, lack of attention to individual rights, and lack of decisiveness in interactions makes her weak and causes physical-mental illness and unhealthy relations [30].

Other findings of the present study regarding the familial consequences of domestic violence against women are consistent with those of other studies [1, 24, 25, 31, 32]. In these studies, factors such as the presence of emotional problems, the weakening of family relationships, an increase in family collapse and eventually divorce, as well as the negligence of children and their problems, and the family system are reported as well. To the best of our knowledge, no research has focused on the "reduction of the quality of life". In explaining the results of domestic violence against women and its family consequences, it can be declared that socio-economic factors always expose a man to constant stress and tension, stress due to the lack of ability to manage life properly, financial pressure, the feelings of helplessness and the lack of control over life, the feeling of uselessness and lower self-worth to spouses and children. Each of the above-mentioned issues can ignite the bedrock of domestic violence and increase the severity of violence against women [21, 33], leading to economic, verbal, and physical violence between the couples and thus affecting the children as well. Children are somehow the victims of domestic violence because of the problems between the couples [34]. Further, women tolerating the most violence have the least amount of familial commute. It seems that annoying men inhibit women from interacting with their families and this deprivation or the lack of commute can increase a woman's sense of the lack of support from others, loneliness, and helplessness, leading to an increase in a woman's stress and further disrupting the couple's relationship. Thus, there is a kind of "emotional divorce" between men and women [22].

The findings of the present study on the social consequences of domestic violence against women are consistent with those of several other

studies [8, 15, 17, 21, 24, 26, 30]. However, reviewing the literature, no study was found to focus on social isolation.

Based on the findings on the social consequences of domestic violence against women, women exposed to violence suffer from some forms of social isolation. The feelings of loneliness, the lack of support from others, mistrust, a change in the attitude of the people of society, sexual harassment, and the like are the consequences of social isolation. Furthermore, man's violence against women destroys his sense of belonging to life and society and takes him away from human nature. The logical consequences of this isolation are the lack of support from others, social rejection, social incompatibility, and the like. Moreover, such consequences can affect a person's quality of life and exacerbate the psychological consequences. Therefore, all three outcomes are believed to overlap and affect each other. Thus, domestic violence against women in the social dimension not only reduces women's health and the family but also causes serious damage to the entire family system and even society. The inappropriate emotional and social upbringing of children is one of these damages [15].

Considering the research findings on intrapersonal and interpersonal consequences in the psychological dimension, degrading the quality of life and social isolation are suggested as the main family and social consequences of domestic violence against women, respectively.

As regards designing psychological interventions in the framework of educational and counseling programs with families exposed to violence, meetings and workshops should be held by the relevant institutions for young couples before marriage in order to prevent domestic violence. Additionally, life skills training should be implemented with an emphasis on interpersonal relationships between family members in order to improve the quality of life. Similarly, families should receive training on self-control, self-guidance, and self-management skills and mass media should raise people's awareness to create social support for the victims of domestic violence.

The present study has some limitations. The results cannot be generalized and rely on the conditions, especially the location. From another point of view, this in itself can be considered as

capability or at least one feature considering environmental and cultural conditions in the study. Thus, similar studies are recommended in other provinces of the country so that to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the consequences of domestic violence against women by comparing the results. Eventually, it is suggested that quantitative and qualitative studies evaluate psychological, social, and legal support for domestic violence against women and then discover and explain hidden factors that increase violence against women.

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Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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