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# Intimate partner violence in relation to early maladaptive schemas in a group of outpatient Iranian women

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## Abstract

Intimate partner violence is considered as a notable legal and health challenge of our age. In this study we test the hypothesis that pre-existing shame/defectiveness maladaptive schema increases the likelihood of becoming the victim of intimate partner violence. Participants were 20 women who were the victims of IPV, interviewed by open questions about experiencing different types of abuse during the childhood and marital life, their feelings about the abuse and their coping styles. At the end, participants completed Young Maladaptive Schema Questionnaire. We found that *shame and defectiveness, emotional deprivation and mistrust/abuse are the most prevalent schemas in these women.*

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*Key words:* intimate partner violence; early maladaptive schemas; victims;

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## 1. Introduction

IPV is a form of domestic violence between two individuals currently or previously involved in a relationship; it is characterized by physical, verbal, sexual and psychological abuse (Weiss, Ernst, Blanton, Sewell, & Nick, 2000). In a summary of 80 population-based surveys conducted in more than 50 countries, Ellsberg & Heise (2005) find that:

- between 10% and 60% of women who have ever been married or had a partner have experienced at least one incident of physical violence by an intimate partner.
- rates of intimate partner violence in a single year range from 3% or less in the United States, Australia and Canada, to 27% in Leon, Nicaragua, 38% in Korea, and 52% of Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip
- women are more likely to be murdered by an intimate partner than by anyone else.

Results from a growing body of work in developing countries have consistently shown a significant association between IPV against women and adverse physical and mental health conditions (Ellsberg, Jansen, Heise, Watts, &

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Garcia-Moreno, 2008; Kumar, Jeyaseelan, Suresh, & Ahuja, 2005; Patel, Kirkwood, Pednekar, Pereira, Barros & Fernandes, 2006; Coker, Davis, Arias, Desai, Sanderson & Brandt, 2002; Hathaway, Mucci, Silverman, Brooks, Mathews & Pavlos, 2000). The literature demonstrates positive relationship between intimate partner violence and suicidal behavior (Mezey, Bacchus, Bewley, & White, 2005).

Although most of abuser are described by Personality characteristics such as being avoidant/dependent, borderline, and antisocial/psychopathic (Huss & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2000) No victim-predicting profile has been established for battered women.

According to Esqueda (2003), Harrison & Esqueda (1999) women abuse victims are viewed as helpless, vulnerable, ashamed, weak, passive, dependent, unassertive, depressed and defenseless (Esqueda & Harrison, 2005).

Schumacher and his colleagues (2001) conducted an extensive review of research on the risk factors for male-to-female domestic abuse. They found many factors associated with victimization including age, education, unemployment, pregnancy, childhood victimization, mental illness, and some personality factors. Only less education, unemployment, and a history of child emotional and/or verbal victimization, however, demonstrated moderate to strong effects across the studies examined.

The schema can be seen as the organizing framework, a structure, for processing information. Young (1990) proposed that schemas, or Early Maladaptive Schemas (EMSs), develop during childhood through relationships with significant caretakers. Once in place, the EMSs selectively filter for corroborating experience such that the schemas are extended and elaborated throughout the individual's life-time. At the cognitive level, the schema is believed to be maintained by magnifying information that confirms the schema, and negating or minimizing information that is inconsistent with the schema (Milner & Webster, 2005).

Although limited, there has been some research which has attempted to investigate the cognitive structures and processing of sex offenders (Mann and Hollin , 2010; Richardson, 2005).

To our knowledge no study has investigated the issue of intimate partner violence within the schema theory perspective. The aim of this study was to test the hypothesis that pre-existing shame/defectiveness maladaptive schema increases the likelihood of becoming the victim of intimate partner violence.

## **2. Measures**

The present research is a qualitative research that was carried out on a sample of 20 married women. Participants were victims of spousal abuse from two counselling centres in Tehran. The participants were interviewed by using open questions about experiencing different types of abuse during their childhood and marital life, their feelings about the abuse and their coping styles. At the end participants completed Young Maladaptive Schema Questionnaire.

### *2.1. Instruments*

#### *2.1.1. Semi -Structured Interview*

Two main questions about experiencing different types of abuse during childhood and marital life and types of confrontation to the abuse were used.

#### *2.1.2. Young Schema Questionnaire-Short form*

Young Schema Questionnaire-Short form (YSQ-SF; Young, 1998) was used in this study. The YSQ-SF is 75-item scale, which is a subset of the original 205 items from the Young schema questionnaire-long form (YSQ-LF;

Young, 1994). The items assess the presence of 15 early maladaptive schemas (emotional deprivation (Ed), abandonment/Instability (Ab), mistrust/ abuse (Ma), social Isolation/ alienation (Si), defectiveness/Shame (Ds), Dependence/Incompetenc (Di), Failure to Achieve (Fa), vulnerability to harm (Vh), enmeshment (Em), subjugation of needs (Sb), self-sacrifice (Ss), emotional inhibition (Ei), unrelenting standards (Us), entitlement (Et), and insufficient self-control (Is)). Each of the 75 items required a rating on a six point scale as follows, (1= completely untrue...6= describes me perfectly). A higher score on a given subscale reflects a greater possibility of the presence of a maladaptive schema for that individual (Baranoff, Tian, CHo, Kwon, 2006). Good evidence on the reliability and validity of the Persian version of the inventory has been reported. The reliability of the current questionnaire was calculated as 94% by Cronbach's alpha coefficient method (abbasiyan and fatehizadeh, 2003).

### 3. Results:

First, the results of interviews were determined and then classified and the main themes were derived. The results showed that more than 70% of participants had experienced verbal and psychological abuse during their childhood and marital life. 30% of them had experienced physical abuse during childhood and 25% had experienced it in their marital life. Finally, 10% of participants had experienced sexual abuse during childhood and % had experienced it in marital life. The main procedures used for confronting the abuses consisted in breaking of relation, tolerance, confronting in the same manner, consulting specialist and courts.

In the case of early maladaptive schemes, the highest scores were related to the domain of disconnection and rejection, so that the participants were in agreement with the most items of defectiveness/shame, emotional deprivation, and mistrust/abuse.

In some the results indicated that most of the participants had childhood experience of abuse, and verbal abuse was very common among them as well. During their marital life they experienced verbal and psychological abuse more than other forms. Most prevalent maladaptive schemas were shame and defectiveness, emotional deprivation and mistrust/abuse.

### 4. Conclusions and Recommendations:

The results of the current study show that the sense of shame and defectiveness and mistrust in women may increase their susceptibility to become the victim of spousal abuse. It may have many implications for social workers in their preventive interventions and also for clinical psychologists in setting their therapeutic priorities.

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