

Aggression of Husbands against Wives in the City of Shirāz

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Abstract

This survey expounds the role of the socio-economic factors in the explanation of aggression of husbands against their wives. The survey's assumptions have been developed from social learning approach and from the comparative historical theories. This is a survey method research which examines the physical, mental, social, and economic aspects of aggression of husbands toward wives. The self-report data was obtained through a questionnaire from a sample of 1500 wives residing in Shirāz. Simple and multiple regressions were used in the data analysis. The findings of this study suggest that there are significant relationships between the aggressive behaviour of husbands against their wives and their parents' addiction, the attitude of the husbands toward religion, the employment of the wives and the aggressive behaviour against wives by their parents.

Keywords

Aggressive Behaviour; Husband Aggression; Physical Aggression; Mental Aggression; Social Aggression;

INTRODUCTION

Aggression is a behaviour with the purpose of causing harm and suffering and imposing various kinds of offences on others (Baron and Bell, 1957; Moghaddam, 1997). Generally, there are two explanations for aggression: causal and normative. Each one of these explanations consists of specific theoretical approaches. The causal explanation considers the physiological approaches, the environmental factors of aggression, the realistic conflict approach, the evolutionary theory of aggression, and the frustration aggression theory. The normative explanation encompasses the social learning approach and the comparative historical theory which stress the relationship between culture and aggression.

This research examines the physical, mental, social, and economic aspects of aggression of husbands toward their wives in light of the theoretical approaches of causal explanation and frustration aggression. The causes of the situational and social conditions that lead to aggression have also been investigated. The cultural conditions in Irān are such that one can gain access to reliable data on problems such as sexual aggression. However, some studies confirm the relationship between the economic and social status of husbands and the different degrees of aggression (Messner, 1980; Landau, 1984). Data from Germany, India, Israel, Japan, and the United States of America show that low economic status could lead to higher levels of violent offences. It is argued that weaker economic status causes deprivation which leads to more aggression (Landau, 1984).

In the normative explanations of aggression, it is maintained that the aggression of husbands toward their wives, like all other social behaviours, is an action on a manner that they find suitable in the environment that they live. This explanation of aggression emphasizes learning of some skills for identifying and using the normative systems. This approach consists of two theories:

1. The social learning theory brings up the assumption that behaviour through observation and imitation is learned by reward and punishment (Bandura, 1973; Nisbett; 1993; Moghaddam, 1997). Experiencing and observing violent and hostile behaviour by husbands, increase aggressive behaviour. The above statement is also true of wives.



2. Another theory that helps to better understand the relationship between normative systems and aggression is the comparative historical theory. The comparison of a society in the course of time, or the comparison of two different societies in the same geographical region show that aggression stems from the normative systems of a society (Hart, Pilling, and Goodale, 1988).

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The causal explanations of aggressive behaviour of husbands toward their wives are determined by certain factors such as the specific physiological, hormonal, and genetic structures of men (Witkin et al., 1976). Based on this explanation, aggression toward women is caused by sudden strong emotions and is usually not based on premeditated plan to achieve certain material goals. The normative explanations on the aggression of husband toward their wives argue that this behaviour is shaped by certain cultural rules and regulations. In normative approach, aggression toward women is explained through reference to cultural norms which codes right behaviour in a certain situation. For example, causal explanations relate differences in kind and degree of aggression to physiological differences between males and females. On the contrary, normative explanations claim that in most societies, norms that regulate aggressive behaviour for men and women are different. Even within a specific normative system, individuals can fully act with a certain degree of autonomy, which in some situations excessive assertion and use of autonomy may lead to aggressive behaviour. Although people often follow the norms of their own ethnic groups, in certain situations, some people change their accepted manners to achieve their goals and thus become aggressive.

The view that the aggression of the husbands toward their wives may be the result of deprivation has been confirmed by experimental studies. In general, the normative explanations argue that aggressive behaviour is better understood in the context of the cultural structure of the society, because the individual learns how and when to be aggressive through the cultural norms. So, the aggression of husbands against their wives follows the patterns of their ethnic norms which have been internalized in husbands. Aggression which is grown in a specific social context has a cultural base. Normative explanation is

able to present and discuss this behaviour more culturally rather than environmentally and individually.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The survey method is used in this research. All the families living in the Shirāz (one of metropolitan centres of Irān) in 2001 are considered as the population in this research, and married women (married more than one year) are the responders. Sampling was conducted in accordance with the stratified random sampling method, using line's table with the reliability of 95%. Hence the sample includes 1500 wives. The questionnaire was designed based on the relevant literature and its validity and reliability verified through a pilot study used for collecting data. Aggression against women at home is a dependent variable in this research. The indices for aggression against women at home include physical, mental, social, and economic aggression. The independent variables in this research are: demographic attributes (e.g., age and gender); socioeconomic factors (e.g., occupation and income); cultural factors (e.g., observing and experiencing aggression in the family and commitment to religious beliefs); biological and mental factors (e.g., drug addiction records and sterility).

Consultation with experts in the field of humanities has been used to test validity, and for testing the reliability *Cronbach* Alpha was utilized. The *Cronbach* Alpha coefficient resulted from the consistency test is 0.817. In this research, the statistical techniques, used at the level of descriptive statistics, include frequency distribution. At the level of inferential statistics, simple and multiple regressions were included.

DATA ANALYSIS

In this research, the aggression of the husbands against their wives has been measured in its physical, mental, social, and economic aspects. **Table 1** shows women's comments on their husband's aggression in relation to items scaled in different dimensions.

**Table 1. Women's Views on the Aggressive Behaviour of their Husbands**

Dimension	Item	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
Economic	Not giving money for expenditure to you	72.0	12.2	10.8	3.5	1.5
	Constant control over your expenditure	68.8	10.6	11.1	6.0	3.5
	Not telling you about his income	65.8	7.2	14.5	7.2	5.3
	Opposing to your having a job	38.0	3.2	8.6	8.1	43.1
Psychological	Rage, frowning and sour action	32.4	42.5	19.4	3.6	2.1
	Shouting and yelling	26.7	22.4	29.3	16.5	5.1
	Actions or comments against you	30.5	31.4	23.8	7.5	6.6
	Humiliating you because of your physical appearance	80.6	12.2	5.0	1.9	0.3
	Threatening you with a knife or a gun	98.1	0.5	1.0	0.4	0.0
Social	Swearing and insulting	58.1	22.8	13.3	4.9	0.9
	Making fun of you in front of others	85.7	8.1	4.0	1.6	0.6
	Throwing you out of the house	91.4	5.5	2.2	0.4	0.5
	Threatening and harming the people you like	92.9	3.1	3.2	0.5	0.3
	Prevents you from meeting your friends	59.0	10.2	15.9	9.0	5.9
	Prohibiting you from meeting your parents and relatives	77.7	11.3	7.4	2.6	1.0
	Locking you up in the house	92.7	2.7	3.2	0.7	0.5
	Following you and spying on you	89.0	4.8	4.9	0.4	0.9
Physical	Beating you or throwing things at you	80.2	9.1	7.5	2.4	0.8
	Breaking the household objects or throwing them at you	87.2	6.4	5.2	0.8	0.4
	Throwing things at you	79.4	8.6	8.7	3.0	0.3
	Pushing and shoving you	87.2	11.3	7.3	2.9	0.3
	Slapping you	70.0	16.2	9.4	3.6	0.8
	Pulling your hair	78.6	11.5	6.4	3.0	0.5
	Punching and kicking you	79.7	10.3	4.8	3.8	1.4
	Hitting you with some objects	88.7	4.8	3.2	2.5	0.8
	Beating you up with a belt or a stick	98.1	1.3	0.5	0.1	0.0

PEARSON CORRELATION COEFFICIENT TEST

The results obtained from the Pearson correlation test (**Table 2**) show that the cultural factors play the most important role in the explanation of the rate of the aggressive behaviour against women. Among these factors, the memories of the husband from the aggressive behaviour of his parents and the observance for aggressive behaviour between the parents of the husband show the highest correlation of aggressive behaviour of the parents of the husbands against their wives. The correlation coefficients of these two variables are 0.46 and 0.42. Positive coefficient means direct relationship between these variables and dependent variable. It means that the men who have observed

highest degrees of aggressive behaviour between their parents, or the men whose parents have treated each other roughly, would tend to treat their wives roughly. The same relationship exists between the aggression rate of the parents' use of violence experienced by a spouse, the observance of aggression of the parents against each other; with the rate of the aggression against her. The Pearson correlation coefficients obtained are 0.28 and 0.27. These results indicate that the way the couples have socially adapted to aggressive behaviours has a direct relationship to committing aggression in their own marital life. It means that their socialization process produces and condones aggression behaviour against women.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation between Independent Variables and the Rate of Aggression against Women

Independent Variable	Correlation Coefficient
The aggressive behaviour experienced by the husband	0.46
Observance of aggressive behaviour by the husband	0.42
Husband's attitude toward religion	-0.40
The aggressive behaviour experienced by the wife	0.28
Observance of aggression by the wife	0.27
Husband's level of education	-0.21
Wife's attitude toward religion	-0.21
Wife's age	-0.15
The difference in the level of education of the couples	-0.13
Wife's level of education	-0.12
Wife's income	-0.11
Age difference of the couples	0.11
Husband's age	-0.10
Husband's income	-0.06
Duration of marriage	-0.03
Number of the children	-0.03
The difference in the level of income of the couples	-0.01

P < 0.01; P < 0.001

Another cultural factor is the attitude of the couples toward religion. In contrast to other variables, this variable has a reverse effect on the rate of aggression of the couples against each other. The Pearson correlation coefficient for the couples' attitudes toward religion, and the rate of aggressive behaviour that they commit against each other are -0.40 for men and -0.21 for women. This result means



that couple's religiosity strengthened the tendency to respect, and thus caused fewer cases of resorting to aggression.

The results show that the education level of the couples has a reverse effect on aggression rate in their marital life. The Pearson correlation coefficient concerning the level of education and the display of aggression is -0.21 for men and -0.12 for women. The age of husbands, as a demographic factor, has a reverse effect on aggressive behaviour ($r = -0.10$). Furthermore, as the age difference increases, so does the possibility of displaying aggressive behaviour ($r = 0.11$). An interesting point is that, there is a negative relationship between wife's income and aggressive behaviour of their husbands. So, it can be argued that this economic factor plays a more important role than other factors in causing aggressive behaviour. It means that, an increase in wife's income leads to less aggressive behaviour. **Table 2** shows the Pearson correlation coefficient of independent variables and the rate of aggression against women. As indicated in the table, there are not any significant relationships between the incomes of the husbands, the duration of marriage, number of children, the difference in the income level of the couples, and the dependent variable.

THE MULTIPLE REGRESSION TEST

In the multiple regression test, in addition to that 13 variables that showed significant relationships to aggressive behaviour against women, two other variables which are nominal variables and indicate if the wife is employed or not, and if the husband is addicted to drugs or not, have also been added to the equation. Out of the 15 variables which were studied, 6 variables include the husband being treated aggressively by his parents, the wife being treated aggressively by her parents, the observance of aggressive behaviour of the parents against each other, the husband being addicted or not and the wife being or not employed were added to the equation, and as a whole, they explain 42.95 per cent of the variation dependent variable ($R^2 = 0.4295$).

According to the B coefficients of the regression equation, for each unit that is increased in the rate of aggressive behaviour against the husband by his parents, there is a 0.91 unit increase in the rate of aggressive behaviour of the husband against his wife.

Also, the rate of the aggressive behaviour of the women whose husbands are addicted to drugs is 11.14 percent higher than those whose husbands are not addicted. One unit increase in the rate of the attitude of the religiosity of husbands leads to 0.79 unit decrease in their aggressive behaviour. Also, one unit increase in the rate of observance of the aggressive behaviour of the parents against each other by the husband, leads to an increase of 0.863 in the rate of his aggression. Furthermore, the average rate grade for the aggressive behaviour against the women who are employed is 4.67 less than the average rate grade for the housewives. Finally, one unit increase in the rate of aggressive behaviour displayed against women by their parents leads to one unit increase in the rate of aggressive behaviour of the couples against each other.

According to the β coefficients of this equation the aggressive behaviour of the parents of the husband against him plays the most important role in explaining the aggressive behaviour against women ($\beta = 0.29$). Furthermore, this variable examines the addiction of husbands as the main factor in aggressive behaviour against women. The β coefficient of this variable is 0.27. As we can see, the β coefficients for the two variables bear the same value. According to the β coefficients, the attitude of the husband toward religion, the observance of aggressive behaviour of the parents against each other by husbands and the employment of women, each play a role in explaining the aggressive behaviour against women. **Table 3** shows the equation of aggressive behaviour against women in terms of B and β coefficients.

Table 3. The Regression Equation of Aggressive Behaviour against Women in terms of B and β Coefficients

Independent variables	B	β	T	Sig.
Aggressive behaviour against husband by their parents	0.91	0.29	16.43	0.00
Addiction	11.14	0.27	10.85	0.00
Attitude of the husband toward religion	-0.79	-0.22	-8.66	0.00
Observance of aggressive behaviour of parents by husband	0.86	0.18	6.47	0.00
Employment of the wife	4.67	0.12	5.32	0.00
Aggressive behaviour against wives by their parents	0.57	0.10	4.28	0.00
Constant number	5.70	-	3.87	0.00

$R^2 = 0.4295$; Sig. = 0.00; $df = 6$ and 1174; $F = 147.3$



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Aggression as a meaningful social action can reinforce various imbalances in different social systems. Aggression is a kind of social deviation which reflects domination and the violation of the rights of people. In some countries, aggression against wives has created a situation where women are denied responsibility and empowerment in the family and in the social system at large.

In Irān the family, as an active social unit, plays an important role in the process of socialization. Although in the process of social changes in Irān, the family has moved away from tradition and has leaned toward modernization, the family as an institution unit has not lost its strength because of the cultural, national, and religious support bases it enjoys. In the family, father and mother are two basic members who manage this social unit. The ambiguity in defining parents' roles and the mutual relationships, have led to the fact that male chauvinism is still being strengthened in family by traditional prejudice. Male superiority in the family which is supported by tradition has led to the dominance of the men over women, hence the aggression of the husbands against their wives. The overall condition causes aggression which is experienced in the families. It is developed in different degrees and forms. Thus an experience is stored in the meaning system of the members of a family and may be displayed later as the time seems to require. Therefore, aggression is considered a significant social act which is acquired in the process of socialization.

The occurrence of social changes in Irān, and rational conceptualization of religion have weakened the traditional support for the illogical family relationships (especially the relationship between husband and wife) and the gradual tendency toward the humanistic approach is being strengthened. Illogical perceptions are replete with personal discrimination and collective stereotypes which are common in tradition societies. Certainly, carefully planned and well organized activities should be devised and implemented within the social context to encourage wise and harmonized interactions of the family members. To achieve this goal the Iranian authorities in charge of the social affairs should make it their main task to focus on

the humanistic principles of Islam and make them practicable in the familial contexts.

According to the data obtained in this research, the opposite relationship between the attitude toward religion and the aggression against women is indicative of the fact that the factor of religion can have a positive effect on controlling and weakening violence in general, and sexual violence in particular, in the Iranian society. What seems to be important is the theoretical agreement of the authorities of the social affairs on the religious ideology and their offering of definitions relating to the theoretical aspects of religion concerning the social life of people.

Providing more appropriate opportunities for women in the areas of education and employment can build an effective barrier against the aggression of husbands against their wives in the family system of Irān. Although, traditional, ethnic, and tribal prejudice still overshadows factors such as the level of education and employment, the operative/functional status of women, and the process of modernization in Irān are not in favour of such prejudices.

Providing more opportunities for women to take on responsibilities by increasing their skills and their level of education and making it possible for them to apply those skills within social institutions will lead to acquisition of more power against the traditional domination of men. In this process, it should be taken into account that since the process of modernization, i.e., the rise in women's education and skills, does not conform well to the traditional framework of cultural norms, and hence the problem of its feasibility. In such a situation women's expectations may lead to radical changes (e.g., mental crisis in the lives of women). Therefore, it is crucial that the measures by which women's power and responsibilities are meant to be increased take effect relative to those of men, so that the balance of the division of the labour and the family relationships would not be upset.

The establishment and development of exclusive civil organizations for women, is a way of providing women with power. Defining the privacy of women and the provision of proper institutional means to protect that privacy can support women's independent identities. Men, in light of such an institutional



framework, will recognize and respect women's privacy. This will encourage some kind of balance in their relationships. Along this course of action, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for women, which are founded on the basis of logic, can increase women's power. A few cases of conditionality are in order: if these organizations sustain their nongovernmental backbone, if it their mains their goal to increase women's awareness and of enabling them to gain a better recognition of their rights in the society, and if women are shown that the proper way of achieving their rights passes through organization and reasonability, then a solid bedrock for the realization of women's identity can be envisioned. With the active participation of women, these organizations in pursuit of their policies can recognize women's problems and take measures leading to their logical and creative solution. To be sure, through a balanced implementation and control of such a process, as described above, the traditional men's view of women will be greatly enhanced, and the values and social identities of women will be strengthened. This would be beneficial to both women and men as co-founders of the family.

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