

## ORIGINAL RESEARCH—PSYCHOLOGY

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# Are the Predictors of Sexual Violence the Same as Those of Nonsexual Violence? A Gender Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

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**Introduction.** Violence manifests itself in such multifarious ways as sexual, physical, and psychological abuse. What has hitherto eluded the medical community, however, is whether sexual and nonsexual abuse share the same predictors.

**Aim.** Drawing upon a representative sample of married men and women in the Iranian capital, Tehran, we aimed to determine: (i) the overlap between sexual abuse and physical and psychological violence, and (ii) the predictors that sexual violence victimization share with physical and psychological violence victimization.

**Main Outcome Measures.** Victimization through any type of sexual coercion by the husband in the context of the current marital relationship, as determined via the conflict tactic scales-revised (CTS-2).

**Methods.** In a cross-sectional survey in Tehran in 2007, 460 married Iranian men and women were selected via a multicluster sampling method from four different randomized regions. Independent variables comprised sociodemographic characteristics, subscores of psychological, and personality characteristics known to be allied with intimate abuse (personal and relationship profile), and dichotomous data on victimization history through all types of violence by the spouse including psychological aggression, physical assault, and sexual coercion (CTS-2).

**Results.** In both genders, the experience of physical or psychological violence increased the likelihood of sexual violence victimization. In both genders, higher conflict was a predictor of sexual and psychological violence victimization. In addition, the common predictors of sexual and physical violence victimization were low self-control and high violent socialization in the men and women, respectively.

**Conclusions.** Sexual violence victimization shares some factors with the victimization of nonsexual types of marital abuse, but this seems to be partially gender dependent. **Mohammadkhani P, Forouzan AS, Khooshabi KS, Assari S, and Moghani Lankarani M. Are the predictors of sexual violence the same as those of nonsexual violence? A gender analysis. J Sex Med 2009;6:2215–2223.**

**Key Words.** Sexual Coercion; Sexual Violence; Psychological Aggression; Physical Assault; Marital Violence; Spouse Abuse; Domestic Violence

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### Introduction

Violence encompasses all language, manner, and actions that infringe upon one's physical body, sense of self, and sense of trust [1] and occurs irrespective of age and race/ethnicity/nationality. Violence by an intimate partner is categorized as sexual, physical, and psychological (emotional) abuse [2]. Sexual violence is perhaps

the most veiled mode of violence [3] and has thus become a topic of interest for sexologists at the expense of other types of violence. Marital violence is one of the main, yet neglected, social concerns of recent times, and leads to health consequences as severe as disabilities and death. However, the extent of its social and psychological complications has not been completely identified [4].

Reports of partner demands and partner psychological abuse in surveys might be associated with the respondents' use of physical aggression and sexual coercion [5], and these situations are known as the co-occurrence of different types of intimate violence [6]. In 1996, the National Research Council [7] recommended that victims of one type of violence be inquired about the other forms of violence as well.

A review of the existing literature is indicative of two salient points. First, the link between the diverse types of violence victimization needs further clarification [8], although we do know for certain that covictimization constitutes a tragic phenomenon because the victim not only has to live through the ordeal of at least two types of abuse but has to suffer diminished general and sexual satisfaction [8] and a higher rate of risky sexual activities [9]. Second, different forms of abuse may have some risk factors in common [10,11]. In the co-occurrence of intimate abuse, a significant moderating effect of gender has been reported. For example, psychological abuse was associated with physical aggression and sexual coercion in men, but not in women; and gender-sensitive approaches might be necessary to understand and prevent covictimization [5].

In a survey in the Iranian capital, Tehran, one study reported that 30% of the respondents were frequently insulted and 24% of the women were sometimes threatened by their husbands [4]. Another study reported that 50.9% of its female subjects had been exposed to at least one form of violence (36.1% physical and 19.6% psychological, not sexual) by their husbands [12]. In another Iranian city, named Sanandaj, 38% of the married women recruited into a study had been assaulted by their husbands at some time during their marriage [13]. In another study conducted in the Iranian city of Babol, 15.0% of the women had suffered physical abuse, 42.4% sexual abuse, and 81.5% psychological abuse at the hands of their husbands [14]. Another study carried out in the Iranian city of Isfahan reported the prevalence of wife abuse to be 36.8%, with physical violence being the type of violence in 27.2% [15]. Severe verbal violence was 0.7%, emotional violence was 1.7%, physical violence was 0.3%, and sexual violence was 0.3%, during pregnancy [16].

We sought to determine the overlap between sexual violence and other types of violence as well as the predictors that sexual violence victimization shares with physical and psychological violence

victimization in men and women in the capital city of Iran, Tehran.

## Method

### Participants

The data were obtained from the Family Violence Survey, conducted in Tehran in the year 2007. The subjects were selected through a multicluster sampling method. Four regions of Tehran were randomly selected as the main clusters of research, and the public entertainment centers thereof were designated as the second-rank clusters. The final participants were selected randomly from the foregoing centers; 255 couples were initially invited, 230 of whom were included.

The couples recruited in the study met the inclusion criteria of being married, literate, and residents of Tehran at the time of the study. The exclusion criteria included self-report of a history of diagnosed psychotic disorders or their features. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences, and informed consent was obtained from all the participants after they had been verbally reassured that the information would be kept confidential from their spouse.

### Procedure

As we described elsewhere [17], the interviewers were trained to administer a structured interview lasting between 1:00 and 1:15 hours for data collection on cultural issues. The male and female subjects were interviewed separately. If a participant claimed to be a victim of sexual violence, the self-report was considered a case of sexual violence victimization, regardless of the spouse's confirmation. It should be noted, however, that some researchers in this field suggest relying upon both partners [18].

The interviewers, introduced to the above-mentioned four centers with a kit containing a cover letter from the Iranian Ministry of Health, routinely described the aim of the study to the respondents and assured them of research confidentiality. The subjects were allowed to opt out of the study at any time.

### Measures

#### A Socio-Demographic Checklist

This checklist consisted of the demographic data of the respondents, that is, age, education level,

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