



Prognosis of Codependency Based on Types of Abuse in Female Primary School Teachers in Ghaemshahr

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Abstract

Background and Objective: A codependence is a person who allows others to influence them through their mistreatment, creating an obsessive desire in them to control and change them. The present study aimed to predict codependency based on records of sexual, physical, and emotional harassment of parents of female primary school teachers in Ghaemshahr.

Materials and Methods: The casual-comparative study used the regression method. The statistical population involved female primary school teachers in Ghaemshahr in the 2018-2019 educational year. Out of this population, 150 cases were selected via simple random sampling method. Thereafter, they completed the 16-item Codependency Questionnaire and the Child Abuse and Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ). Data were analyzed in SPSS software (version 22) using Pearson correlation and regression analysis.

Results: The results of the present study demonstrated that the records of emotional harassment were positively and significantly correlated with codependency, and the predictor variable predicted the affliction with codependency ($P < 0.01$). The findings indicated that runaway girls were the victims of more physical and sexual assaults and emotional harassment by the head of the family or their family members compared to their peers, and these factors had a great impact on them ($P < 0.01$). Moreover, there was a correlation between experiencing physical harassment and codependency; nonetheless, sexual harassment by parents displayed no significant relationship with codependency.

Conclusions: As evidenced by the results of this study, it can be concluded that codependency is correlated with emotional harassment and physical harassment.

Keywords: Codependency, Educational personnel, Female, Prognosis, School teachers

Background

Codependency is a learned behavior that occurs under the pressure of being dependent on individuals or things other than oneself. Dependency is accompanied by neglect and a reductive effect on the individual's identity. A kind of false self develops and is expressed through compulsive habits, addiction, and other disorders. It fortifies the individual's alienation from their real identity and fosters a sense of shame [1]. Other studies have illustrated that codependency is prevalent in individuals brought up by alcoholic parents, living in a family setting with chronic stress, parents with behavioral disorders, women, and those who look after patients with chronic diseases or are involved in care professions [2].

A codependent is an individual who allows others to influence them through their mistreatment and create an obsessive desire in them to control and change them. Codependents are mostly those who

become afflicted with a kind of chronic and progressive obsession due to the addition of one of the main relatives, overeating, other long-term addictive-like behaviors, or some long-term psychological disorders. It is an obsessive, abnormal, and strong desire to control and dominate the target person. The vicious cycle of codependency starts after the failure of a codependent person; she/he plays the roles of "the contented nurse," "savior," "cool-tempered spouse," and the "silent torturer" periodically, or sometimes for a few hours. Nonetheless, his/ her mental problem is by no means of lesser importance than the addict's problem, and the person in most urgent need of help is themselves [3]. Codependent individuals detach from themselves by concentrating on others' emotions, needs, and motives and neglecting their physical changes and psychological needs. Still, an obsessive desire to repeat the past

captures them in the spirals of self-distinctive behaviors. They create self-defeating and self-destructive scenarios for themselves. Due to the multi-dimensionality of codependency, it is difficult to define, and sometimes it is referred to as a syndrome [4]. Codependency is a chronic and progressive disorder that starts from the individual's most outward emotional, thinking, and behavioral levels and gradually continues into their deepest psychological parts so that their ontology is affected. For codependency, the "denial" factor is always present through the stages of disorder development. In essence, codependency is developed on a bed of denial [5].

Child mistreatment by parents is an important phenomenon that can occur during childhood and adolescence, imposing serious and permanent damage to one's health and personality [6]. Parents play the main role in child abuse. Parents and caregivers who constantly criticize, reproach, threaten, ridicule, humiliate, and belittle the child due to their dominance and control over the child arouse shame, fear, and stress in the child, have unreal expectations, and are seldom satisfied with the child's behaviors, belong to emotional torturers [7]. In the same vein, the individuals who abide by their child by ignoring the child's distress symptoms, need for help and attention, comfort, encouragement, stimulation, and acceptance demands are also emotional torturers [8]. The condition will worsen when one parent is aware of the other parent's torturing behavior and takes no action to prevent the continuous torture. It will even worsen when they help the other parent's violent behavior. Regardless, in most non-fatal cases, direct physical harms have fewer side effects than the long-term effects of violence on the child's neurological, cerebral, cognitive, emotional, and general health. Codependency can also be one of the sub-effects and consequences of such emotional harassment [9].

Emotional harassment is the assault and verbal attack against the child's worthiness or welfare or any form of humiliating or threatening behavior towards the child by an adult person. Physical harassment is the physical attack on the child by an adult person that subjects the child to the damage or leads to actual damage. Sexual harassment is to maintain the sexual relationship between a child and an adult person, which is often explicit or compulsory; nonetheless, the compulsion is not mandatory [10]. According to McDaniel and Yates [11], on average, one-third of the nurses are highly suffering from codependency. In a study by Willard and Snow, the rate was reported as 80%. The nurses' codependency is still being studied and

assessed in terms of such concepts as caring, nursing history, hospital work, being a woman, and nursing education [12]. Among different professions, primary school teachers are most closely related to nurses. Hall and Ray [13] emphasized that the nature of nurses' and primary school teachers' professions provides the background for the risk of codependency since they involve a high sensitivity to others' needs. They are expected to sacrifice their own needs for others; moreover, they evaluate their value through their work progression, which they often fail to achieve. There are no doubts about teachers' vital and sensitive role in mental health, education, and training. It is enough to say that the mental and physical health, empowerment, consciousness, and performance of the young and influential generation of society depend on the performance quality of this group [14].

The main issue is that women, as half part of the societal body, are the most frequent and principal group afflicted with this reductive damage. No realist and sound thinker can deny the obvious fact that if the women's role in the progress and excellence of a society is not greater than that of men, it is not less. In the present era, women play a prominent role in society [15] and family. It is very crucial to conduct studies on the exact identification of the obstacles threatening the quality of life of this valuable part of society and increasing their well-being in an attempt to pave the way for finding suitable treatment methods and, more importantly, preventing the next generations of women from suffering from degrading damages. Nonetheless, among different professions, some are highly prone to attract codependent individuals or can lead to forming a codependent personality [16].

The issue here is that due to the high volume and difficulty of the duties of these loved ones, which imposes much pressure on their mental well-being, an increase in codependency and its side effects will leave highly destructive impacts on their personal quality performance and well-being. Furthermore, the teachers who are involved in codependency will be severely inefficient in educating and giving independence to their youngster students, posing serious harm to their students through their stressful behaviors. Elementary school is a critical time for students with little age, life skills, and social experience. Therefore, the kind of interaction and education they receive from their teacher will exert a critical effect on their self-image, self-esteem, and their definition of themselves and their surrounding world. It is of utmost importance for elementary school teachers to be capable of maintaining a balance between meeting the children's needs and

providing them sufficient support and care for them and giving them the independence and education to form an independent and capable "self." Therefore, a careful study of the prevalence of codependency and its qualities and effects on this group will clarify the dimensions of the issue, paving the way for the emergence of new therapeutic steps. In Iran, over recent years, appropriate but few studies have been conducted on codependency. Different groups and strata, especially the addicts' families, have been investigated. Nonetheless, the issue has never been assessed among elementary school teachers. Scholars are striving to find a scientific answer to this problem of whether the records of experiencing kinds of emotional, physical, and sexual harassment can predict the occurrence of codependency. Moreover, this study was conducted in one group (women) since sexual abuse is more common in women in the workplace. In light of the aforementioned issues, the present study aimed to predict codependency based on records of sexual, physical, and emotional harassment of parents of female primary school teachers in Ghaemshahr.

Objectives

The present study aimed to predict codependency based on records of sexual, physical, and emotional harassment of parents of female primary school teachers in Ghaemshahr.

Materials and Methods

The present study was applied in terms of its objective and explorative in terms of its data-gathering method. The casual-comparative study used the regression method. The research method was a survey, which offers the main advantage of result generalization. The statistical population of the present study consisted of female elementary teachers in Ghaemshahr in the 2018-2019 educational year. Out of this population, 150 cases were selected as the study sample via a simple random sampling method so that first, the list of elementary schools in the city was prepared and numbered. Thereafter, random numbers were drawn to identify the schools. Following that, teachers in these elementary schools completed the Codependency Questionnaire and the Child Abuse and Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ). The subjects were within the age range of 29-56 years (average: 43 years). Moreover, the employment records were in the range of 20-29 years (average: 17 years). In this study, the annoying variables were controlled using a random sampling method and matched in terms of age and education. Trust in respondents was obtained by asking them to answer all the questions honestly, given that the questionnaires

were anonymous. In addition, some questions were designed to be false to be removed if there was a contradiction.

Spin-Fisher's test

Spin-Fisher's test is a 16-item formal university test to measure codependency. The items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, and two items are reversely scored (items 5 and 7). After conducting preliminary studies and taking into account the commonalities of definitions and theories, the initial Spin-Fisher's test, after its standardization with validation and reliability (Cronbach's α coefficient was 0.77), was introduced to the academic community under the abbreviated name "SPCS." Spin & Fisher conducted several comparative studies that led to adding one extra question to the test. Regression coefficients between depression and codependency ($P < 0.001$), between anxiety and codependency ($P < 0.00$), between external control source and codependency ($P < 0.01$), and between self-esteem and codependency ($P < 0.001$) were obtained at 0.42, 0.47, 0.19, and -0.54, respectively [17]. In the present study, a 16-item questionnaire of the test prepared in 1991 was used. In Iran, this questionnaire was validated by using the narrative criteria method and construct validity method. Moreover, Cronbach's α of the instrument was reported to be 0.76.

Child Abuse and Trauma Questionnaire

This questionnaire, which was developed by Bernstein & Fink in 1998, assesses the manifestations of 5-fold childhood misbehaviors through a 28-item reviewing questionnaire that respondents themselves complete. This questionnaire measures the manifestations of physical, sexual, and emotional harassment, as well as physical and emotional neglect. This study uses data from the first three variables. These 28 items have been developed as expressions answered based on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) Never, (2) seldom, (3) sometimes, (4) often, and (5) always. Each childhood misbehavior is introduced with five articles. In addition, there are three items of denial/minimization to detect the false and negative reported traumas [18]. To test the internal reliability of the questionnaire in the present samples, the validation test was performed. The overall standard alpha of the questionnaire was 0.94; therefore, the internal reliability is excellent. Its internal reliability was very satisfactory since the total Cronbach's α questionnaire was 0.95. The high construct validity was also obtained so that the groups with psychological records reported higher levels of harassment and neglect than the nonclinical samples. Its differential validity was also acceptable [19]. Descriptive statistics were analyzed using

Pearson's coefficient of correlation, and multiple regression was utilized to evaluate the effect of predictor variables on the criterion variable. Meanwhile, all statistical analyses were performed in SPSS software (version 22).

Results

Out of 150 participants, 70, 43, and 37 cases were at

the age range of 20- 30, 31- 40, and 41-50 years, respectively. In the sample group, 111, 35, and 4 subjects hold bachelor's, master's, and Ph.D degrees, respectively.

The above table demonstrates the significance of the regression model for emotional harassment and physical harassment; however, sexual harassment could not predict codependency.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of study variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	No.	
Harassment	emotional harassment	29.75	4.10	8	40	150
	Physical harassment	26.71	3.44	9	37	150
	Sexual harassment	16.67	2.04	10	32	150
	Codependency	43.75	11.84	28	75	150

Table 2. Summary of results for the correlation between child abuse and codependency

Variable	r	r ²	pr	P value	
Harassment	emotional harassment	0.51	0.26	0.20	0.0001
	Physical harassment	0.49	0.24	0.21	0.0001
	Sexual harassment	0.46	0.21	0.18	0.0001

P-value with Bonferroni correction was reported to be significant at 0.005
Pr= Partial correlation

Table 3. Regression equation coefficients

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		standardized coefficients	t	P
	Beta	Deviation	β		
Constants	32.56	2.19	-	14.82	0.01
Emotional harassment	0.78	0.12	0.41	5.62	0.01
Physical harassment	1.497	141	0.658	10.638	0.01
Sexual harassment	0.05	0.01	0.02	0.11	0.81

Discussion

The results of the present study pointed out that the records of emotional harassment were positively and significantly correlated with codependency, and the predictor variable predicted the affliction with codependency well. This problem was investigated for the first time in Iran, and no similar study was found in this regard; nonetheless, in several foreign and local studies, some investigations have been conducted on pathological outcomes of different kinds of harassment and yielded similar results since the records of experiencing different kinds of harassment are related to different pathological outcomes. The findings of the present research are consistent with the results of the studies by Pielage et al. [20] and Leroux et al. [21], who concluded that conflict with emotional harassment during childhood has several serious pathological outcomes.

To explain this relationship, based on the findings of this research and previous studies, it can be claimed that emotional harassment is the assault and verbal attack against the child's sense of worthiness, well-being, or any kind of humiliating and threatening behavior by the adults. One of the main important causes of the affliction of individuals with this disorder is unhealthy and problematic relationships with parents during childhood; the more the parent experience a socio-psychic

problem, the less they will be able to meet marital and parental needs [22]. Therefore, it is not strange that the children of careless and abusive parents often do not get their natural demands. These children are brought up with expecting unreliability from others, are self-centered and hateful, and usually underestimate themselves very much. When parents don't pay enough attention to their children, they may feel like they don't have a true sense of who they are. In such circumstances, the child will learn to identify and define themselves not as what they feel but based on the feelings of their parents. Many of these children, who are deprived of parental time and care, feel "not to be." They feel they are invisible, as though they do not exist, and these children will easily ignore themselves in their future relationships during adolescence and repeat their childhood scenarios [23].

According to Maslow's theory of human needs, another explanation is that the human organization is in special needs for its proper growth, such as physiological needs (need for food, clothing, and shelter), needs of safety, love, belonging, and dignity that will grow if they are not neutralized by emotional and physical harassment [24]. The children who are deprived of their needs are, therefore, subjected to a pattern of immature interactions, such as codependency. In this way, a

person who has been deprived of the basic needs of safety and belonging will grow in such a way that their personality is mixed with feelings of extreme anxiety and insecurity. They strive to control others and their surrounding environment; therefore, their relative balance and tranquility become highly dependent on the predictability of the surrounding environment and individuals [25].

According to Erickson's theory of developmental stages, human development is the result of a set of stages in which some crises need to be resolved by the individual so that failure in them does not adversely affect the following stages. Psychological harassment or neglect can weaken the mastery of tasks in these particular stages of development and can affect an individual's self-esteem and sense of worth, depending on the stage. As a result, an individual with this personality type becomes codependent [26]. Therefore, in the stage of trust vs. mistrust, due to the annoying and insufficient behaviors of parents, people are not able to find the necessary trust in the surrounding world and primary caregivers; therefore, they will grow up with severe distrust. Furthermore, as a result of parents' behavior, the person is afflicted with feelings of worthlessness and miss-identity. All these factors together lead the individual to prefer others to oneself, value them more than oneself, and suffer from a false self that makes sense in meeting others' needs.

According to the theory of parental rejection, the emotional harassment perpetrated by the parents has permanent effects on the development of the child's personality. It exerts lasting effects on the performance of an adult's personality that has been rejected in childhood. This theory emphasizes the impact of warm and loving acceptance of parents, which is an adverse counterpart of harassment, i.e., hostility, aggression, and indifference. Emotional and physical harassment affects self-esteem, self-sufficiency, emotional stability, and negative attitudes toward the world of the growing child, making them more susceptible to such disorders as codependency [27].

According to the study results, the second hypothesis regarding the correlation between experiencing physical harassment and codependency was proved. In line with the result of the study by Bala & Devaiah [28], the present research revealed that the experience of physical harassment leads to disorders in extraversion behaviors. Detailed explanations provided in the previous hypothesis can also elucidate this hypothesis. The third hypothesis which was the predictor of codependency by sexual harassment, despite other study hypotheses, was rejected since, according to this study, there was no significant relationship

between the records of experiencing sexual harassment by parents and codependency. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that individuals present in our sample reported no sexual harassment. This can be ascribed to the fear of revealing this experiment; that is to say, although personal identities were not recorded in the questionnaire, these loved ones' answers were affected by this fear.

Based on the findings of this study, it can be stated that codependency displayed there is a significant relationship with emotional and physical harassment. Codependency is controllable, and on-time diagnosis of codependents and effective treatments can reduce the undesirable outcomes of this pervasive disorder. However, apart from inattention to the process of recovery and treatment of codependency, there are no specialized and regular treatment methods in Iran. Although the plan of self-helping groups (12 steps) has played a major role in helping to treat and improve codependency (even in Iran), the concept of codependency in the plans is used in a nonclinical, vague, and ambiguous way. Self-helping group plans are a popular treatment program and do not address the personal issues and problems of codependent individuals [27]. Based on the studies that were conducted on websites, magazines, and other valid scientific sources, the number of articles and studies related to codependency is insignificant. Although there are several tools for identifying and evaluating codependency [12], no necessary measures have been taken to identify these people, and unawareness of this disorder and its diagnostic tools is an important factor in ignoring the diagnosis and treatment of codependency. However, codependency is developing and evolving so rapidly that writers and researchers need to be actively engaged in clinical work [14]. Considering all of the aforementioned issues and given that codependency is a cultural process [10], it is essential that an effective intervention be developed for codependent individuals in Iran through a localized, structured, measurable, and customizable model so that specialists can provide appropriate services to all these people with effective intervention and reduce the abnormalities arising from it, especially in the field of primary education by treating people with this personality problem. On the other side, according to the obtained results, it is crucial to carry out programs to teach and improve parenting skills, pathology, and treatment so that children can enjoy appropriate care, communication, and qualitative family support. Only by expanding the quality of parenting skills can we hope for a healthy, dynamic, and loving society. Therefore,

organizational officials must work to achieve this. It seems that workshops for teachers, educators, and parents are highly influential in learning how the quality of the child's personality formation and life in adulthood are affected by how children interact [28]. The present study faced some limitations, such as the test conditions that were not the same for individuals who, due to the busy schedule of teachers during working hours, had to complete the questionnaire at home; therefore, it was not possible to control different environmental variables in their homes, and the teachers refused to disclose negative cases due to the special importance that the members of this profession attach to their social status. In general, teaching is a profession with a high social status, and society places great emphasis on the role of positive and social stereotypes by the people involved in it. This issue, in particular, prevents teachers from easily answering negative and self-disclosing research questions. Finally, the limited number and variety of studies in the field of codependency in Iran provided scholars with limited literature and local background. Therefore, it is suggested that more attention be devoted to the field of etiology and the explanation of codependency. Throughout the study process, it was clarified that codependency is a highly multi-dimensional and multi-faceted phenomenon, and a wide range of factors can casually affect its occurrence and emergence. Therefore, researchers need to measure their interaction with different psychological variables.

Conclusions

As evidenced by the obtained results, codependency displayed a significant relationship with emotional and physical harassment.

Compliance with ethical guidelines

All ethical principles were considered in this research. The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and its stages. Informed consent was obtained from subjects, and they were assured of the confidentiality of their information. Moreover, participants were free to withdraw from the study if desired. They were also informed that they would be provided with the results of the research. This article was extracted from the master thesis of the first author of the article and was approved by the Ethics Committee of Allameh Tabataba'i University (Code: IR.ATU.REC.1397.002).

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Authors' contributions

Conceptualization [Arezoo Mahmoudzadeh]; Methodology [Abdollah Motamedji]; Investigation [Arezoo Mahmoudzadeh]; Writing – Original Draft [Faramarz Sohrabi]; Writing – Review & Editing, Author names [all author]; Funding Acquisition, [all author]; Resources, [all author]; Supervision, [Abdollah Motamedji].

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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