

## Research Paper

## Relationship Between Spouse Abuse and Depressive Symptoms in Women: The Moderating Role of Personality Characteristics

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**ABSTRACT**

**Objectives** Spouse abuse against women is the most prevalent type of family violence, and its harmful consequences threaten both women's health and their well-being in family and society. It is very important to find the factors that eliminate these deleterious effects and protect women's health. The aim of this study was to explore the moderator effect of personality characteristics in the relationship between spouse abuse and symptoms of depression among women.

**Methods** For this purpose, 300 married women were provided with questionnaires measuring spouse abuse, depression symptoms (Beck depression inventory) and personality characteristics (NEO-FFI).

**Results** According to the results, depressive symptoms in women were correlated with spouse abuse. Agreeableness was found to serve as a moderator between spouse abuse and depressive symptoms.

**Conclusion** From these findings, one can conclude that women who experience spouse abuse suffer from depressive symptoms. The battered women who were more agreeable experience less depressive symptoms.

**Keywords:**

Depression, Personality characteristics, Spouse abuse

**Extended Abstract****1. Introduction**

Violence against women is one of the most important human rights and health problems across the world [1, 2]. It affects the rights, health, well-being, and personality of women and poses a serious threat to the family and society [3]. The most common form of violence against women is domestic violence, i.e., violent abuse by the spouse.

Violence against a spouse is associated with physical injuries [8], poor mental health [9] including depres-

sion, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicidal thoughts and actions [10-12]. In such cases, depression disorders and suicide attempts in women victims of violence is four times higher than that in non-victimized women [13].

Given this background, can we say that women victims of violence experience more symptoms of depression than other women? If this is the case, what can change the likelihood of these outcomes in women victims. In an attempt to answer these research questions, the present study investigates the moderating role of personality traits in relation to domestic violence and depression.

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## 2. Method

This correlational study is descriptive in form. The study population consisted of all married women in Tehran in 1393 (2014). Sample size was determined to be 302 subjects based on the number of predictor variables. To select the appropriate sample, convenient sampling method was employed, and 400 questionnaires were distributed in different places of the city including parks, shopping centers and cultural centers in five regions (North, South, East, West and Central). After obtaining informed consent to participate in the study, the participants were asked to respond to the questionnaire. The researcher monitored the overall process while the participants were answering the questions. Inclusion criteria for women participating in the study are living in Tehran and being married and having permanent first and second marriage. Exclusion criteria included a history of psychiatric disease and divorce or the separation of the couple. Of the 400 questionnaires obtained, 98 incomplete questionnaires were excluded.

After converting the scores into standard scores, hierarchical regression was used for five personality traits and three types of violence against women so as to investigate the moderating role of personality traits of women in the relationship between domestic violence and depression. The personality scores considered in this study were neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, and the three types of violence against women included psychological violence, physical violence, and sexual violence. The dependent variable was scores of depression symptoms. Data analysis was performed with the help of SPSS-22 software using the hierarchical regression analysis.

## 3. Results

A total of 302 patients participated in the study. The average age and duration of marriage for women in the research were found to be 38.59 years and 16.10 years, respectively. The mean and standard deviation of research variables for women participating in the study can be seen in Table 1. Based on the Figures 1 and 2, it can be inferred that those who are agreeable to a greater extent showed fewer symptoms of depression compared with people who have relatively average or lesser extent of this trait. But when sexual violence was low, the difference between the three groups was negligible. The more the sexual violence, the greater was the difference between the three groups of violence. Regarding the difference in the slope of the three figures, it should be noted that the more the agreeable a person is, the greater the sexual abuse of the spouse can predict the symptoms of depression (Figure 2).

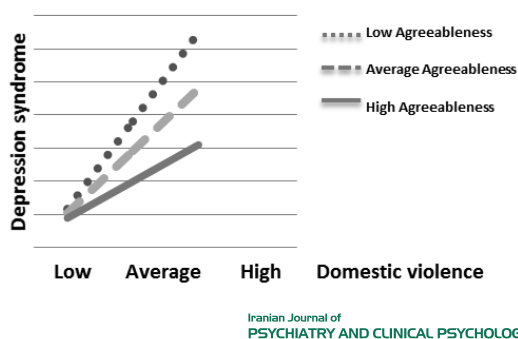
## 4. Discussion and Conclusion

Our findings support the direct connection between domestic violence against women and their depression symptoms. In other words, women who are exposed to domestic violence experience significant depressive symptoms. Previous research also suggests that women who are subjected to violence by their husbands are more depressed than other women [16, 19, 31].

This finding can be explained using the theory of "battered women syndrome" proposed by Walker [37], which is based on Seligman's theory of learned helplessness. Walker defined the "battered women syndrome" using diagnostic terms such as "growth of symptoms and physical, psychological and social abnormalities such as

**Table 1.** Mean of variables for women participating in the study

Variable	Mean (SD)
Domestic violence	11.93(11.05)
Depression	9.38(7.63)
Neuroticism	18.93(6.51)
Extraversion	29.62(5.28)
Openness to experience	28.24(4.52)
Agreeableness	34.02(5.31)
Accountability	35.63(6.12)



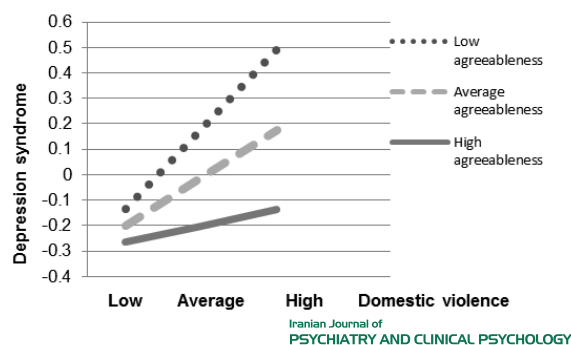
**Figure 1.** Prediction of the level of occurrence regarding depression syndromes based on hierarchical multiple regression of psychological domestic violence and agreeableness

depression, low self-esteem, and isolation, which occur as a result of experiencing violence from the husband" [37]. According to Walker, with passing time and with repeated uncontrollable and unpredictable courses of violence, abused women realize that their actions made no change in the relationship [38], and they lose a sense of control over the stressful situations. As a result, they feel helpless to stop the violence, which in turn causes their depression [39].

According to our study results, those who are agreeable to a greater extent manifested fewer depressive symptoms compared to people who have medium and low levels of this trait. When the psychological violence was low, the difference between the three groups was negligible. When the psychological and sexual violence increased, the difference between the three groups also increased. In other words, the lesser the women are agreeable, the more the psychological violence inflicting upon them can determine the levels of depressive symptoms.

According to the research by Schutte et al. (2014), personality trait of agreeableness has a significant negative relationship with self-criticism and depression scores. In this regard, Finch and Graziano [40] showed that personality trait of agreeableness is indirectly associated with depression. Agreeable people have more friends, receive more social support, and apply effective reactions, which makes them less likely to have depression [41].

To explain this finding, we can use the traits of agreeableness structures. People who have more of this trait are considered to be trustworthy, optimistic, and cooperative in interpersonal relationships. They are polite, warm, loving, flexible, generous, gentle, caring, thoughtful, and logical persons. Such people desire to help other people and look at them in a positive way [42]. In addition, agreeable people interpret social behaviors of others as less aggres-



**Figure 2.** Prediction of the level of occurrence regarding depression syndromes based on hierarchical multiple regression of sexual domestic violence and agreeableness

sive, and they tend to be more involved in social relations that facilitate communion [43]. These traits and having a positive attitude towards the people and events will cause agreeable women victims of domestic violence to be less depressed compared with others.

The current study showed that women who are inflicted with domestic violence are significantly more prone to depression and that victims who are agreeable have fewer depressive symptoms. In this study, we investigated the role of individual variables in violent relationships of married couples while one of the main variables in the field is the relationship between married couples.

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### Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.