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**THE DIMENSIONS OF NON-PHYSICAL (“HIDDEN”) VIOLENCE
PERCEIVED IN THE COUPLE**

Natalia Burtoiu (a)*, Alexandra Frîncu (a)
*Corresponding author

(a) Pitesti University, natalia.burtoiu@upit.ro

Abstract

Through this paper we wanted to carry out a study on the Romanian family and the individual development. The interest in this subject was mainly motivated by professional reasons, but also by the more and more frequent finding that family was and will continue to be an institution which, through its imprint on the individual, exerts influence on society itself. This particular study could not have been done without taking into account the main difference from birth in each person's life, namely the gender difference. If other aspects that can influence the development process can be more or less changed (such as the cultural-geographic space or features of the physical environment such as living conditions, resources, etc.), it was considered that the issues related to the biological organization are ‘a given’ that implicitly determines the relationship between the individual and the environment (mainly social) as well as the type of transactions that will take place between the two entities. Starting from the premise that gender-differentiated socialization leads to the construction of a different vision of individual reality, we followed the application of this theory and the phenomenon of non-physical abuse to see, after the research undertaken, whether and what differences exist between the two genres about this phenomenon within a couple relationship. The purpose of the present research is to evaluate the perception of the dimensions of non-physical ("hidden") violence perceived in the couple.

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Keywords: Family, couple, gender difference, hidden violence.



1. Introduction

As a special form of this transmission process that the family does, however, we considered the anomic phenomenon of domestic violence distinctive. Also subject to gender-differentiated socialization, domestic-marital abuse is still a poorly understood reality, making it difficult to recognize, combat, and prevent it. All the more, there are some aspects of reality that do not reveal themselves easily, and which, in their subtle, masked form, make it harder to be recognized, and often raise questions about their validity or existence. This is also the case of those forms of abuse that do not present visible characteristics and are not explicit or physically manifest - forms of abuse of non-physical violence.

Non-physical abuse often involves forms that are based on beliefs, models and values that are difficult to quantify and to define, inherited in most cases undifferentiated through the very process of familial socialization. Starting from the premise that gender-differentiated socialization leads to the construction of a different perception of individual reality, we followed the application of this theory and the phenomenon of non-physical abuse to see, after the research undertaken, whether and what differences exist between the two genders about this phenomenon within a couple relationship.

2. Problem Statement

Healthy relationships are increasingly rare because people think more about themselves, their interests, their needs, and they have no time or mood to listen to their partners as well. The most common mistake for most people is to mentally shape the image of their ideal partner and, when they know someone, to compare him/her to that projection. From then on, they will be facing relationship problems, as the real partner will have its defects compared to the ideal partner (Adler, 2016).

At first, in order not to underestimate his/her power to decide correctly, the person concerned will try to disregard these discrepancies, will become self-sufficient, and over time all these self-indulgent frustrations will escalate to the point where they will punish the other for not being perfect: some become aggressive, others play the role of victims, others are absent in their relationship, others seek parallel lives, etc. Such types of behaviours give rise to different types of abuse, not so physical, but especially emotional. Emotional abuse may be more serious than the physical one. The emotional abuse is a reality sent from generation to generation, nowadays tolerated silently. They are not talking about it, thinking that they are lighter than physical abuse and can live with it. We often encounter emotional abuse within the family, within the couple, even within the relationship with the parents – the elderly parents abused by their adult children, or even situations in which we are abused by colleagues, managers, etc. The situation of emotional abuse is the one in which a person humiliates ('you are good for nothing'), deprives of emotional rights ('do not cry'), quarrels, uses criticism in a very aggressive manner ('I cannot do anything with you'); in other words, has some manifestations because of which the abused person begins to doubt himself (Pollak, 2004).

3. Research Questions

The study attempted to cover the following issues:

1. to measure the perception of non-physical partner violence behaviours on a group of subjects;

2. to measure the perception of one's own behaviour of non-physical violence within the couple on another group of subjects;
3. to identify the perceptual differences of the two groups regarding non-physical violent behaviours;
4. to identify the links between different behavioural dimensions of non-physical violence on the two groups of subjects.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present research is to evaluate the perceptual dimensions of non-physical ('hidden') violence perceived within the couple. Thus, women's perceptions about the partner's non-physical violent behaviour in the relationship and man's perceptions of non-physical violent behaviours within the relationship will be assessed.

5. Research Methods

The participants were 120 males and 120 females, each of them being involved in a relationship. The average age registered for the total 240 representatives varied from 18 years old to 50 years old, with a mean of 28.3 years old. For females, the average age varied from 19 years old to 48 years old, with a mean of 26 years old; as for males, the average age varied from 18 years old to 50 years old, with a mean of 30 years old. 66.7% of the participants reported a high level of education and 95.8% lived in urban areas.

The instruments that we applied were Non-Physical Abuse of Partner Scale (NPAPS) and Partner Abuse Scale: Non-Physical (PASNP), (Corcoran, & Fischer, 2007).

1. Non-Physical Abuse of Partner Scale (NPAPS) had to be translated into Romanian language in order to be applied. Its authors are James W. Garner and Walter W. Hudson. The purpose of this scale is to measure the extent of non-physical abuse that a person considers to manifest toward his/her partner within their relationship. It was applied to male participants. It has 25 items that measure the perceived degree of non-physical abuse inflicted on the partner by the person that completes the scale. The scale was created to be applied on heterosexual or homosexual couples, married or not, which live together or not. It is considered to be one of the fewest scales that examine the degree of self-perceived non-physical abuse manifested in a relationship. NPAPS is part of the WALMYR Assessment Scales battery tests and was reported to have a very high alpha score of internal consistency, of 0.9. The factorial validity of the test was also reported as very high, although there are no data of its stability.

To score it, we used a Likert scale with 7 items ('Never', 'Very Rare', 'Rare', 'Sometimes', 'Often', 'Very Often' and 'Always') to analyse the frequency of the self-perceived non-physical violent behaviours, each of these having a score varying from 1 point ('Never') to 7 points ('Always').

2. Partner Abuse Scale: Non-Physical (PASNP) also had to be translated into Romanian in order to be applied. Its author is Walter W. Hudson. The purpose of this scale is to measure the extent of the perceived non-physical abuse from the partner. It was applied to female participants. It also has 25 items, correspondent to the 25 items previously presented (NPAPS), measuring the perceived degree of non-physical abuse that the partner of the person completing the scale displays.

The scale was created to be applied on heterosexual or homosexual couples, married or not, living together or not. Considering the importance of this phenomenon in clinical practice, as well as the fact that

non-physical abuse is mostly condoned, this scale is considered to be one of the fewest short scales available for measuring this widespread phenomenon. PASNP is part of the WALMYR Assessment Scales battery tests and was reported to have a very high alpha score of internal consistency, of 0.9. The factorial validity of the test was also reported as very high, although there are no data of its stability.

To score it, we used a Likert scale with 7 items ('Never', 'Very Rare', 'Rare', 'Sometimes', 'Often', 'Very Often' and 'Always') to analyse the frequency of the perceived non-physical violent behaviours, each of these having a score varying from 1 point ('Never') to 7 points ('Always').

The data were analysed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 20 programme. The tests that we ran were Independent-Samples T Test and Pearson Correlations Coefficient.

6. Findings

The general hypothesis was that there are significant differences of perception regarding non-physical violent behaviours between the comparing groups. In order to test this, we applied Independent-Samples T Test, the analysis being done for each item of the scale, this way testing the differences for each measured behavioural dimension. Thus, there were reported statistically significant differences for items 3, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23. The criteria used for decision making was a Sig. score < 0.05.

Following, to test the working hypothesis we tested the association between different behavioural dimensions structured by gender. There were specific hypothesis formulated and was applied Pearson Correlations Coefficient to run the tests.

Thus, the results were:

- For male participants:

The first hypothesis: there is an association between present anger reactions in general disagreement situations with the female partner and verbal violence due to alcohol consumption. Pearson Correlations Coefficient revealed an r score of 0.724, indicating a very strong correlation. Furthermore, the linear analysis of regression of the two variables, performed in order to verify the extent to which present anger reactions in general disagreement situations can predict behaviours of verbal violence, revealed a positive result.

The second hypothesis: there is an association between strict financial control of the female partner and her forbiddance to have a job or to study. Pearson Correlations Coefficient revealed an r score of 0.589, indicating a strong correlation. Furthermore, the linear analysis of regression of the two variables, performed in order to verify the extent to which strict financial control of the female partner can predict the forbiddance of her to have a job or to study, revealed a positive result.

The third hypothesis: there is an association between giving orders to the partner and general bullying behaviour displayed in the relationship. Pearson Correlations Coefficient revealed an r score of 0.599, indicating a strong correlation. Furthermore, the linear analysis of regression of the two variables, performed in order to verify the extent to which the behaviour of giving orders to the partner can predict the general bullying behaviour displayed in the relationship, revealed a positive result.

The fourth hypothesis: there is an association between forbidding the female partner to have male friends and forbidding her to have a job or to study. Pearson Correlations Coefficient revealed an r score of 0.639, indicating a strong correlation.

The fifth hypothesis: there is an association between financially controlling the female partner and the behaviour of giving orders to her. Pearson Correlations Coefficient revealed an r score of 0.673, indicating a strong correlation. Furthermore, the linear analysis of regression of the two variables, performed in order to verify the extent to which the behaviour of financial control can predict the behaviour of giving orders to her, revealed a positive result.

The sixth hypothesis: there is an association between the behaviour of giving orders to the female partner and the expectancy that she finishes her chores on time. Pearson Correlations Coefficient revealed an r score of 0.684, indicating a strong correlation.

The seventh hypothesis: there is an association between giving orders to the female partner and the expectancy that she executes them. Pearson Correlations Coefficient revealed an r score of 0.845, indicating a very strong correlation. Furthermore, the linear analysis of regression of the two variables, performed in order to verify the extent to which the behaviour of giving orders to the female partner can predict the expectancy that she executes them, revealed a positive result.

- For female participants:

The eighth hypothesis: there is an association between engaging into sexual intercourse against the female partner's will and the presence of feelings of fear toward her male partner. Pearson Correlations Coefficient revealed an r score of 0.544, indicating a strong correlation. Furthermore, the linear analysis of regression of the two variables, performed in order to verify the extent to which feelings of fear toward the male partner can lead to the engagement into sexual intercourse against one's will, revealed significant results.

The ninth hypothesis: there is an association between disrespecting feelings and the forbiddance from the male partner to have a job or to study. Pearson Correlations Coefficient revealed an r score of 0.162, indicating a very weak correlation. Also, considering the Sig. score ($0.217 > 0.05$), the hypothesis was rejected.

The tenth hypothesis: there is an association between feelings of fear toward the male partner and his expectations to get the chores done on time. Pearson Correlations Coefficient revealed an r score of 0.534, indicating a strong correlation.

The eleventh hypothesis: there is an association between the male partner's behaviour of giving orders and the female partner's feeling of being a vassal of his. Pearson Correlations Coefficient revealed an r score of 0.718, indicating a very strong correlation. Furthermore, the linear analysis of regression of the two variables, performed in order to verify the extent to which the male partner's behaviour of giving orders can lead to the female partner's feeling of being a vassal of his, revealed significant results.

The twelfth hypothesis: there is an association between the male partner's anger reactions in disagreement situations and his behaviours of verbal violence due to alcohol consumption. Pearson Correlations Coefficient revealed an r score of 0.147, indicating a weak correlation. Also, considering the Sig. score ($0.264 > 0.05$), the hypothesis was rejected.

The thirteenth hypothesis: there is an association between male partner's behaviour of disrespecting feelings and the presence of verbal violence in his behaviour. Pearson Correlations Coefficient revealed an r score of 0.375, indicating an average correlation.

The fourteenth hypothesis: there is an association between the male partner's bullying behaviours and the female partner's feelings of fear toward him. Pearson Correlations Coefficient revealed an r score of 0.346, indicating an average correlation.

When considering constructs liable to social and cultural influences, the contextual factor plays a massive role in the analysis of those dimensions that are to be evaluated. Also, historical timing as well as society's tendencies that are to be analyzed, even if only through a small sample of participants, are extremely important and are not to be neglected or underappreciated when aiming for picturing the reality to be investigated. All the more so, in the case of studying interpersonal and romantic relationships the premises that partners themselves can be subjects to social, historical and familial pressures must consider that family, on its behalf, is a product of that same social and historical context.

Furthermore, when it comes to the phenomenon of gender socialization, an extremely complex dynamic is to be considered, from values and beliefs of behavior to forms of the interaction itself and the way the individual capacities and processing dictate – all situations in double-context: macro social and micro social (Iluț, 2005).

The fact that differences between the two groups of the participants were found in terms of gender doesn't appear that surprising, given the information already presented, that men and women "see" reality differently. Nonetheless, in the context of the evaluated dimensions with the purpose of establishing associations between different pairs of behaviors characteristic of non-physical violence, if, on behalf of men, the tendency was to recognize and admit the presence of those characteristics in their own behavior with their partner, then, on behalf of women, there was a low and medium degree of association that predict the tendency for different behaviors specific to the partner's non-physical violence.

In terms of general tendencies of men, showing off their power in the relationship through specific behaviors (control of the financial resources, the forbiddance of certain things, the demanding of others) comes as a justification if there is the case of behaviors emerging from these (specifically, giving orders or expecting from the partner to execute the expressed orders). Among the most frequently evaluated dimensions were the expectancy that the partner obeys, the financial control and the presence of anger reactions in general disagreement situations, all of them being behaviors on which predictions of other behaviors could be made: the executions of orders, the forbiddance to have a job or to follow an educational program, verbal violence associated to alcohol consumption.

Considering the results for women, the main dimension that was the basis for tolerating other partner's behaviors was the feeling of fear toward him. Also, the impression created by the partner that the woman would have an obedient status in the relationship came out as a significant dimension. The association was between these and the behaviors of engaging into sexual intercourse even without one's will, as well as tolerating the partner's general bullying behavior. Additionally, the inducement of a feeling of submissiveness from and toward the partner is mostly created by the male partner's behavior of giving orders and of adopting a directive attitude toward the woman.

The medium correlations concerning the verbal violence behaviors and the belief that the partner doesn't respect the woman's feelings could indicate a tendency for belittling this aspect of the man's behavior, due to thinking that their language is, generally speaking, more aggressive and not necessarily an intention toward hurting the woman's feelings as much as a characteristic way of expression fully owing to the gender difference.

Also, the dimensions that did not correlate statistically and were rejected due to the fact that they did not show a significant score to confirm the hypothesis are important. The fact that the partners didn't have the tendency to control the finances or to exert social pressures and to impose forbiddances in this direction is an indicator that, through the absence of statistical significance, draws as much attention as those that are statically significant. Thus, following the idea above, the forbiddance to get a job or an education is not seen as a tendency toward disrespecting the female partner's feelings and wishes. This aspect is often seen by women as a protective and careful behavior.

These conclusions represent in fact the two major tendencies that the result of the study illustrated. On the one hand, it is very possible that all these specific dimensions of non-physical abuse are not perceived as being present in the partner's behavior or that they exist in a very small degree. Hence, it is difficult to say with precision what actually means non-physical violence in a couple, given the fact that in this case it is defined by its very own perceptions (equally influenced by those micro and macro social factors that we mentioned).

On the other hand, the very low presence and even the absence of some representative dimensions for non-physical abuse of the male partner's reported behavior of the female participants could be due to the feminist current that is being felt not only through its presence in the society, but also through its effects on it.

Hereby, we can deduce that the contemporary woman is less likely to tolerate the abusive-like behaviors, no matter that these are physical or non-physical. The presence of a partner that does not control the finances or the behaviors of his partner, the less her social life, could be an indicator that the contemporary woman chooses a partner that can treat her equally and right. Another possible explanation for women's results could be the fact that 80% of the participants reported a high (university) and very high (post-university) level of studies, 93.3% of these coming from an urban area. Thus, we can conclude that the high education they received contributes to the personal independence that these women have and that they are manifesting in their relationship.

7. Conclusion

7.1. Conclusions/ Discussion

In terms of general objectives, the present research followed the identification of non-physical violence in a couple's relationship, in report to one's own behavior (the case for men) and in report to the partner's behavior (the case for women). Hence, differences concerning the perceived non-physical behaviors stood out, in the way that men manifested a higher degree of perceiving these behaviors, in regard to women, who reported a medium and low degree of this sort of aspects being present in the partner's behavior. Also, in terms of theoretical objectives, the concepts of family, gender difference, violence and the way these interact and what effects they produce in the individual psychological development were described.

Regarding the practical objectives, the perceptions toward non-physical violence behaviors of the partner were described, as well as the perceptions concerning one's own non-physical violent behavior toward the partner. Differences of perceptions were identified between the two groups regarding the fore-

mentioned behaviors, as well as the associations between different behavioral dimensions and the degree some of these could predict the emergence of others.

The theoretical premises that were formulated constituted the basis on which the applicative part of the research was founded, offering landmarks in the identification of the research data and the establishment of measuring and interpretation criteria of the obtained data. Reaching the both theoretical and practical objectives was reflected on the results of the research itself, the hypotheses being in their majority confirmed with statistically significant results and subsequent interpretation accordant with the psychological described and measured reality. In term of limits of this study, we can mention the fact that the two groups were independent groups, meaning that the men and the women from the two samples did not constitute couples. Still, this limit can be considered a future direction for research, with the purpose of a more precise measurement of what perceptual differences mean regarding any type of behavior taking place in a couple's relationship.

Moreover, the fact that the majority of the participants were individuals coming from an urban area and that have a high level of education could be considered a limit of this study, in the way that a gender perception analysis concerning non-physical violence could be conducted in a less influenced by education or offered opportunities of the urban area environment direction.

In addition, another possible direction for research could approach things from a reversed perspective, meaning that it would realize a measurement of the partner's perceived non-physical violent dimensions from the men's point of view, as for women it would unfold a self-analysis concerning the same dimensions.

We consider that through this study a plus was brought in terms of information about family and the way its relationship with the individual determines its process of development in a higher or lower degree. Also, approaching the subject of gender and identity we hope that a contribution was made toward a more facile clarification and understanding of what gender difference and interpersonal interaction, familial and conjugal are, as well as what effects these complex and dynamic interrelation processes can produce.

Acknowledgments

We hope that treating the subject of non-physical domestic violence, comprising its less visible forms, brought a contribution in the way of drawing the attention on its presence and the existence of the phenomenon, so often neglected and belittled precisely due to its discreetness and being so wide spread. Nonetheless, we consider that the research itself brought a plus of information concerning the ways and the forms that the specific dimensions of the studied phenomenon operate in the specific, concrete reality.

As it points out Pascal Bruckner also, "a lasting couple is, paradoxically, a couple who accepts that he is mortal, and he experiences himself as the relay of an adventure that surpasses him. The power of the love couple is that it is imperfect and malleable, even protected by what makes it vulnerable. Being imperfect, he can be reformed indefinitely. He remains, in essence, a promise thrown over the abyss of doubt, a bet on longevity, an act of trust in the fecund powers of time"(Bruckner, 2011, p. 152).

The challenge of finding a person with whom to develop a harmonious and healthy relationship has perhaps become one of the most important for modern man, and the pathology of family life is also the subject of new theorizations.

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