Dwelling in Shelter Homes: Personality Dispositions, Coping Mechanisms and Depression

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A B S T R A C T

Residing in shelter homes has become a safety option for runaway women. The primary objective was to understand the females' personality dispositions, coping mechanisms, and depression. A purposive sample of 90 female residents of shelter homes from 5 different cities, namely Lahore, Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib, Rawalpindi, and Faisalabad, was recruited. The females aged between 17 to 80 years, with average age 28.23. A correlation survey method was used with Urdu-translated versions of assessment measures. Spearman's correlation and Multiple Linear Regression were used for data analysis. Findings showed that women experiencing low self-esteem reported high depression. Most depressed females were less likely to use a problem-focused coping mechanism. Even though almost all the male perpetrators were educated and employed, it did not reduce the incidence of abuse inflicted on the females. Results can be used to assess the mental well-being of these females and improve their living conditions.

Introduction

In a survey by Thomson Reuters Corporation, Pakistan was ranked as one of the most unsafe countries for women (Anderson, 2011). This insecurity is not only confined to situations outside of their homes; instead, there is a high prevalence of domestic abuse that is faced by these females domestically. Over 5,000 women are estimated to be killed yearly because of domestic violence; others are maimed or disabled (Hansar, 2007). Due to these reasons, women tend to look for safety outside these environments and often run away from their homes. They are often labelled as "runaway women" as females who leave their families without informing them because they don't feel secure with them. It also has a negative connotation as the female is considered immoral for leaving the social constraints of their respectable family set-up. However, these women go because of fear of honor killing, love marriage, Watta Satta and Vani (Tarar, 2016). Catering to this problem, a productive impact of evolution is the springing up of shelter homes worldwide to provide refuge to these abused females. Though the materialization of shelter homes in Pakistan is not chronicled systematically, there is information regarding the opening of some public and private shelter homes. Different private shelter homes exist, including Dastak, Edhi Homes, Panah, Bali Memorial Trust Homes, etc. While it is very crucial, not much research is done on the perpetrators of abuse in Pakistan. Some research in other areas has shown interesting findings. Rapp et al. (2012) found that in India and Bangladesh if the men (perpetrators) were educated, they were less likely to inflict physical abuse on females. It agrees with the notion that education level does positively affect how males act towards their partners in interpersonal relationships.

The present research examined the relationship between personality dispositions, coping mechanisms, and depression in females residing in shelter homes. Domestic violence is an extensive area explained over time by multiple researchers and through profound phenomena. One such theory, "Battered Women Syndrome (BWS)", has expanded upon domestic violence by rationalizing murder committed by battered women. A "battered woman" is described as any female with continued physical and psychological abuse inflicted on her (Walker, 2006). Thus, specific components of the BWS are common to most females in the same situation: Learned helplessness, low self-esteem, impaired functioning, loss of the assumption of vulnerability, fear and terror, anger, diminished alternatives, the cycle of abuse, hypervigilance, and a high tolerance for cognitive inconsistency (Fulero & Wrightsman, 2009).

Our study mainly focuses on two personality dispositions namely: Self-esteem and emotional instability. Folkman and Lazarus (1985) grouped the Ways of Coping Scale into two categories: Problem-focused coping, which aims to fix the issue and modify the stressor in contrast to the second, emotion-focused coping, which is directed towards reducing the emotional distress triggered by the situation. A third type, avoidance coping, is when an individual's efforts are towards denying or avoiding dealing directly with the demands of the stressor (Cronkite & Moss, 1995).

Females in shelter homes have been studied for a long time since the issue of domestic violence and other problems have been prevalent since the dawn of time. In a study by Mitchell and Hodson (1982), 60 battered women residing in a shelter home in the USA were examined. All women were physically abused at least twice by a male figure. The study aimed to identify a relationship between stress, personal resources, social support, and coping with adjustment. When the females had less active-cognitive coping, more avoidance coping and greater severity of violence inflicted upon them, depression was also higher. Furthermore, avoidance coping, and level of violence were also correlated in a positive direction. Miskofski (2001) recruited 30 females from three domestic violence shelters who were asked to complete the questionnaire. The central hypothesis stated that victims of physical violence were more likely to have higher depression, and victims of non-physical violence would have lower self-esteem. However, a significant positive correlation was found between the RSE and CES-D, indicating that many abused women have low self-esteem and depression concurrently. Rodriguez (2011) studied 22 women in shelter homes under the Department of Social Welfare and Development. The purpose of the research was two-fold: To identify the psychological health and coping styles used by abused women and to develop a relationship between the two variables. Regarding the coping mechanisms used, the following were used in the highest frequency; Positive reappraisal, looking for social support, taking responsibility, and planned problem-solving.

After analyzing the disparity between the rate of violence against marginalized women in Pakistan and research on their mental health, the need for this study is imperative. There has been individual focus on the variables in question, however, the current research would be aiming at a more holistic approach.

Hypotheses

- ➢ High emotional instability is likely to be related with high depression among females residing in shelter homes.
- ➢ High negative self-esteem is likely to be related with high depression among females residing in shelter homes.
- ➢ High problem-focused coping is likely to be related with low depression among females residing in shelter homes.
- ➢ High avoidance-focused coping is likely to be related with high depression among females residing in shelter homes.
- ➢ High emotion-focused coping is likely to be related with low depression among females residing in shelter homes.
- ➢ Individuals with higher level of education would inflict lower physical abuse on the females.
- ➢ Females with lower level of education were more likely to suffer physical abuse.
- ➢ Individuals who were employed were less likely to inflict physical abuse on the females.

Methodology
Design

A co-relation survey research design was used. This design investigates the relationships between variables without interference from the researcher (Bhandari, 2022).

Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling technique was used. The researcher finalizes what information they need, and which people can provide it specifically (Nikolopoulou, 2023).

Sample

Ninety females from government funded domestic shelters from Lahore, Rawalpindi, Nankana Sahib, Sheikhupura, and Faisalabad were taken. The data collection was spanned over the course of three months. All 90 participants filled in the questionnaires. These are the collective responses taken from the cities' various shelter homes. The participants were aged between 17 to 80 years. The average was 28.23 years, and the SD was 8.62. All women reported some form of abuse.

Measures

Personality Assessment Questionnaire: The brief adult version has 63 items with seven subscales. Out of these, only 2 subscales were used i.e., negative self-esteem and emotional instability. A 4- point Likert scale with scores from (1) almost never true of me to (4) almost always true of me (Rohner & Ali, 2016) is used.

Brief Coping Orientation of Problems Experienced Inventory (Brief COPE): The original version consists of 28 items which assess effective and ineffective methods of coping during an intense life event out of which 25 are used for the Urdu version. It measures 3 sub-scales of coping styles: problem focused coping, emotion-focused coping and avoidant coping.

Hamilton Rating Scale for Depression Urdu (HAM-D-U): A 21-item has been developed to rate severity of depression in adults (Hamilton, 1960). Only 17 items are used for assessment.

Ethical Considerations

For all the measures used in the study prior permission was sought from the respective authors. Written informed consent was obtained from all. They were debriefed regarding the study. Participants were told that they had no compulsion to answer any questions which they felt uncomfortable in doing so. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained.

Procedure

Permissions for all the scales were sought. Permissions were also taken from the Applied Psychology Department at Kinnaird College for Women, as well as Office of Research Innovation and Commercialization (ORIC) at Kinnaird College. All shelter homes were approached prior to the research for permission. No participant left the study and all 90 respondents participated voluntarily. After administering the demographic questionnaire, the Adult Personality Assessment Questionnaire (PAQ), brief COPE Scale, and Hamilton Rating Scale for Depression – Urdu (HAM-D-U) were administered to the participants. It took about five to seven minutes to fill in the form for each participant.

Statistical Analyses

IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, SPSS (Version 22) was used for the statistical analyses. For demographic variables, descriptive statistics were run as well as cross-tabulations. Reliability of all scales used in the research was assessed. Spearman's Rho Correlation analysis to see the correlations among personality dispositions, coping mechanisms, and depression was used. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis was run on the predictor variable of depression.

Results

Table I

Psychometric Properties of Study Variables (N=90)

Variables	M	SD	Range	α	Skewness	Kurtosis
1. NSE	22.74	5.57	9-36	0.74	-0.71	-0.65
2. EI	24.86	5.20	9-36	0.69	-1.45	0.49
3. AC	13.79	5.32	0-27	0.64	-0.19	-0.02
4. PFC	18.42	4.53	0-24	0.84	-1.88	-1.04
5. EFC	13.94	4.28	0-21	0.61	-0.94	-0.92
6. HAM-D-U	19.98	9.63	0-68	0.84	0.78	-1.15

Note: NSE = Negative Self-Esteem, EI = Emotional Instability, AC = Avoidance-Coping, PFC = Problem-Focused Coping, EFC = Emotion-Focused Coping, HAM-D-U = Hamilton Rating Scale for Depression – Urdu.

Results shown in Table I suggest that sample distributions are free of significant skewness and kurtosis i.e., all values fall within the acceptable criteria of ±1.96, indicating that the distributions are approximately

normal. According to Wim et al. (2008), Cronbach's alpha values between 0.6 to 0.8 are sufficient. The Cronbach alpha value for HAM-D-U and Problem Focused Coping subscale is good. The Cronbach alpha value for all the other scales falls under the category of acceptable and fair.

Table II

Descriptive Statistics and Spearman's Rho Correlation among Personality Dispositions, Coping Mechanisms and Depression in Females in Shelter Homes of Pakistan (N = 90)

Variables	*n*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. NSE	90	----					
2. EI	90	----	-------				
3. AC	90	----	----	------			
4. PFC	90	----	-----	-----	-----		
5. EFC	90	----	----	----	-----	------	
6. HAM-D-U	90	.47***	.16	.29**	-.19*	-.02	----

*Note: *p<.05. **p<.01.***p<.001.*

Spearman's Rho correlation analysis was run to explore the relationship between personality dispositions, coping mechanisms, and depression among females in shelter homes of Pakistan, since the data was not approximately normally distributed. Results indicate that HAM-D-U has a significant, positive and moderate relationship with NSE. This indicates that females who have depression are more likely to have negative self-esteem. HAM-D-U also has a significant, positive, and weak relationship with AC suggesting that women who are depressed are somewhat likely to use avoidance coping mechanism. Lastly, it is demonstrated by the results that HAM-D-U has a significant, negative, and weak relationship with problem-focused coping. It suggests that females who have depression are less likely to have a problem-focused coping mechanism.

Table III

Multiple Linear Regression showing Personality Dispositions, Coping Mechanisms and Depression in Females in Shelter Homes of Pakistan (N=90)

Note: SE = Standard Error; CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; *p<.05.**p<.01.***p<.001.

Predictor	B	95% CI for B		SE B	β	R^2	△ R^2
		LL	UL				
			Depression				
Step I						.26 ***	
Constant	.26	-.28	.79	.27	--		
NSE	.53	.32	.74	.10	.58***		
EI	-.15	-.37	.07	.11	-.16		
Step II						.30 ***	.04
Constant	.57	-.11	.24	.34	--		
NSE	.49	.26	.71	.11	.53***		
EI	-.16	-.40	.07	.12	-.17		
AC	.08	-.15	.31	.12	.08		
PFC	-.21	-.42	.01	.11	-.21		
EFC	.09	-.13	.30	.11	.09		

Multiple Linear regression was run to identify the predictors of depression among females in domestic shelters of Pakistan. Two dimensions of Personality Assessment Questionnaire, negative self-esteem and emotional instability as well as three dimensions of Brief Coping Inventory, avoidance-coping, problem-focused coping, and emotion-focused coping, were entered as predictor variables in the model for regression. Depression among these females was identified as outcome variable. All regression assumptions were fulfilled completely.

In model I, two predictor variables, i.e., negative self-esteem and emotional instability were entered, and the regression model was significant, $R^2 = .26$, $F (2,87) = 14.94$, $p < 0.001$. Thus, two dimensions of Personality Assessment Questionnaire are explaining 26% variance in depression among females in domestic shelters. Among the predictors that were entered, negative self-esteem emerged as significant positive predictor of depression among these females. This suggests that females who have higher negative self-esteem were more likely to suffer from depression.

In model II, five predictor variables, i.e., two dimensions of personality dispositions that are negative self-esteem and emotional instability, along with three dimensions of brief coping inventory i.e., avoidance-coping, problem-focused coping, and emotion-focused coping were entered, and the regression model came significant, $R^2 = .30$, $F (5,84) = 7.07$, $p < 0.001$. Thus, two dimensions of Personality Assessment Questionnaire and three dimensions of Brief COPE Inventory are explaining 30% variance in depression among females in domestic shelters. When the effect of model I was excluded from model II, model II became insignificant, $\Delta R^2 = .04$, $F (3, 84) = 1.61$, $p = .193$.

Discussion

Our research aimed to identify a relationship between the IVs, personality dispositions and coping mechanisms, and DV, depression, among females living in shelter homes. Despite that fact that many of these females came to the shelters for different reasons, maybe because of living together in the same environment enabled them to have similar personality dispositions. In order to facilitate the females in their future, it is essential to understand the context and role of abuse which they suffered. In light of previous literature, the following study was conducted and yielded significant results that could potentially aid in future research.

The demographic-based hypothesis that was formulated based on common perceptions and past research were not found to be necessarily true. Results of this study were in contrast to prior research where a high level of husband's education meant lower level of domestic violence (Rapp et. al., 2012). Presently, we found that the education level of the perpetrator did not lower the incidence of abuse rather, more educated men inflicted more physical abuse on the females. This was also true in terms of their employment level, meaning that employed men also conducted higher physical abuse. While theoretically, it would make more sense that if the men are educated and employed, there would be a lower level of frustration and less of it inflicted on the female. However, we saw the opposite. Possible reasons could be that even while being educated, the men might not have learnt what constitutes a healthy relationship. Furthermore, job stress could be also adding to the frustration of the men. Another plausible explanation is that cultural and societal influences in Pakistan are extremely high. Among family and certain societies, domestic violence is not considered a pivotal issue which could have been ingrained in the minds of these men.

Secondly, we hypothesized that high negative self-esteem is likely to be related with high depression among females residing in shelter homes, which was supported. The Spearman's Rho correlation results showed a significant positive relationship of depression with negative self-esteem. Furthermore, the Multiple Linear Regression results also indicated that negative self-esteem emerged as a significant positive predictor of depression among these females. These results were in synchronization with previous studies. The research by Miskofski (2001) assessed depression and self-esteem in women living in shelter homes who had experienced violence in their relationships with men either as a husband, father, or brother. Results showed a positive correlation among low self-esteem and depression. Depression and self-esteem are two completely different concepts. In terms of females who are suffering from abuse, they tend to go into a depressive phase (Malik et al., 2021). This consequently leads to a reduction in their self-esteem as most of them tend to blame themselves for the situation they are in. They start considering themselves worthless and begin assuming that they are failures, which could be an explanatory link between our variables.

Thirdly, high problem-focused coping was assumed to be related with low depression among females in shelter homes. This was also supported. The Spearman's Rho correlation results showed a significant, negative and weak relationship of depression with problem-focused coping. The results agree with the findings of previous studies. The research conducted by Rodriguez (2011) was on 22 females living in shelter homes. Results showed that problem-focused coping was used by the women in the highest frequency. In many situations, instead of distracting themselves from the abuse they have undergone, many

women find it easy to focus on the problem at hand and figure out a solution. For women, when they directly confront and accept the reality that their physical and psychological boundaries are being broken, it leads to them working on how to find a way out. Thus, it makes sense that once the issues are being solved either by coming to a shelter home or by leaving their abuser, they tend to feel less depressed.

The fourth hypothesis high avoidance-coping is likely to be related with high depression among females residing in shelter homes was also accepted. The Spearman's Rho correlation results showed a significant, positive and weak relationship of depression with avoidance-focused coping. Mitchell and Hodson's (1982) study validate the finding of this study where females living in shelter homes with depression used avoidance coping mechanism in the highest frequency. Avoidance-coping is used when people tend to avoid the stressor in any way and do not deal with the underlying emotional and physical toll that it took on them. If the females did not accept that they were in a shelter home because they were being abused, it led to having depressive symptoms. They were using different strategies to distract themselves but not dealing with the pain associated with their situation. All other hypotheses were rejected according to the results of the present study because they were insignificant.

Conclusion

To sum it, the present study was successful in establishing a relation between personality dispositions, coping mechanisms, and depression in females who have been abused and are residing in shelter homes of Pakistan as a result of it. It gave important insights into the perpetrators of abuse of women which were mostly their husbands. While families and strangers also abuse these females, the probability of this happening is much lower. This provides evidence that most abuse occurs in the context of a domestic environment where a dominating husband elicits all sorts of abuse including physical, psychological, sexual and verbal, on his wife. Furthermore, having children did not affect the rate of abuse as would be thought which could also be a reason as to why domestic violence is increasing day by day maybe due to children learning this violence at their homes and then exhibiting it as they grow up. We can also conclude that these men being educated and employed does not lower the incidence of abuse. All in all, we can conclude that the present study provides multiple avenues for possible future research.

Limitations

While the present study took a holistic approach between personality dispositions, coping mechanisms, and depression, there were certain limitations.

Firstly, the major problem was the sample size. Due to that, there were statistical problems that arose majorly during the data analysis. As the scales' reliability was already low, it was further reduced because sample size was too low to improve it. Additionally, maybe due to the low sample size, there was a problem in confirming some of the hypotheses as with limited data, limited responses were assessed. Additionally, the number of women taken from each shelter home were not exactly equal. While this may not be a problem initially, differences in demographic characteristics as education, profession, children, types, and years of abuse may have been affected. Perpetrators of abuse in one city may have different MO "modus operandi". This is the behavioral patterns and actions that an abuse perpetrator may inflict on their victims such as the type and years of abuse. Thus, the findings might not be generalizable all over Pakistan as the current shelter homes are only based in Punjab.

Recommendations

Firstly, the present study can be replicated in the future with a possibly larger sample which would increase generalizability of the research. Secondly, other personality measures could be used as well with higher reliability so that findings that may develop are more accurate. Furthermore, a comparative study can also be done with females outside the shelters who also undergo domestic abuse yet are still living with their perpetrators. It would provide a comparative analysis of whether the women in shelter homes are much better off physically, psychologically, and socially among other aspects.

Implications

In addition to the items discussed to this point, this study also carries immediate implications for understanding the personality dispositions and mental health of females that are residing in shelter homes and their perpetrators. They can also be used to improve the conditions of these shelter homes which may consequently promote physical and mental growth of the residents. Furthermore, they provide major insight into incidence and types of abuse that most women go through which can help in maybe drawing up personality profiles of perpetrators of abuse.

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