

# Comparing Abused and Normal Male Students in Tehran Guidance Schools: Emphasizing the Co-Dependency of Their Mothers

Mohamad Saleh Sangin Ostadi, Esmail Safari, Somayeh Akbari, Kaveh Qaderi Bagajan

**Abstract**—The aim of this study is to compare abused and normal male students in Tehran guidance schools with emphasis on the co-dependency of their mothers. The method of this study is based on survey method and comparison (Ex-Post Facto). The method of sampling is also multi-stage cluster. Accordingly, we did sampling from secondary schools of education and training in Tehran, including 12 schools with levels of first, second and third. Each of the schools represents the three – high, medium and low-economic and social conditions. In the following, three classes from every school and 20 students from each class were randomly selected. By (CTQ) abused and normal students were separated that 670 children were recognized as normal and 50 children as abused. Then, 50 children were randomly selected from normal group and compared with abused group. Using Spanned-Fischer Co-dependency Scale, we compared mothers of abused and normal students. The results showed that mothers of the abused children have higher co-dependency average comparing to the mothers of the normal children.

**Keywords**—Co-dependency, child abuse, abused children, parental psychological health

## I. INTRODUCTION

**C**O-DEPENDENCY is a maladaptive pattern of problem-solving and a lifestyle which is seen within the framework of a set of norms and rules of the family manifests, co-dependency is a model in which the person is so fascinated and influenced by the other person that forgets his/her his own. A reason for the situation is that these people search joy and peace out of themselves and rely on others to alleviate their suffering and anxiety. In other words, these people are comfortable only when the people around them are satisfied [1]. This destructive pattern is a tendency for the emergence of passive and excessively servant behaviors which negatively influence the person's relationships and quality of life. Co-dependency is a self-missing disease and it can be defined as follow: Any disorder or suffering that is accompanied with a focus on the needs and behaviors of others. It should be said that co-dependency is the most common addiction which people get addicted to [2]. Co-dependents have low self-esteem and look for anything outside of themselves to make them feel better. They find it hard to "be themselves" Some

try to feel better through alcohol, drugs or nicotine - and become addicted. Others may develop compulsive behaviors like gambling or indiscriminate sexual activity. In this regard, Drew said [3] co-dependent is a person who allows others to affect him or her by their misbehavior and create an obsessive desire to control and make change in him or her. Co-dependency is a mental health problem; Bradshaw, [4] a pioneer in codependency treatment, said that codependency is a plague on the earth, and even plague is not comparable to the ravages and risks of co-dependency. It is estimated that 40 million Americans are co-dependent and the majority of these people are women [5]. Due to the characteristics mentioned about the co-dependency; it should be paid attention to child abuse and its features Since the number of reports on injuries and social harm to the children is on the rise these days, most countries and international organizations, pay more attention to children and their problems in order to reduce the risk to their lives as much as possible [6]. Different definitions have been provided on child abuse but, on the basis of common definitions, it should be said that, Child abuse is a complicated set of parent's behavior and child's answers, and a multidimensional personal, family and sociological phenomenon. It has been referred to each type of body or mental damage, sexual abuse or exploitation and lack of investigation into child's fundamental needs who are under 18 years by others or family's members that is not accidental and it is expended from depriving children from food, dress, shelter and parent's kindness to sexual and body harms, which clearly lead to death or damage [7]. Child abuse constitutes all forms of physical and emotional ill treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power [8]. Child maltreatment, is a global public health problem that associated with significant burden of suffering. Nationally representative data from the 2012 Canadian Community Health Survey quoted from [9] indicated that 32% of the general adult population reported experiencing child abuse [9]. Results from a comparable United States (US) survey have shown similar prevalence of physical abuse (18%) and sexual abuse (11%) [9] in Iran, owing to cultural problems, there is not an exact statistic concerning child abuse prevalence and a few surveys have been conducted on it [10]. Another study was conducted on the views of seven hundred persons above 18 years in a number of Tehran districts regarding child abuse and its

M. S. Sangin Ostadi, E. Safari and S. Akbari are with the Department of Social Sciences Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran (e-mail: ostadi166@yahoo.com, esmail.safari9@gmail.com, danesh\_computer19@yahoo.com).

K. Qaderi Bagajan, is with the Department of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran (corresponding author phone: +00988735244261; e-mail: kawe.ghaderi@gmail.com).

confrontation ways. Based on its results, more than half of them believed child abuse in Iran society has a high level. According to their view, things such as low level of thought and culture, parents' illiteracy and their life problems are the factors of child abuse in our society, 51 percent of male responders and 54.2 percent of female responders express that they see child abuse among their relative's family and neighbors [11]. On the causes of child abuse it should be said that several factors contribute to child abuse and researchers have identified several factors. Baird [12] for example, showed that there is a relationship between child abuse and parental mental health problems. And fathers who has experienced mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety, commit more child abuses. Edleson [13] found that there is a relationship between the properties of the maternal and child abuse too. Mothers who abused their children often have mental health problems, especially anxiety, depression, and poor parenting skills. Now, according to what was presented on the subject of the present study, it should be noted that as, on the one hand, the co-dependency has been known as a mental health problem and, on the other hand, due to the codependency characteristics, there is an inaction from mothers against authority in the family, that mostly includes the father, and this inaction, specially, when the father has mental health problems and aggressive parenting style, could have a role in child persecution and neglect of care. Thus, finally, we are to answer the question whether there is a significance difference between abused and non-abused students regarding the co-dependency of their mothers or not?

## II. THE EMPIRICAL BACKGROUND

Mesghali et al. [14] compared co-dependency between two groups. The descriptive research was causal-comparative and all the women on the verge of divorce and normal married women living in Esfahan city formed the statistic society. Participants included 50 women on the verge divorce and 50 married women who were selected by convenience sampling. Research instruments included ENRICH Couple Scales and the Holyock Codependency Index (HCI). The results of multivariate analysis of covariance showed that there is a significant difference between two groups in focus on outside, responsiveness, co-dependency and material satisfaction. The results showed that the level of co-dependency and its dimensions such as focus on outside, responsiveness, co-dependency and also marital satisfaction of women on the verge of divorce is more than normal married women.

Conducting a study entitled "The relationship of co-dependency with emotional regulation difficulties in women in Isfahan", [15] began to investigate whether emotion regulation difficulties in women is associated with co-dependency or not. The method was descriptive and correlational. The statistical population consisted of all Isfahan women and the studied. The sample included 450 females who were selected by available sampling method. Research instruments included Codependency Assessment Tool (CODAT) and Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DER). The results of this study showed that the relationship between, co-dependency is

significant with difficulties in emotion regulation and there is also a significant multi dependency among the components of emotional regulation difficulties and co-dependency and components of difficulties in emotion regulation is predictable via components of co-dependency.

Khak Rangin and Fathi studied [16] the "Family factors associated with child abuse" in district 15 in Tehran. They concluded that parents' knowledge of properties of child growing period and their access to social support have an inverse relationship with applying violence against their children. These also have a direct relation with parents' violent experience in their family, parents' social isolation, marital disputes and family dimension with child abuse by parents. In another study done by [17] entitled "checking out prevalence of child abuse in dependents to opium" that referred to addiction treatment clinic in Yazd, there was a direct relationship between child abuse and dependence on opium. It turned out that low education level, family history of divorce and being abused in childhood may play a role in resulting this phenomenon. Also research results by Mary Beth et al quoted from [18] about child abuse in American urban and rural areas in 2010 showed that many stresses in rural and urban abusive families, is the same such as mental health problems, alcohol dependence and a history of family violence

In a survey conducted by Massimo Bardly and Simula Borgotoni, quoted from [19] as parents and children conflict resolution and violence within the family in Italy, the aim was to understand what the factors are that lead to violence in Italian families. So they considered the family structure and characteristics of children and parents as important factors in the rise of violence. Their method of work was survey, thus, they distributed 2388 questionnaires among families who lived in the region of Tuscany in Italy. The questionnaire included two sections, one section covered the cultural context of families and important events that had occurred potentially during the 1998 and was a hierarchy of factors that have affected families and the other covered possible answers to open questions. They concluded in their work that the occurrence of poor violence in Italy is 77 percent and extreme violence is 80 percent. They also showed that, more violence occurs in low-income families and in families that parents suffer health problems and feel great psychological pressure. Also, young and problematic children are more prone to violence

### A. Research Theoretical Framework

Conceptual framework will be in a combined form. In most theories focus will be on a particular factor but violence includes a set of causes and conditions that contribute to its emergence in family life. Strauss is one of the leading researchers in study of violence and tried to design a systemic theory in an approach in which various obtained results on familial violence can be discussed. In this viewpoint, family is considered as a system with open, closed, or porous borders with its surroundings. This equation takes place as positive-negative feedback and latent goals in system have an influence

on feedback. For example, it is possible that violence would be an effective mean in achieving the target or saving survival of system [19]. Violence will be affected through the way the internal and external family system reacts to it and negative feedbacks will reduce it. Accordingly, different forms of violence depend on several factors. Strauss named specific factors of family violence system and generally resort to violence will achieve its ends and positive reinforcement. On the other hand, not using violence aggravates conflicting or negative positions. So finally and according to person labeling theory, violent factor is confirmed by the environment and finds himself obliged to repeat the violent behavior. System analysis, shows novel behavior patterns that finds possibility show itself off according to feedback from system and therefore it can be determined that resorting to violence creates more violence or stability in its amount [20]. On the other hand, in order to provide a proper context for understanding codependency, [19] used some concepts and theoretical frameworks adopted from family systems theory and began to explain co-dependency based on this theory. In this model family is seen as a set of related components and any change in one part of the family system affects also the rest of the system. According to this pattern, the main purpose of adjusting the family system is each family member should achieve an interpersonal balance and a family system and the ultimate goal is to arrive to stability. According to this theory, every part of the system is at the same time an independent person and also an integral part of the family system as well. Emotional system, as the main force of life, leads family members towards making interactive achievements, such as providing food and shelter, breeding, and preserving life and the other aspects of social relations. The degree in which the person can exist as an emotionally independent individual, depends on the balance between the person's feelings and family system, the balance in the level of separation which the person has achieved and his ability in dealing with life. In this case, when a person is in search of a wife, unconsciously selects a person who is similar to him in terms of separation and fusion. Thus this theory assumes that it is wrong to think that someone with apparent disorder, is a patient but his/her spouse is a healthy person According to family system theory, co-dependency originates from the disturbing patterns of family that is primarily rooted in the family emotional patterns. These patterns include the mechanisms that relate to anxiety which occurs in forms of addictive and obsessive behaviors. Lack of awareness of personal feelings and external focus on someone else leads into the lack of a coherent individuality, interpersonal separation and having problems in providing the desired level of intimacy [19]. As the codependent mother has failed to create balance between intimacy and individuality and is inclined to passive behaviors, we, therefore, make the theory as the base of our work to see whether it is associated with child abuse or not.

### B. Research Hypothesis

It seems that there is a significant difference between abused and normal male students in terms of their mothers, co-dependency.

### III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

According to subject of the research two research methods were used in the study. The first step is a survey study to examine the situation of child abuse in secondary school students in Tehran and separating them from one another based on the experience of child abuse on the basis of (CTQ) questionnaire and then after identifying these children and filling Spann-Fischer Co-dependency Scale by the mothers of the children, Comparison method (Ex-Post Facto) was used to determine the relationship between child abuse and the co-dependency of mothers. The Statistical population was all male students of the first, second and third grades in Tehran guidance schools who enrolled in 2013-2014 the academic year in Tehran schools. The sampling method was also multi-stage cluster; so that from secondary schools of education and training in Tehran, 12 schools with levels of first, second and third representing the three conditions of economic and social - high, medium and low were selected. And three class from every school and 20 students from each class were randomly selected. Thus the number of studied individuals were 720. By Childhood Trauma Questionnaire abused and normal students were separated that 670 children were recognized as normal and 50 children as abuse. But because of matching between two groups, 50 children were randomly selected from normal group and compared with abused group, then in order to compare the co-dependency of the mothers of the abused and normal students, the mothers were invited and Spann-Fischer questionnaire was used to assess the mothers' co-dependency. In the last, the data were collected and analyzed. To collect the data, the following questionnaires were used in this study:

#### A. Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ)

In order to assess child abuse, childhood trauma questionnaire (CTQ) is used, which Bernstein and his colleagues [21] made it and in 1995 its final copy in 53 articles was presented. CTQ evaluates harming according to 5 scales and provides one general mark which is nominated as Global Maltreatment Scale, which includes emotional, bodily, sexual damage, emotional and bodily neglect. To mark the items Likert five-point scale is used. Bernstein et al. [21] have reported the reliability of CTQ of different factors based on retest and Cronbach's Alpha between 0.79 and 0.94. Furthermore, [22] by using bisect method and Cronbach's Alpha, the reliability of CTQ in several factors was obtained between 0.65 and 0.94. In [21]-[23], to determine the validity of CTQ, factors' analysis method was used and the obtained factors were consistent with the questionnaire's subscales.

#### B. Spann-Fischer Co-Dependency Test

This test is a 16-question formal academic test for measuring codependency that is answered through Likert 6-pieces spectrum and two questions have reverse scoring.

Spann Fisher prepared, after approving the tests' validity and reliability, the test's 15-question form in 1990 after validating (Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 77% the abbreviation "S F CS") and offered it to the academic community. Spann and Fischer conducted a number of comparing studies in 1991 and the studies, lead into adding a question to the test. The test's 16-question form, prepared in 1991, has been used in the present study. This questionnaire has been validated, by Ashraf, [24] Internal consistency method was used to evaluate the reliability of questionnaire. The obtained Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the test was 73%. The split-half reliability coefficient was calculated based on both Gutmann and Spearman-Brown method and the achieved amount was 74% which indicates the reliability of the questionnaire. Furthermore, the correlation between the two halves was equal to 62% that is at an acceptable level.

#### IV. RESULTS

##### A. The Age of the Mothers

The age of the mothers of both abused and non-abused groups comes in Table I, as it is seen the average age of the mothers in the two groups is somehow at range. The minimum and maximum age of the mothers and the standard deviation is also shown in Table I.

TABLE I  
THE AGE OF THE MOTHERS

Group	Number	Standard Deviation	Average	Maximum	Minimum
abused	50	7,47	38,3	47	31
non-abused	50	8,69	39,1	48	29

##### B. Education Level

Table II shows education level of mothers in both groups of studied children.

TABLE II  
EDUCATION LEVEL

Group	Master's degree and higher	BS	Diploma and Associate Degree	High school diploma	Illiterate
abused	0	1	9	11	29
non-abused	5	7	20	10	8

##### C. Employment Status

The employment status of mothers of two groups of the children has been shown in Table III. As it can be seen 11 mothers of children who have experienced child abuse are employed and 39 of them are housewives. In contrast, 28 mothers of children with no experience of child abuse are practitioners and 22 others are housewives.

TABLE III  
EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Group	Housewife	Practitioner
Abused	39	11
non-abused	22	28

In this part, using T-test of two independent groups, the co-dependency of the mothers in the two groups of children are

compared and evaluated. Table IV shows the results of the T-test in two independent groups, the co-dependency average score in mothers with abused children is 74.49 and on the contrary, the average score of non-abused children's mothers is 67.21. And this indicates that mothers of the abused children have a higher co-dependency average in comparison to the mothers of the normal children. The other variables, including the maximum and minimum codependency score and standard deviation, are shown in Table IV too. But in order to achieve an accurate statistical assess, the average of the two groups was compared using T-test. As shown in Table IV, T value is 11.27 and sig is 0.000 and that indicates there is a statistically significant difference between the co-dependency of mothers of abused children and those of the non-abused children. Therefore, the research hypothesis that there is a significant difference between the codependency level in two groups of abused and non-abused children is confirmed with 99% confidence coefficient.

TABLE IV  
T-TEST OF TWO INDEPENDENT GROUPS

Group	Standard Deviation	Average	Maximum	Minimum	The statistical Values
Abused	19,35	74,49	87	34	T= 11.27
Non-abused	17,68	67,21	79	28	Sig=0.000

#### V. DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to compare the abused and non-abused children among students in Tehran guidance male schools in terms of the co-dependency of their mothers. According to the results, the children who were subject to child abuse have codependent mothers very likely. And this finding is in line with findings by [12], [13], [19], [17] that confirm parents' psychological health role in child abuse. It also is in line with findings by [25], that co-dependency is related to the person and his-her family's mental health problem. As a conclusion of the study, it should be noted that according to family system theory about co-dependency that as family is seen as a set of related components in this model where any changes in one part of the family system involves other parts of family system, the co-dependency of the mother normally occurred because of a powerful father and it negatively affected the rest of the family system which led to neglecting the child and surrendering to the authority (father), the probability of molestation and neglecting the child rises. In other words, since the codependent mothers have not been able to reach a balance between the individuality and the family system and have passively been surrendered to the demands of their spouse, the situation has, therefore, left an impact on educating and taking care of the child and the aggression implied by father from time to time, aggravates with passivity and assertiveness of mother and indirectly rises the possibility of neglecting the child and being abused. But it should be noted that it should be cautious about the conclusions of this study as due to the nature of the discussions and consequently the research method used (ex-post) there is not the possibility of concluding a clear causal

relationship. Another limitation of the study was that due to the sensitivity of child abuse issue, winning the schools' cooperation was very difficult and because of the especial sensitivity of studying girls they not studied and it is recommended that future studies use groups of girls and also the researchers conduct researches on this issue with more controlling variables and with different cultures. Finally, and according to the findings it is suggested that experts pay more attention to the mothers' psychological health, co-dependent mothers in particular, so as, by creating a healthy positive relationship based on partnership in the family, provide the basis for proper education and care from the children.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors wish to thank all of those who have supported this research for their useful comments during its completion. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the Department of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Allameh Tabataba'i University, and Many thanks to all the mothers, children and officials who helped us in this research and the study could not be conducted without their cooperation. Many thanks to them.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Grellman, R. (2013). What is co-dependency. Therapist's Guide to Clinical Intervention. ddrobg@comcast.net
- [2] Farsham, A., Mobaseri, M. And Davoodi, I. (2014). The relationship between depression and attachment styles with female students, Personality and Individual Differences Journal. No. 5(3): 61-74.
- [3] Drew, J. (2009). *Codependency, in Sex and Society*. New York: Roberts Inc.
- [4] Bradshaw, J (1990) .“Is Everyone Codependent? *Utne Reader*, May/June, p. 26.
- [5] Martsolf DS, Hughes-Hummer C, Estok P, Zeller R. Codependency in male and female helping professionals. *Arch Psychiatr Nurs*. 1999; 13(2):97- 103
- [6] Khoshabi, K. (2008). Child abuse: types of physical, sexual, emotional abuse and inattention to infants, Tehran, Ghatreh Publications
- [7] Norman RE, Byambaa M, De R, et al.( 2012) The long-term health consequences of child physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect. A systematic review and meta-analysis. *PLoS Med* 2012; 9: e 1001349.
- [8] Yekta, M., Bagherian, F. & Salehi Nezhad, M.A. (2011). The attitudes of adults toward child abuse. *Social and Behavioral Sciences* 30 (2011):278 – 282.
- [9] Afifi, T. O., MacMillan, H.L., Taillieu, T., Cheung, K., Turner, S., Tonmyr, L. & Hovdestad, W. (2015). Relationship between child abuse exposure and reported contact with child protection organizations: Results from the Canadian Community Health Survey. *Child Abuse & Neglect* 46 (2015):198–206.
- [10] Seydi, M. (2007). *Sorrowful for life*, Tehran, Shirazeh.
- [11] Ghomashchi, F. (2008). Child abuse and its consequences on the psychological-social development of abused children. Tehran: law enforcement social assistance Publications. 48-56.
- [12] Baird, S. C. (1988). Development of risk assessment indices for the Alaska Department of Health and Social Service. In: *Validation Research in CPS Risk Assessment: Three Recent Studies* (ed Tatara T.), pp. 91-136. American Public Welfare Association.
- [13] Edleson, J. L. (1999), Problem with children's witnessing of domestic violence, National Electronic Network on violence against women, Available in [www.vaw.umn.edu](http://www.vaw.umn.edu).
- [14] Mesghali, Sh., Aghaii, A. and Ghorbani, M (2014). Comparison of codependence and common marital satisfaction of normal married women and on the verge of divorce. *Knowledge and research in applied psychology*. 15 (58): 4-16.
- [15] Motiyan, S., Ghorbani, M. and Golparvar, M. (2014). Codependency relationship with emotion regulation difficulties in women in Isfahan. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*.6 (1):35-40.
- [16] Khak Rangin, M. & Fathi, M. (2008). Family factors associated with child abuse: *Journal of Social Welfare*. 9 (33):41-52.
- [17] Kholasezadeh, G., Basharsost, N., Ahmadi, N., & Dastgerdi, Gh. (2007). Investigation of the prevalence of child abuse in the addicted people who referred to Khodmarouf addiction disuse clinic in Yazd, *Journal of Medical Sciences, Shahid Sadoghi Yazd*. 18(3): 199-206.
- [18] Haji Aliakbari, N. (2015). Comparing your unconditional acceptance, loneliness and control source among codependent and non-codependent persons. *Personality psychology master's thesis*. Islamic Azad, University: Karaj.
- [19] Tayebi, M. (2014). Social factors affecting the phenomenon of child abuse. Bachelor science thesis of Social Work Allameh Tabataba'i University: Tehran. 47-61.
- [20] Ezazi, Sh. (2001). *Sociology of the family*. Intellectual Publications and women studies.pp.56.
- [21] Bernstien, D. P., Fink, L., Handelsman, L., Foote, J., Lovejoy, M., Wenzel, K., Sapareto, E. & Ruggiero, J. (1994). Initial reliability and validity of a new retrospective of child-abuse and neglect. *American Journal of Psychiatry* 151(8), 1132-1136.
- [22] Shahni-Yeylagh M, Mikaeili N, Shokorkon H, Haghghi J. The prevalence of child abuse and parental mental health predicted by these variable, adaptability, self-esteem and academic performance in students and demographic variables in girl students abused and normal junior school ahwaz Persian. *J Educ Psychol Shahid Chamran University Ahwaz* 2007; 3: 167-194.
- [23] Paivio, S. C., & Cramer, K. M. (2004). Factor structure and reliability of the childhood trauma questionnaire in a Canadian undergraduate student sample. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 28, 889- 904
- [24] Ashraf, S. M., H. (2010). Spann-Fischer codependency and codependency validating test on Mashhad's women. *Journal of research on addiction drug abuse*, 4 (15):15-16.
- [25] Knudson, Theresa M.; Terrell, Heather K (2012). Codependency Perceived Inter Parental Conflict, and Substance Abuse in the Family of Origin. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, Volume 40, Number 3, 1 May 2012, pages 245-257.