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## Explaining the Causes of Hidden Marital Aggression in Women: The Role of Feelings of Guilt and Self-Sufficiency

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### Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to explain the cause of hidden marital aggression in women with the mediating role of guilt and self-compassion. The method of the present research was applied in terms of objective and descriptive data collection method with correlation method. Structural equation model is used in researches where the goal is to test a specific model of prediction between variables. The statistical population of the research was married women working in the Broadcasting Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Tehran. In this research, a multi-stage random sampling method was used and 150 married women were selected by simple random sampling. They responded to covert marital communication aggression, Nelson and Carroll (2006), self-compassion, Reiss (2011), and conscious affect, Tangen, Wagner, and Gomez (1989). Pearson's correlation coefficient and path analysis were used for analysis. The results of data analysis showed that self-compassion affects guilt ( $\beta=0.49$ ,  $P=0.01$ ). In addition, self-compassion affects the covert aggression of marital communication ( $\beta=0.32$ ,  $P=0.01$ ) and the effect of self-compassion on the covert aggression of marital communication. These effects have a significant relationship with the mediation of guilt ( $\beta=0.16$ ,  $P=0.01$ ). According to the obtained results, guilt can play a mediating role between hidden aggression in marital relationship and self-compassion in married women.

**Keywords:** *Marriage, differentiation, emotional intelligence.*

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## Introduction

Research shows that hidden aggressive behavior in marital relationships is a basis for the growth and expansion of uncompromising social behaviors and low understanding of interpersonal situations and, as a result, being less accepted by the spouse (Parade & Leerkes, 2011). Relational aggression means trying to harm one's partner by exerting purposeful influence and damaging the relationship (Crick & Groat-Peter, 1995; cited in Kramer, Ward, Saper, Fishbein, Dubas, & Lauch, 2015). Covert aggression includes emotional withdrawal. In such a way that a person refrains from expressing affection or sexual intimacy and destroys the social image of his wife by gossiping, spreading rumors, sharing his private information with others, or making it possible for others to interfere in discussions and arguments. Usually, women show their emotions better in non-verbal communication and express their sadness, happiness and hatred more easily. Also, they are more in a position to complain, but men are more emotionally restrained and have more emotional withdrawal (Frankel, Ammora, Jacobowitz, and Hazen, 2015). Guilt is one of the variables that affect the interpersonal emotional relationships of couples. Shame and guilt, like other negative emotions, may arise from primary relationships (Leary, Tati, Adams, Allen, and Hancock, 2015). According to Jang (2005), shame and guilt are potential risk factors in the occurrence of aggression in intimate relationships. Shame is a kind of negative and general self-evaluation that is associated with a feeling of helplessness or a kind of passivity in correcting mistakes. In general, in the experience of shame, the focus is on oneself, and a person has a negative evaluation of himself due to committing a

mistake and thinks of himself as a bad person. The feeling of shame is a painful feeling that is caused by losing one's respect and dignity in the eyes of others due to one's inappropriate behavior or inadequacy (Hosseinabadi, 2011). Guilt is a negative feeling, filled with regret and feeling responsible for the wrong behavior, not the person himself (Harper, 2011). Dearing, Stoic and Tangney (2005) believe that these emotions are very similar, but they are distinguished from each other based on certain characteristics. Shame involves a negative self-evaluation, while guilt is a negative evaluation of one's behavior by oneself (Besser and Prill, 2006; Harper, 2011). Since self-compassionate people act to fix their mistakes, this can be a factor for creating conflict between them.

Considering that hidden marital aggression is the cause of many physical injuries, mental illnesses and adverse marital outcomes, this research tries to answer the research question whether hidden marital aggression can be predicted based on the role of guilt and self-compassion in married women?

## Method

Considering that the purpose of this research was to explain the cause of hidden marital aggression based on the role of guilt and self-compassion in married women, a descriptive correlational research method based on the structural equation modeling method was carried out. The current research population was married women working in the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting Organization in Tehran in 2019. In this research, multi-stage random sampling method was used.

## Materials

**1. Marital covert communication aggression scale.** Covert communication aggression scale was developed by Nelson and Carroll (2006) in order to measure

emotional withdrawal and spoiling social image in couple relationships. Covert communicative aggression scale has 12 questions (each subscale of 6 items). The Emotional Withdrawal subscale includes questions 1 to 6 and the Social Image Destruction subscale includes questions 7 to 12.

**2. Self-conscious emotion test. Tangeney, Wagner and Gomez developed this test in 1989.** Self-awareness test is a paper-and-pencil self-assessment tool that presents 16 situations (scenarios) of everyday life conditions to the subject. 11 of its situations have a positive social value and 5 of its situations have a negative value, and the respondents rate their emotional and behavioral responses and the probability of their response. In this questionnaire, in addition to self-conscious emotion, the subscales of couples' shame and guilt traits were investigated. Subjects rate their answers on a 5-point Likert scale.

**3. Self-compassion questionnaire.** The self-compassion questionnaire (2011) was designed and compiled by Rice et al. to measure three components of self-compassion against self-judgment, human sharing against isolation, and mindfulness against extreme identification. This questionnaire has 12 questions and 6 components and measures compassion based on a five-point Likert scale.

### Findings

According to the obtained correlation coefficients, it is inverse and significant regarding the relationship between "self-compassion" and "guilt and aggression of hidden marital communication". In other words, with the increase of "self-compassion" and the amount of "guilt and hidden marital communication aggression" decreases. On the other hand, the relationship

between the variable "feeling of guilt" and the variables of "concealed marital communication aggression" is direct and significant. It means that as the level of guilt in the respondents increases, the level of hidden marital communication aggression increases. Considering that the significance coefficient of all relationships in the research model is not in the range (-1.96 to 1.96), it can be said that all the relationships between the research variables are significant. Considering that in the theoretical research model, guilt plays a mediating role in the relationship between "self-compassion" and "concealed aggression in marital communication" as dependent variables, therefore, in the following section, confirmation or rejection of the mentioned hypotheses has been investigated.

Considering that the significant coefficient ( $t = -2.96$ ) of the mentioned hypothesis is not in the range (-1.96 to 1.96), it can be said that self-compassion has a significant effect on hidden aggression related to the mediation of guilt. According to the effect size ( $\beta = -0.16$ ), it can be said that the effect of self-compassion on covert aggression is inversely related to the mediation of guilt. In other words, by increasing respondents' self-compassion through the mediation of guilt, their communication covert aggression decreases.

The calculated relative chi-square value is 2.63. It is desirable to have a relative chi-square smaller than 3. Also, the root mean square error of estimation (RMSEA) should be less than 0.08, which is equal to 0.072 in the presented model. The goodness of fit indices of GFI, AGFI, CFI and NFI should also be more than 0.90, which in the model under study is 0.97, 0.95, 0.96 and 0.96 respectively. Therefore, according to the fit indices, it can be claimed that the collected

data support the conceptual model well, and in other words, it can be said that the research model has a good fit.

### **Discussion**

The results of the present study showed that self-compassion has a significant effect on hidden aggression related to the mediation of guilt, according to the effect, it can be said that the effect of self-compassion on hidden aggression is inversely related to the mediation of guilt. In other words, by increasing respondents' self-compassion through the mediation of guilt, their communication covert aggression decreases. With self-compassion, a person can experience positive emotions towards himself because self-compassion is not based on ideal standards. In fact, self-compassion is the application of a complete and integrated process combined with kindness and understanding and acceptance of the generality of humanity. Therefore, the higher a person's self-compassion is, the more patient and tolerant he is in front of his problems and sufferings; As a result, it affects his life style and procedure and increases a person's satisfaction with life (Neff, Kirkpatrick and Rudd, 2017). Also, the findings showed that there is a significant effect between communication covert aggression. In explaining this result, it can be said that the man's avoidance behaviors in interaction with the woman's shame lead to an increase in violent shame that gives the woman the idea that no one loves her because she is imperfect. Then the woman uses emotional withdrawal to punish her man. Of course, it seems that this result can happen in a situation where the woman's dominant attachment is an avoidant type of attachment, and in such a situation, she will withdraw emotionally.

People who have high self-compassion because they judge themselves less harshly, accept negative life events more easily, and their self-evaluations and reactions are more accurate and based on their actual performance. Because the self-judgment in these people tends neither to an exaggerated self-criticism nor to a self-defensive inflation. Having self-compassion requires that one does not harshly criticize oneself for failures or not meeting standards. This concept does not mean not paying attention or correcting these failures. When the self is judged harshly for its mistakes with the belief that self-criticism can force a person to change and improve, self-supporting functions act to hide the flaws from the person's self-awareness in order not to threaten the dignity of the person. Without self-awareness, these weaknesses are not questioned (D'Olimpio et al., 2014). On the other hand, through self-compassion, a person creates an emotional security that allows him to see himself clearly without fear of self-blame, and he gets the opportunity to more accurately understand and correct inconsistent patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior. (Neff and Bratvas, 2013) Therefore, self-compassion does not lead to passivity and stillness that is associated with personal resentment. Since self-compassion requires awareness and awareness of one's emotions, painful and uncomfortable feelings are no longer avoided, but one approaches them with kindness, understanding, and a sense of human commonality.

### **Ethics**

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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## Conflict of Interest

According to the authors, this article has no financial sponsor or conflict of interest.

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