

## Comparison of coping methods in marital disputes and the communication pattern of couples in married women with and without borderline personality

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Numerous studies indicate the existence of fears, tensions, legal conflicts and traumatic interpersonal relationships and their subsequent low quality of life in patients with borderline personality. The purpose of this research was to compare the ways of dealing with marital disputes and the communication pattern of couples in married women with and without borderline personality.

**Method:** The current research was a causal-comparative study and the participants were selecting by random available sampling method in Qom city in 2018, including 100 subjects and 50 individuals for each group, and among them, Leichsenring's borderline personality questionnaire (1999), Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS-2, 2004) and Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ, 1984) were distributed. The obtained data were analyzed with SPSS software and univariate analysis of variance.

**Results:** There was a significant difference between the marital discord scales and couples' communication patterns in women with and without borderline personality, with 99% confidence. Based on the obtained data, the components of the scale of marital disputes (injury, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, physical violence, mental violence) and the scale of couples' communication patterns in women with and without borderline personality, showed more than 47% of the effect, in women with and without borderline personality.

**Conclusion:** The results showed that self-learning variables marital intimacy and job satisfaction positively and significantly affect marital adjustment.

**Keywords:** Marital Disputes, Ways of Dealing, Communication Pattern of Couples, Married Women, Borderline Personality.

## 1 Introduction

It is not easy to define a healthy personality. However, a healthy personality generally allows a person to deal with normal stresses in life and establish close and satisfying friendly relationships (Titus & DeShong, 2020). Also, among personality disorders, *borderline personality disorder* (BPD) has a high degree of comorbidity with other mental disorders (Garland & Miller, 2020), and among personality disorders, BPD is one of the most serious psychiatric disorders (Livesley & Larstone, 2018). BPD is one of the complex problems related to mental health, characterized by extreme negative emotions, identity disorder, impulsive behaviors, and instability in interpersonal relationships (Richmond, Tull, & Gratz, 2020).

BPD causes frequent and severe damage in a person's life in various cognitive, emotional and functional areas (Brenning et al., 2020; Stratton et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 2012). A wide range of studies indicate the existence of fears, tensions, legal conflicts and traumatic interpersonal relationships and their subsequent low quality of life in patients with borderline personality. These cases result from traumatic experiences such as sexual and physical abuse and long-term separation of parents at a young age or absence of parents due to illness or divorce, lack of security, chaotic living environment and faulty relationships with parents (Schiffler et al., 2022) and impulsivity is considered the main core and underlying dimension and an essential aspect of understanding its pathology (Baranger et al., 2020). Suicide and self-harming behaviors are common among these patients, and 80% of them have a history of suicide attempts, and 30% of people who die from suicide are borderline patients (Dreyße et al., 2020; Volkert, Gablonski, & Rabung, 2018). Also, with a prevalence of 1.3%, this disorder is one of the most common personality disorders that has attracted the attention of many researchers in recent decades (Volkert, Gablonski, & Rabung, 2018). 22% of people with borderline personality suffer from alcoholism, and 23% of male prisoners and 20% of female prisoners also have BPD (Pizarro-Campagna et al., 2020).

Researchers believe that this disorder has negative personal, family and social consequences due to numerous disturbances in the behavioral, emotional, cognitive and interpersonal fields (Bornovalova et al., 2005). *Marriage* is an event that leads people to enter a new stage of life and includes an important part in people's individual and social life (Razavi et al., 2018). BPD is classified as one of those personality disorders that are characterized by strange, cold,

aloof, and unconventional characteristics (Sadock, 2015); Therefore, one of the factors that can be investigated in these people is the interpersonal relationships of these people and especially the relationship with the spouse when facing a conflict. Modes of *marital conflict* include restrained conflict, cooperative decision-making, quality of communication, sexual and psychological intimacy, and valuing trust, respect, empathic understanding, and equality in the relationship (Dainton & Stafford, 1993). Researchers believe that satisfied couples are those couples who have found a way to resolve conflict effectively (Nimtz, 2011). Due to the nature of mutual relations between spouses and the unique personality of each couple; One cannot or does not want to see things exactly the way another person sees them; Therefore, there is a possibility of conflicting views and demands, and there will be a difference of opinion and the needs will not be met; As a result of such a situation, spouses feel anger, hopelessness, and dissatisfaction with each other, and conflicts occur; Therefore, according to the nature of the couple's relationship, it is natural for differences and conflicts to arise in the marital relationship (Mbwirire, 2017).

Also, good communication plays a decisive role in the couple's sense of security (Besharat, 2012). By getting married, couples are in a two-way relationship with their spouse, which is considered the most important relationship in each person's life, and one of the signs of success is the couple's relationship (Bharambe & Baviskar, 2013). *Communication patterns* (CP) are considered a very important category in the stability and strength of couples' relationships and are valuable in marriage; Because the commitment of couples strengthens the stability of the relationship and is positively associated with compatibility and marital satisfaction (Tariveh et al., 2020). It should be noted that communicating is a difficult task even if people have a common language, so people must understand each other to establish a good relationship (Laser-Maira & Nicotera, 2019). Christiansen and Sullaway (1984) divided CP between couples into mutually constructive, expectant/avoidant, and mutually avoidant CP (Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Christensen & Sullaway, 1984). Smith, Heaven, and Ciarrochi (2008) believe that intensifying the expectant/avoidant CP leads to permanent marital problems; Couples whose CP is mainly expectant/withdrawn lose their marital satisfaction over time and are drawn towards divorce (Smith, Heaven, & Ciarrochi, 2008). Based on the conducted studies, this research seek to investigate and compare marital

disorders and CP in married women with and without borderline personality.

## 2 Methods

### 2.1 Study design and Participant

The current research is descriptive and causal-comparative; this method is also called post-event research. In this method, the researcher does not have direct control over the predictor variable because it occurred in other conditions, and only the type and extent of its impact on the criterion variable is currently evaluated. Causal-comparative research aims to find possible causes of a behavior pattern. For this purpose, the subjects with the studied behavior are compared with those in whom this behavior is not observed. The statistical population of the current research consisted of all married women with and without borderline personality, referring to counseling centers in Qom. The minimum sample required for causal-comparative research is recommended to be at least 50 people in each group. Therefore, in this research, considering the possibility of dropping subjects and the possibility of distorted and unanswered questionnaires, a sample size of 100 people (50 people for each group) was considered. In order to select the sample members in this research, an available sampling method was used.

### 2.2 Measurements

The data were collected using *Leichsenring's borderline personality questionnaire (1999)*, *Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS-2, 2004)* and *Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ, 1984)*.

#### 2.2.1 Borderline personality

The borderline personality questionnaire was created by Leichsenring in 1999 to measure borderline personality traits in clinical and non-clinical samples, and the answers are yes and no. This tool is a 53-item scale based on DSM-IV diagnostic criteria. The last two questions of this questionnaire are not included in any of the factor classes or other classes of this questionnaire (Leichsenring, 1999). Their score is not calculated in the subject's final score, so it has been omitted in the Iranian version. In Iran, concurrent validity was obtained with a coefficient of 0.70 and a correlation of subscales with the whole scale and each other with coefficients of 0.71 to 0.80. Retest reliability,

segmentation, and internal consistency were obtained with coefficients of 0.80, 0.83, and 0.85, respectively.

#### 2.2.2 Communication Patterns

CPQ is a 35-question self-assessment tool designed by Christensen and Sullaway (1984) to estimate marital relationships. This questionnaire determines the behavior of couples during three stages of marital conflict. These steps are 1. When a problem arises in the couple's relationship. 2. The length of time the problem is discussed. 3. After discussing the communication problem. To answer this questionnaire, couples rate each behavior on a 9-point Likert scale from 1 (impossible) to 9 (very possible). These behaviors include mutual avoidance, mutual discussion, discussion/avoidance, mutual negotiation, verbal violence, physical violence, and mutual withdrawal. This questionnaire consists of three subscales: mutual constructive communication scale, mutual avoidant communication scale, and expectancy/withdrawal communication scale. Demand/withdrawal relationship consists of two parts: demanding man/withdrawal woman and demanding woman/withdrawal man (Christensen & Sullaway, 1984). Previous studies that have used CPQ have determined the validity of (0.74) to (0.78) for its different subscales.

#### 2.2.3 Marital Disputes

CTS-2 was created in 2004 by Straus in order to evaluate five subscales of physical violence, psychological violence, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, and injury. This scale contains 36 questions, and the sub-scales are: sexual abuse (7 statements), physical violence (12 statements), psychological-emotional violence (7 statements), verbal abuse (6 statements), and injury (6 statements). The sexual abuse subscale includes three levels of abuse (insistence, threat of violence, practical violence) and three types of sexual activity (genital, anal, and oral). The subscale of verbal abuse is also divided into two emotional and cognitive levels. The internal consistency of this scale measured by Cronbach's alpha coefficient was reported between 0.79 and 0.95 (Straus, 2004).

### 2.3 Data Analysis

The data were analysed with SPSS software and univariate analysis of variance.

## 3 Findings and Results



A descriptive statistical report of variables is shown in [Table 1](#).

**Table 1**

*Descriptive findings (N=100)*

Variable	Group	Mean	SD	Variance	Variable	Group	Mean	SD	Variance	
Conflict tactics	Harm	BPD	3.40	2.850	8.122	Mutual avoidance	BPD	15.94	5.362	28.75
		Normal	0.48	1.147	1.031		Normal	13.04	4.309	18.57
		Total	1.94	2.612	6.825		Total	14.49	5.054	25.55
	Sexual abuse	BPD	3.42	3.775	14.25	Woman-demand/Man-withdraw	BPD	14.74	6.508	42.36
		Normal	0.48	1.015	1.30		Normal	11.60	4.041	16.33
		Total	1.95	3.122	9.745		Total	13.17	5.616	31.54
	Verbal abuse	BPD	13.43	7.799	60.83	Man demand/Woman withdraw	BPD	15.82	6.605	43.92
		Normal	18.32	8.365	69.98		Normal	11.52	5.912	34.95
		Total	15.89	8.409	70.71		Total	13.67	6.600	43.76
	Physical abuse	BPD	7.88	7.663	58.72	Demand/withdraw	BPD	24.06	9.917	98.34
		Normal	1.78	2.971	8.828		Normal	19.12	7.122	50.72
		Total	4.83	6.544	42.83		Total	21.59	8.941	79.94
	Mental abuse	BPD	16.64	11.72	137.3	Constructive	BPD	-3.00	10.18	103.7
		Normal	5.80	6.528	42.61		Normal	8.30	8.435	71.15
		Total	11.22	10.90	118.8		Total	2.65	10.9	118.8
CP	BPD	70.44	20.33	413.1	Friends first	BPD	12.10	3.259	10.92	
	Normal	60.24	17.90	320.5		Normal	14.20	3.801	14.45	
	Total	65.34	19.73	389.4		Total	13.15	3.677	13.52	

Based on the [Table 1](#), in the descriptive comparison between the two groups of women with borderline personality and women without borderline personality, it can be concluded that the mean of the component (injury, sexual abuse, physical violence, psychological violence) is higher in women with borderline personality. Only the average component of verbal abuse is lower in women with borderline personality. In a descriptive comparison between the two groups of women with borderline personality and

women without borderline personality, the mean of mutual avoidance communication component, woman expecting male withdrawal, male expecting female withdrawal, expected withdrawal relationship and the overall scale of couple CP are higher in women with borderline personality. Finally, the average component of mutual constructive communication is lower in women with borderline personality.

**Table 2**

*The results of univariate analysis of variance*

Source	Variable	SS	df	MS	F	P	Eta2
Group	Harm	213.160	1	213.160	45.169	.000	.315
	Sexual abuse	216.090	1	216.090	28.286	.000	.224
	Verbal abuse	590.490	1	590.490	9.029	.003	.084
	Physical abuse	930.250	1	930.250	27.543	.000	.219
	Mental abuse	2937.640	1	2937.640	32.657	.000	.250
	CP	2601.000	1	2601.000	7.090	.009	.067

According to [Table 2](#) there is a significant difference between all the components of marital disputes (injury, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, physical violence, psychological violence) and the scales of couples' CP in women with and without borderline personality, with 99% confidence.

The results of the post hoc test (difference of means) to investigate the difference in the components of the marital discord scale (injury, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, physical violence, psychological violence) and the scale of couples' CP in women with and without borderline personality are shown in the [Table 3](#).

**Table 3**

*The results of post-hoc test*

Variables	Sample	Mean	Mean diff. (i-j)	SE	P	
Conflict tactics	Harm	I	3.400	2.920	.434	.000
		J	.480			
	Sexual abuse	I	3.420	2.940	.553	.000
		J	.480			
	Verbal abuse	I	13.460	-4.860	1.617	.003
		J	18.320			
Physical abuse	I	7.880	6.100	1.162	.000	
	J	1.780				
Mental abuse	I	16.640	10.840	1.897	.000	
	J	5.800				
CP	I	70.440	10.200	3.831	.009	
	J	60.240				

I: BPD sample; J: Normal sample

According to the [Table 3](#), there is a significant difference between the mean of the component (injury, sexual abuse, physical violence, mental violence) of the marital discord scale and the couple's CP scale in women with and without borderline personality, with 99% confidence; So that women with borderline personality have a higher score. There is a significant difference between the average component (verbal abuse) of the marital discord scale and the life priorities scale in women with and without borderline personality, with 99% confidence. Hence, women without BPD have a higher score.

**Table 4**

*The results of analysis of variance for between-group effects*

Source	Test	Value	F	Df hyp.	Df error	p	Eta <sup>2</sup>
Group	Pillai's Trace	.474	11.847	7	92	.000	.474
	Wilks's Lambda	.526	11.847	7	92	.000	.474
	Hotelling's trace	.901	11.847	7	92	.000	.474
	Roy's largest root	.901	11.847	7	92	.000	.474

According to [Table 4](#), there is a significant difference between the components of the scale of marital disputes (injury, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, physical violence, mental violence) and the scale of couples' CP in women with and without borderline personality, with 99% confidence. The components of the scale of marital disputes (injury, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, physical violence, mental violence) and the scale of couples' CP in women with and without borderline personality are more than 47% influenced by group membership.

#### 4 Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of the present study is to compare the ways of dealing with marital disputes and the CP of couples in married women with and without BPD. The results showed a significant difference between all the components of marital disputes (injury, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, physical violence, psychological violence) and the scales of couples' CP in women with and without borderline personality, with 99% confidence.

BPD does not exist only in the clinical population; its characteristics and symptoms are also observed in the normal population. BPD syndrome in the normal population

is related to significant negative consequences; Consequences such as academic problems, the presence of characteristics of mood disorders, relationship disorders and problems such as drug and alcohol use. Therefore, the presence of symptoms of BPD causes problems in people with this disorder and the normal population ([Gholzar Sirjani & Bayanfar, 2020](#)). A model that has been able to explain the causes of BPD to a great extent is Zannarini's (1993) model ([Zanarini, 1993](#)). According to this model, the formation of BPD results from the complex combination of the three components of a person's temperament, childhood traumas and challenges, and relatively subtle neurological and biochemical distortions ([Zanarini, 1993](#); [Zanarini & Frankenburg, 1994](#)). Zanarini and Frankenburg (1997) state that the first factor is the presence of traumatic factors in the family, which is defined in a broad format ([Zanarini et al., 2002](#)). The second factor is the presence of a vulnerable temperament in these people; These people turn unbearable feelings of anger, sadness, and shame into a relentless effort to draw others' attention to the enormity of their emotional pain. The third essential factor for developing BPD is an event or a series of events (natural and accidental experiences or injuries) ([Zanarini & Frankenburg, 1994](#),

1997). The existence of tense and hostile interactions between husband and wife and disrespect and insult that may be associated with profanity are caused by conflict (Zhou & Buehler, 2019). Marital life is one of the most universal human needs, consisting of two people with different abilities and talents, needs and interests, and personalities (Hajnal, 2017). Researchers have shown that conflict in couple interaction is related to violence (physical and verbal) and conflict (Carroll et al., 2010). These harmful relationships or negative interactions between couples decrease relationship satisfaction and harm family and mental health (Razavi et al., 2018). Soo-hoo (2019) believes that marital conflicts usually arise from two sources: the imbalance of the family structure and the non-adherence of each couple to family norms and values and violation of them (Soo-Hoo, 2019). Sanford (2010) believes that the common understanding of CP between couples is the clarification of positive marital interactions that help couples receive and develop communication skills (Sanford, 2010). There is a significant relationship between the family's CP and the lifestyle dimensions of the tendency to commit marital infidelity in women (Eltiamnia, 2020). Studies showed that psychological capital, stress coping skills and CP could directly predict life satisfaction and indirectly through the mediation of individual differentiation. Also, family health can be predicted based on self-efficacy and CP, and self-compassion is mediating in predicting family health based on CP and self-efficacy (Haji Rostamloo, Farhangi, & Hosseinpour, 2022; Janbozorgi, Darbani, & Parsakia, 2020).

## 5 Limitations

Also, one of the limitations of the research was a lack of time and budget, which did not allow the researcher to conduct the research with an effective method, and there was

also a limitation of the tools. In this research, only a questionnaire was used to measure the variables, which is a self-reporting tool. Although we have done our best to gain these people's trust and confidence, the respondent's honesty still has a direct effect on it. Finally, the present study has only been conducted on a small population, which limits the generalization of the results and requires more research.

## 6 Suggestions and Applications

According to the results of the research, it was found that the quality of dealing with marital disputes and the CP in married women with and without borderline personality is different. Therefore, it is suggested that women with borderline personality symptoms, and even women who do not have borderline personality symptoms, gain the necessary knowledge about the quality of their encounters and CP. Reducing or improving the symptoms will not be ineffective, and considering that improving borderline personality symptoms requires effective psychological treatments, it is suggested that the necessary treatments be carried out, and other studies be conducted in this direction.

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## Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

## Ethics principles

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

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