

Abusing Marital Relation: A Reflective Generalization using Story as a Case

Dr. VIJAY KUMAR GROVER
DAV College of Education, Abohar
India

Abstract:

The paper is about demonstrating the method of content analysis by using story as the subject of research. It is about story of a nearly forty year old lady abused in his marital relation. She narrates her whole story which author divided in to segments of significance and reflections are drawn from the corresponding to it. The reflections are then analyzed and generalizations are drawn in section analysis. It was concluded that abuse is a strategy rather than isolated incidents; it starts in the couples having mismatch dominance urge of husband and submissive extent of wife. Abuser uses all possible tools to establish his authority and power in the relation. Abuse happens to be due to absence of institutional support, economic dependence, forced isolation, male psyche of dominance and female psyche of connectionism & psychological homelessness. Finally, author suggests some measures as way out for resolving the issue. Abusing relation is a crime against humanity, as all are born independent and no one is slave to any other. Marriage is only the institution created by the society for social way of living.

Key words: marital relation, abusing marital relation, abuse by intimate partner, domestic violence, abusive behavior

Stories have always been the tool of content analysis for case studies which can reveal the truly important facts which otherwise can't be discovered in quantitative analysis of the data obtained in normative form. It intends to reveal the

intricacies involved in the phenomenon, which otherwise we miss in data research. The problems of social situations are difficult to be understood through positivistic methods, as they usually miss the capture of affective domain of the issue. Although story reveals individual problem and the solution found may be specific to the case, but similar behavior can be theorized on collecting such experiences if documented in terms of parameters of content analysis. Moreover, social phenomena have been defined on the basis of prominent features they exhibit, so is true for abusing a relation and specifically marital relation.

Author tries to analyze the problem using a story of a lady in her forties named Monica (hypothetical). She narrates her story which has been presented in segments of significance for reflections could be drawn out of it. It goes as follows:

Abuse Starts

“It started slowly, at first he just wanted to know where I was going all the time. Then he wanted to tell me where I was going all the time”.

Reflections: Abusing is a slow process for which intention asymmetry is a condition. Intention asymmetry is a situation where abuser has a plan to be implemented systematically to downgrade the abused, whereas, the abused is totally unaware at least in the initial phase of the process. The abuser takes advantage in the process and tries to create a ground where abused could be attacked in latter stage. Abuser wants to establish evidence as a fare reason for attack to be executed.

First Attack (effort to establish authority)

“If I went out with my girl friends, I knew I would come back to find the house trashed..... He would always break something he knew I really cared about”.

Reflections: Swinging the balance of power and controlling the power in one's favor is the issue. It's a natural phenomenon when a couple gets married. There is a competition of gaining power and control in the relationship which ultimately decide the decision making authority in the family. Lady can take position of domination or submission which determines the relation between the couple. There can be four possible combinations depending on theses orientation. These combinations and their derived terms are shown in the figure 1 given ahead. There can be 'Well adjusted' (there is low dominance and low submissiveness, both are balanced), Misadjusted (more dominance and less submissiveness), Maladjusted (more submissiveness and less dominance), Seemingly adjusted (high dominance and high submissiveness). Well adjusted couple would have no chance whatsoever for a conflict, so no abusing of marital relation. Seemingly adjustable couple would be most vulnerable couple for violence by intimate relation. It is hypothetical condition when lady can both dominate as well as be submissive. Actually it is a pseudo marital relation where lady tries to play role rather than living the relation. And when competition of authority arises she loses the battle. The seemingly adjusted couple would be most unadjusted in reality. In case of misadjusted couples there is a chance that female will abuse the relationship, which is rare one, or we may see strong resistance from female partner and relation breaks for ever. In case of 'Maladjusted couple' we may see abusive relation but lady tries to adjust for the sake of family or under pressure of society. This invite real trouble and abusing marital relation becomes inevitable. In a way we observe that abusing a relation is not unnatural, but creating civilized society, educating the masses, inculcating ethics are aimed at reducing this competition of authority justification among the couples.

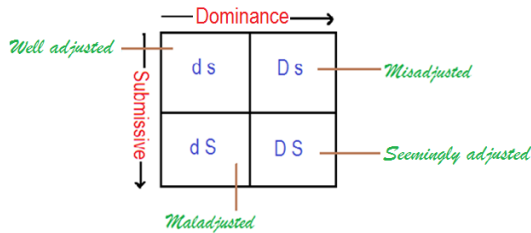


Figure 1: Interaction of Female Dominant and Submissive orientation in Marital Relation

Situation Aggravates

“He started questioning- my spending and sources of income, intelligence, ability, female hood, right over the child, association with others, personality and finally my character and existence as well”.

Reflection: in cases of maladjusted and visibly adjusted, intentionally situations are created and frequency of abusive behavior is increased to test for acceptance. Various ways are tried to break the identity, authority and possessiveness of the lady.

Strategic Attack

“I was made to believe that I was a waste, worthless, that I was unable to do anything right. I had looks, actions, physique and behavior which invite abuse”.

Reflections: weakening the defenses of dignity by lowering the self-esteem of the abused seems to be the strategy of abuser. Self esteem is the most forceful reason for human beings to live and thrive upon. Loss of self esteem means creeping of valuelessness in one’s thinking, feeling and action. This is what makes the abused hapless, the state abuser wanted to reach. The abused starts finding faults with one self and unconsciously justifies for the consequences. This is the crucial point from where victim could be saved by gathering will power

once again, or finding a friend, a counselor or an organized support agency.

Isolation as a part of Strategy

“I thought I was useless, ugly, just a horrible person.....no one would ever love or even like me and I myself was incapable of love. I was not allowed to visit my beauty parlors, neighbors, friends, parents and relatives. It turned me a prisoner of my circumstances, which were actually designed, I could not realize”

Reflections: Isolation is an instrument of socio-psychological abuse, which is more impacting than even physical abuse. It is an effort to create a situation of helplessness. Once a person is isolated from its support system s/he stops further struggle to help oneself to come out of the situation.

Connectionism as Disadvantage

“After years of violence, I was completely bewildered to the extent that I didn’t know how to get away or stay away from even a person whom I hate so much. I think I left ten times before I finally stayed gone for ever. When I look back on it now, I realize I was simply practicing to leave. It was a process, it took time, and I had to learn how to leave and finally how to disappear.

Reflections: ‘Connectionism’ is a prominent feature of woman Psyche. Development of man and woman is distinct at psyche level. Men when grow has a tendency to establish self identity, consequently tries to differentiate from father in some ways. On the other hand female tries to develop similarity to the mother and finds pleasure in losing ones identity. This strong belongingness makes the process of leaving a relationship very difficult. Actually Leaving is also a process can’t and should not be attained in one go, if done so, may escalate the violence.

Reconciliation

“I don’t know why I kept going back, when he begged me to swear he would never do it again. His pretention it happened under the influence of alcohol, it was a rage or a fits, an anger I could not control, a misunderstanding and the like. And I fool wanted to hear it, for some unexplainable reasons”.

Reflections: Promise to change may be a strategy to hide the crime; intention needs to be scrutinized fully. Actually it is one of the phases of the abuse cycle termed as honeymoon period. The abuser has a tendency of shifting responsibility on factors like stress, alcohol, friend, situation and the like. Cavanagh et al (2001) analyzed accounts of violence given by men at tending a Scottish perpetrator programme. Men tried to influence and mitigate the way their violence was perceived by their partners and others, to obfuscate their culpability and to neutralize women’s experience of abuse. Denial featured particularly strongly in the early stages of the violent relationship; behaviour was re-cast as not really violent, or men selectively claimed not to remember particular episodes and gave inconsistent accounts; usually injuries were forgotten details. Silence via selective amnesia served to render significant aspects of violence undiscussable within and beyond the relationship. Research confirms that it is not matter of losing control, rather whole drama is to gain control on everything one can. Abuser may temporarily change his behavior to win the confidence of the abused. There can be events of long drive, partying on a insignificant event or even bringing costly gifts for no obvious reason. Cavanagh et al (2001) observed apology was found to be a common means by which men sought to remedy their violence and to control the way their partners interpreted and reacted to violence. 61% of men and 53% of women agreed that men always apologized after a violent event, and only 4% of men and 6% of women said there was never an apology. Many promised to change, cried, assured

their partners it would never happen again, and offered lavish gifts. Apologies were often followed by requests for affection, reassurance and confirmation of love.

Absence of Support Structure

“There has to be a place to go, it’s just not a matter of leaving from someone, it is need to survive and thrive independently. When I say independently, it means everything from safety to economics and to And for many victims that place either doesn’t exist or they don’t know the one exists”.

Reflections: Lack of resources prevents the victim to leave the relationship. Phenomenon of ‘Psychological homelessness’ starts operating, when abused starts feeling that life outside the relation is even bad, so develops a tendency to compromise. There is lack of confidence in the support structure because people and power are insensitive to the aggrieved. Patriarchal societies are crueler in terms of traditions, customs and role assignment for female gender.

New Instrument Discovered

“I was hoping that it is due to rage of anger or under the influence of alcohol oras he explained, and will finally stop. But rather it happened otherwise. He would use my only child as threat to my opposition”.

Reflections: Abuse does not stop by itself and batterer finds more instruments in the form of battered weaknesses. The female has more weaknesses like- child, finances, friends, respect in the society, sense of belongingness to the home, need for a company and the like. The first threat in terms of new instruments should be opposed by all means.

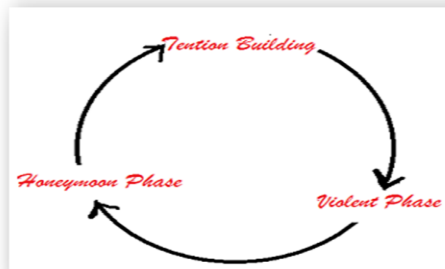
Wicked Abuser

“It was difficult to get support from the relatives as he would behave rather gently with them that they started doubting my intentions and behavior”.

Reflections: Abuser may be quite clever to misguide the outsiders. Now we must agree that abusing is a process, a strategy rather than isolated incidents. It needs our immediate attention for analysis, let us do it. In a comparative study, Goodrum et al (2001) found that men who were violent to their partners constructed a positive, non-violent self-image by holding both the idea and the evidence of their violent selves at a distance.

Analysis of the story

Abusing is a Process: Abusing is a process rather than an incident, the cycle is described in the figure given below.



Tension is created and maintained deliberately by objecting to every possible behavior of the target person. When tension crosses the threshold a physical conflict takes place in which abuser wants to show his supremacy at all costs. One conflict never results in ending of the relationship; it may be due to the social pressure. A reconciliation phase operates in which abuser promises to behave gently in future, but repeats it again and again. This cycle needs to be broken at some stage, otherwise it

will call for vicious circle of domestic violence or abusing marital relation.

Control is the Issue: Abuser wants to establish his control on all the resources of the family and decision making to justify his power. The instruments used for it are shown in figure below.



A qualitative Australian study of men's constructions of their violence to women (James et al 2002) also found that control and loss of control was a key issue for domestic violence perpetrators. All felt entitled to use violence or other abuse when they did not 'get their own way', or 'get the respect they deserve d'. Some men saw their violence in instrumental terms as a means of maintaining the control they had established and felt was rightfully theirs.

Culture is inherently against: woman remains the subject of abuse throughout the life. Before birth: Feticide; Infancy: Infanticide; Girlhood: child marriage, rape prostitution, pornography; Married: Domestic violence, dowry, forced pregnancy or terminating it etc., Old: forced suicide, homicide of widows. Abusing marital relationship is not an exception. Research using men's self-reports has mostly not found traditional sex role beliefs to be associated with domestic violence perpetration (Hotaling & Sugarman 1986, Saunders 1993, Schumacher et al2001). Women participants in a Canadian community survey (Smith1990) who reported that

their partner subscribed to a patriarchal ideology of male control over women's lives, and who considered it acceptable to use violence when partners did not conform to men's requirements of them, were significantly more likely to report injury-causing or threatening assaults by their partners.

Institutional Support is Missing: Female is more vulnerable to abuse due to lack of organized support in the form of Society, Family, Religion, Culture, Legal and Law enforcing agencies, Rehabilitation department, NGO's and the like.

Way Out

- Be aware of start of the abusing process, nip the evil in the bud works well. Call for reliable support for tackling the menace.
- Break the cycle of abuse at the earliest, it can be done by being vigilant, knowing and ailing the support system available.
- Look for building institutional help in legal, social and occupational domains. Lady can approach domestic violence help, some NGO of the sort, even to the employer of the abuser. Emphasis on perpetrator programmes as public safety programmes rather than as treatment may ensure the focus is kept on victim safety, particularly as victims are more likely to stay with perpetrators if they are enrolled onto programmes (Gondolf1988, Healey et al 1998).
- Other relations help, if maintained faithfully. One should have a social circle which can be used build social pressure on the abuser.
- Strive for economic independence. Economically independent ladies have fewer chances for abuse compare to dependent ones. Economic independence can be in terms of employments, assets, shares etc.

- Ensure safety if needed, look for emergency legal protection. Lady should possess emergency contact numbers; join some self defense groups and the like.
- Attitude is the problem, psyche of both male and female needs to be changed. Male need to change for accepting lady as a justified partner and female need to assert for his justified place at home. Female should not accept his position as a natural subordinate to male and hence there is possibility for abuse.
- Share the story with close friends and other victims of similar situation. When we share the problem we may get a solution to the problem.
- Leave the relation if turns incurable. Leaving a relation does not mean leaving the life, existence is much more than a relation. Living is more important than living with or without a male partner.
- Rather than saying 'I was the victim' lady should be able to say 'I am the survivor'.

Finally author appeals, stop abusing marital relationship at all costs because 'Bruises fade but pain lasts for ever'. We have no right to hurt others as we are born free and not as slaves, it is only the social way of living called institution of marriage. Male does not holds superior position by natural consequence, it is only a social arrangement for the sake of division of labor and efficient living.

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