
FEATURED ARTICLE

PATTERNS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST ENGAGED ARAB WOMEN FROM ISRAEL AND SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

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The present study focused on 1,111 engaged Arab women in Israel, examining the different patterns of abuse and battering they experienced by their fiancés. The results revealed that between 8% and 48% of the respondents had experienced psychological aggression by their partners and between 1% to 10% had experienced physical aggression. Moreover, between 5% and 11% of the respondents had experienced acts of sexual abuse at least once during the engagement period. In addition, some mental health consequences of these experiences were examined. Analysis of variance revealed that, when negotiation tactics were not used to resolve conflicts and when respondents had experienced different patterns of abuse and battering by their fiancés, they also expressed relatively low levels of self-esteem and relatively high levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. Regression and multiple regression analyses revealed that the main predictors of the study explained larger amounts of the variance in mental health than did some of the background variables. Finally, the article discusses the limitations of the study and implications for future research, as well as recommendations for prevention and intervention activities.

BACKGROUND

In Arab societies, the socioreligious and legal announcement of engagement (i.e., through a family celebration in a large or small party depending on the decision made by the families of the bride and groom) is followed by the engagement period. The engagement period usually lasts several months and in rare cases continues for over two years (Haj-Yahia, 1991). The engagement announcement is generally accompanied by a religious and legal contract signed by the bride and her father (or his authorized representative) on one side and the groom and his father (or

authorized representative) on the other, along with at least two witnesses. From the legal and religious perspectives, the contract essentially recognizes both partners as married, but according to Arab tradition they are not allowed to live together after the engagement celebration. Rather, they continue living with their families of origin until the formal wedding ceremony.

Despite these practices, over the past two decades it has become more common for the family of the bride to allow her to meet her fiancé during the engagement period (i.e., after the engagement agreement is announced). However, different families show different degrees of “flexibility” about such meetings and the conditions under which they can take place. Strict families only allow a set number of meetings (e.g., during weekends) in the presence of the family (although this custom is rare). Yet most families allow the daughter to see her fiancé as often as both partners wish. These meetings include walks, short trips, visits to friends or relatives, recreational activities, and celebrations. Afterward, the prospective bride and groom return home to their families of origin to sleep. These meetings are intended to provide an opportunity for the couple to get to know each other, to develop a relationship of intimacy and love, and to plan their future jointly before they marry. Social prohibition against premarital sexual relations are strictly enforced by the bride’s family. Both the family and community expect the engaged couple to begin devel-

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oping a relationship characterized by love, intimacy, harmony, mutual satisfaction, and happiness. Under these circumstances, it seems inconceivable that the groom would behave violently toward his bride or abuse her during the engagement period. However, the pioneering studies conducted by Haj-Yahia (1991; Haj-Yahia & Edleson, 1994) among 434 engaged Arab men from Israel revealed that they had engaged in the following behavior toward their fiancées: 15% had insulted, sworn, or yelled at them; 20.5% had done or said something to hurt their feelings; 9.7% had threatened to hit or throw something; 8% had pushed, grabbed, or shoved them; 6.4% had hit (or tried to hit) them with something; and 4% had used a knife or gun against them. Although these results debunk some prevailing myths that portray the engagement process as affectionate and harmonious, one cannot ignore the fact that the violent acts against brides were reported by the perpetrators, who usually tend to underreport their abusive behavior (Edleson & Brygger, 1986). It was therefore assumed that the incidence of such violence could be even greater if reported by the victims themselves.

Based on this evidence, the present study aimed to investigate the incidence of different acts of abuse and battering (i.e., verbal and psychological aggression, physical aggression, and sexual coercion) against engaged Arab women as reported by the women themselves. Although the empirical literature includes an abundance of studies and documentation about some of the psychological consequences of abuse and battering of women, most studies were conducted among married women or women living with their partners. In addition, there is a serious lack of research dealing specifically with the psychological consequences of abuse and battering among Arab women who are socioreligiously and legally considered married but do not live with their partners. In an attempt to fill this gap, the present study examined some psychological effects of abuse and battering (e.g., low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and stress) against engaged Arab women.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research conducted in Western societies reveals that dating and courtship violence is widespread. For example, 21.2% of the college-age participants reported that they had either engaged in or sustained violence within their dating relationships during their lifetime (Makepeace, 1981). Murphy (1988) reported an overall rate of 40.4% for involvement in at least one instance of courtship abuse as victim or aggressor. Specifically, 31.5% had experienced some form of abuse from their dates in past relationships, and 24.5% had abused a date in some manner during past relationships. In a comparative study of couples who were dating, cohabiting, or married, Stets and Straus (1990) found that cohabiting couples were more likely to have experienced violence than dating or married couples. Their results indicated that almost 35% of the cohabiting couples experienced physical assault during the previous year, com-

pared with 20% of the dating couples and 15% of the married couples.

Empirical research on the psychological impact and mental health consequences of violence against women has also been increasing in recent years. The mental health consequences of abuse with the strongest empirical documentation include loss of self-confidence and gradual deterioration of self-esteem (e.g., Aguilar & Nightingale, 1994; Mills, 1984); hopelessness, learned helplessness, gradual immobilization by fear, simple phobia, and agoraphobia (e.g., Gleason, 1993); anxiety (e.g., Follingstad, Brennan, Hause, Polek, & Rutledge, 1991); depression and depressive illnesses (e.g., Follingstad et al., 1991; Gelles & Harrop, 1989); and stress, psychological distress, and posttraumatic stress disorder (e.g., Gelles & Harrop, 1989; Kemp, Rawlings, & Green, 1991; Saunders, 1994).

Aguilar and Nightingale (1994), examining the self-esteem of battered versus nonbattered women, revealed that the battered women had significantly lower self-esteem index scores than their nonbattered counterparts. Cascardi and O'Leary's (1992) study measured self-esteem among battered women as well as other physical and mental health consequences of abuse and battering. Out of a group of 33 women, approximately 70% ($n = 23$) scored higher than 14 on the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, 1967), and approximately 52% ($n = 17$) scored higher than 20—results that reflect a high level of depressive symptomatology. Moreover, they reported that depressive symptomatology and self-esteem correlated highly with the frequency, severity, and consequences of physical aggression: as the level of battering increased across the sample, there was a parallel increase in depressive symptomatology and decline in self-esteem.

In a study of 234 women with a history of physical abuse, Follingstad et al. (1991) examined twelve categories of physical and psychological symptoms. Although only 3% ($n = 7$) of the respondents reported no symptoms, 65.3% ($n = 153$) reported three to seven symptoms, and only one woman reported all twelve symptoms. Of the symptoms examined by Follingstad et al., the ones most frequently noted were depression (76.7%) ($n = 179$), anxiety (75%) ($n = 176$), persistent headaches (56.5%) ($n = 132$), back and limb problems (54.5%) ($n = 127$), and stomach problems (54.5%) ($n = 127$).

Gelles and Harrop (1989) analyzed the results of the Second National Family Violence Survey focusing on psychological distress, which was defined as "the three aspects of mental health that have been mentioned as being related to experiencing violence: depression, stress, and somatic symptoms" (Gelles & Harrop, 1989, p. 406). Their findings indicated that "the more severe forms of distress, including feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness, are more strongly related to violence than the more moderate forms of distress . . . the average woman in the severe violence group would be in the eightieth or ninetieth percentile of the no violence groups based on her scores for moderate and severe distress, respectively" (Gelles & Harrop, 1989, p. 416).

Posttraumatic stress disorder has been a special topic

of interest in recent studies on the mental health consequences and psychological impact of violence against women. For example, Kemp and colleagues (1991) found that the reported subjective distress related to the violence experience correlated positively with the presence and degree of posttraumatic stress disorder, intrusion, depression, anxiety, and general psychopathology. The extent of abuse and battering also correlated positively with the presence and degree of posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and overall symptoms of distress.

Although the present study does not question the merits of previous research on the psychological impact and mental health consequences of abuse and battering against women, they have some clear limitations. First, most studies were conducted among small and nonrepresentative samples—with the possible exception of the Second National Family Violence Survey (Gelles & Harrop, 1989; Gelles & Straus, 1988). Second, most of the studies were conducted with inappropriate comparison groups or without any comparison groups at all. Third, most of the studies were based on imprecise definitions of violence, abuse, and emotional disturbance.

Although the studies reviewed here enhance insight into some psychological effects of abuse and battering against women, it should be emphasized that this research includes married or cohabiting women who either still live with their abusers or are separated from them (temporarily or permanently). These marital structures and contexts are different from the ones examined in the present study (i.e., engaged Arab women who are considered to be married but do not live with their partners). Thus, this study has two goals. First, it aims to investigate the incidence of different patterns of abuse and battering (i.e., psychological abuse, physical abuse and battering, and sexual coercion) among a national systematic random sample of engaged Arab women from Israel. Second, and most important, it aims to investigate the level of some psychological consequences (i.e., stress, anxiety, depression, and self-esteem) of abuse and battering among engaged Arab women. On the univariate level, the study hypothesized that higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression and lower levels of self-esteem would be reported by Arab women living in Israel who have been abused and battered by their partners compared with those who have not. On the multivariate level, the study hypothesized that the variance of stress, anxiety, depression, and self-esteem among engaged Arab women would be significantly explained by their experience with psychological abuse, physical abuse and battering, and sexual coercion, beyond several sociodemographic variables.

METHOD

Sample and Data Collection Procedures

A systematic random sample of 17 Arab clergymen was chosen from a list of 50 Arab clergy (34%) who were authorized by the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs and

the Ministry of the Interior to draw up engagement contracts among the Arab population. The ministries provided the list of clergymen and granted permission to conduct the study. The participating clergy then provided the names and addresses of couples who had signed engagement contracts over the last two years (but none more recently than the past four months). In this way, the researcher obtained a list of 3,126 names and addresses of engaged couples and chose a systematic random sample of 1,000 women. Afterward, female research assistants residing in the same settlements as the participants were recruited. In cooperation with the clergymen and other community figures, the research assistants were asked to provide additional names of couples who are socially recognized in their communities as engaged but not yet registered at the Ministry of Interior. The list was prepared to ensure that all engaged women were given an equal opportunity to be chosen for the study. According to this procedure, a list of 1,214 engaged women was drawn, from which a systematic random sample of 400 women was chosen and added to the original list, bringing the total sample to 1,400 potential participants. Of this sample, only the brides (i.e., the grooms were not asked to participate in the study) were approached to participate in the study. All women were informed of the purpose of the study and asked to fill out a self-administered questionnaire at their convenience during the course of the week. The research assistants returned to collect completed questionnaires, which were placed in sealed envelopes distributed as part of the instrument package. If questionnaires were not completed during that period, the research assistants returned to the respondent's home three to five days later. The research assistants were instructed not to pressure women who had failed to complete the questionnaire after the second round of collection. Rather, they thanked the women and exempted them from participation. Ultimately, out of 1,400 engaged women approached to participate in the study, 1,111 completed and returned the self-administered instrument package (i.e., a response rate of about 79%).

The average age of the respondents was 20.82 years ($SD = 2.88$, range = 16–38). The average age of their partners was 25.84 years ($SD = 3.62$, range = 18–46). Regarding level of education, 9% of respondents had completed preparatory school, 56% had completed all or part of high school, and 35% had completed all or part of their college or university education. About 13% of the respondents' partners had completed preparatory school, 53% had completed all or part of high school, and the rest (i.e., 33%) had completed all or part of their college or university education.

Regarding religious affiliation, 77% of the respondents were Muslim, 14% were Christian, and 9% were Druze (reflecting almost exactly the distribution of religious affiliation among Arabs in Israel). All respondents were engaged to partners of the same religious affiliation. The average duration of the engagement was 14.5 months ($SD = 11.65$, range = 4–24 months). Because documentation on the sociodemographic background of engaged Arab women is lacking, it is not possible to compare the characteristics of

the present research sample with the general population of engaged Arab women in Israel.

Instrument Package

A self-administered instrument package was used for the study. It consisted of the following sections and scales.

Background information. This section included questions about the respondent's background as well as demographic information about the respondent and the fiancé: for example, age, education, place of residence, religion, occupation, and length of engagement in months.

Conflict and negotiation. The Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2) (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996) was utilized to measure the use of negotiation by Arab men to solve conflicts with their fiancés as well as the use of psychological, physical, and sexual abuse. Compared with the CTS1 (Straus, 1979), "the CTS2 has (a) additional items to enhance content validity and reliability; (b) revised wording to increase clarity and specificity; (c) better differentiation between minor and severe levels of each scale. . . . Reliability ranges from .79 to .95. There is preliminary evidence of construct validity" (Straus et al., 1996, p. 283). Internal reliability tests for each subscale of the Arabic version of the CTS2 used in this study revealed the following Cronbach's alpha values: .89 for Negotiation, .88 for Psychological Aggression, .91 for Physical Aggression, and .83 for Sexual Coercion (see Table 1).

Self-esteem. The Index of Self-Esteem (ISE) (Hudson, 1982) was used to measure self-esteem among engaged Arab women. The ISE has "excellent internal consistency . . . good known-groups validity, . . . [and] very good construct validity" (Corcoran & Fischer, 1987, p. 189). The Cronbach's alpha value for the Arabic version of the ISE used in this study was .90.

Anxiety and depression. The Costello-Comrey Depression and Anxiety Scales (CCDAS) (Costello & Comrey, 1967) was used to measure anxiety (ANXIT) and depression (DPRES) among engaged Arab women. The depression scale has excellent internal consistency, with split-half reliabilities of .90. The split-half reliability of the anxiety scale was .70, and the CCDAS was found to have fair concurrent validity (Costello & Comrey, 1967). The Cronbach's alpha values for the Arabic versions of the ANXIT and DPRES used in this study were .82 and .94, respectively.

Stress. The Stress-Arousal Checklist (SACL) (MacKay, Cox, Burrows, & Lazzarini, 1978) consists of 30 adjectives commonly used to describe psychological experiences of stress. In the two-dimensional model of stress, the first dimension, "stress," represents subjective experience in response to external environment, and the second dimension, "arousal," represents ongoing somatic or autonomic

activity. The present study focused only on the first dimension, and reliability data were not available. The SACL has evidence of known-groups validity and evidence of concurrent validity, where the scores correlate with various psychological measures (Corcoran & Fischer, 1987). In the Arabic version, which measured the first dimension of the SACL (i.e., stress), the Cronbach's alpha value was .92.

Cultural Adjustment of the Instrument Package

It should be noted that all of the scales used in this study were based on measures whose reliability and validity have been tested and well-established in Western countries, which are socially, culturally, politically, and economically different from Arab societies. Consequently, two pilot studies were conducted in an attempt to ensure the original reliability and validity of the scales and to adjust them to Arabic language and culture. To do so, Haj-Yahia's (1998, 1999) approach toward culturally adjusting such scales and measures was implemented. Besides translating the instrument package from English to Arabic, attempts were made to maintain the conceptual equivalence, item equivalence, construct operationalization equivalence, and scholar equivalence of the English and Arabic versions of all measures that comprised this package (for further details on this methodological approach, see Hui & Triandis, 1985).

RESULTS

Three types of statistical analysis were employed in this study. The first analysis measured the incidence of negotiation and different patterns of abuse and battering by male partners as reported by their fiancées (see Table 1). Second, analyses of variance were conducted. Self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and stress were the dependent (outcome) variables. Negotiation, psychological aggression, moderate physical aggression (i.e., items 1–5 of physical aggression in Table 1), severe physical aggression (i.e., items 6–12 of physical aggression in Table 1), and sexual coercion were the independent (predictor) variables (see Table 2). For this purpose, the scores for each of the predictor variables were derived on a dichotomous scale of (0) "Never" and (1) "At Least Once" for each act in Table 1. The cumulative scores were calculated for each of the four predictors. Negotiation was divided into two levels: "Used" (the respondent indicated that her fiancé had used at least one negotiation tactic one or more times during the engagement period) and "Not Used" (the respondent indicated that her fiancé had never used any negotiation tactic with her to resolve conflict). Psychological aggression was assessed according to two levels: "Abused" (the respondent was subjected at least once to one or more acts of psychological aggression) and "Not Abused" (no incidents of physical aggression were reported). Physical aggression was divided into two levels: "Moderate" (acts 1–6 of physical aggression in Table 1) and "Severe" (acts 7–12 of physical aggression in Table 1). Moderate and severe physical aggression as well as sexual

Table 1
Incidence of Negotiation and Different Abusive and Violent Behaviors Against Engaged Arab Women
by Their Fiancés ($N = 1,111$)

<i>How many times during your engagement has your fiancé . . .</i>	<i>Never (%)</i>	<i>Once or Twice (%)</i>	<i>3–5 Times (%)</i>	<i>6–10 Times (%)</i>	<i>11 Times or More (%)</i>
<i>Negotiation (Alpha = .89)</i>					
1. showed you that he cares about your feelings or thoughts on an issue?	6	9	12	14	59
2. showed respect for your feelings and thoughts on an issue?	7	12	14	21	46
3. said he is sure that both of you could work out a problem?	8	10	13	19	50
4. explained calmly his side of a disagreement?	8	14	15	19	43
5. suggested a compromise to a disagreement?	12	18	17	21	32
6. agreed to try a solution to a disagreement that you suggested?	15	20	19	22	25
<i>Psychological Aggression (Alpha = .88)</i>					
1. shouted or yelled at you?	52	27	10	5	6
2. stomped out of the room, house, or yard during a disagreement, angry and screaming?	59	24	7	5	5
3. insulted or swore at you and called you nicknames?	88	7	2	1	2
4. did something to spite you?	58	21	10	6	5
5. called you fat or ugly or made fun of your body?	92	5	1	1	1
6. accused you of being a lousy lover or of not knowing how to take care of him?	74	15	5	3	3
7. attacked or destroyed something belonging to you?	89	6	2	2	1
8. threatened to hit or throw something at you?	90	6	2	1	1
9. didn't allow you to visit relatives or friends without his permission?	78	12	5	2	3
10. threatened that he will not allow you to visit your relatives or friends for different reasons?	85	8	4	1	2
11. belittled, disregarded, derided, or mocked you?	89	6	3	2	1
12. tried to make you feel that you are nothing without him?	88	6	2	2	2
<i>Physical Aggression (Alpha = .91)</i>					
1. grabbed you?	90	6	2	1	1
2. pushed or shoved you?	91	6	1	1	1
3. threw something at you that could hurt?	94	4	1	1	—
4. slapped you on the face or on different parts of your body?	91	6	1	1	1
5. twisted your arm or pulled your hair?	97	2	1	—	—
6. kicked you, punched you, or hit you with something that could hurt?	97	2	1	—	—
7. hit you and slammed you against the wall?	97	2	1	1	—
8. choked you?	97	2	1	—	—
9. burned or scalded you on purpose?	97	2	1	—	—
10. beat you up?	97	2	1	—	—
11. threatened you with a knife or gun but didn't carry out his threat?	98	2	—	—	—
12. used a knife or gun?	99	1	—	—	—
<i>Sexual Coercion (Alpha = .83)</i>					
1. insisted on sex when you did not want it (but did not use physical force)?	89	6	2	2	1
2. used threats to make you have sex?	90	6	2	1	1
3. used force (e.g., hitting, holding you down or using a weapon) to make you have sex?	95	3	1	1	—

coercion were assessed according to the same scoring approach used to assess psychological aggression.

Third, regression and multiple regression analyses were conducted to determine which variables best explained the variance among each of the outcome variables. For this purpose, Straus et al.'s (1996) scoring formula was used to score each of the predictor variables. In these analyses, demographic and background variables were first obtained (i.e., age, level of education, frequency of meetings with

the fiancé, work for salary, period of engagement, and way of meeting the fiancé), followed by the predictor variables (see Table 3).

Incidence of Negotiation and Different Patterns of Abuse and Battering

The incidence of negotiation and patterns of psychological, physical, and sexual abuse against fiancées are presented

Table 2

Means for Outcome Measures: Self-Esteem, Depression, Anxiety, and Stress by Negotiation, Psychological Aggression, Physical Aggression, and Sexual Coercion ($N = 1,111$)

Measures	Negotiation		Psychological Aggression		Moderate Physical Aggression		Severe Physical Aggression		Sexual Coercion	
	Used	Not Used	Abused	Not Abused	Abused	Not Abused	Abused	Not Abused	Abused	Not Abused
Self-esteem	37.73 (990)	50.29** (28)	39.68 (754)	33.49** (271)	46.00 (198)	36.00** (832)	53.67 (66)	36.98** (973)	47.79 (144)	36.53** (934)
Depression	21.70 (1000)	33.63** (27)	23.11 (759)	18.93** (276)	28.88 (197)	20.31** (846)	34.06 (68)	21.17** (982)	29.21 (143)	20.86** (909)
Anxiety	18.60 (1028)	21.18* (28)	19.5 (779)	16.9** (286)	22.04 (202)	17.82** (871)	25.01 (69)	18.23** (1011)	21.87 (143)	18.17** (938)
Stress	30.66 (1024)	38.62** (29)	32.11 (776)	27.32** (287)	37.37 (202)	29.27** (867)	42.76 (66)	30.08** (1010)	36.14 (145)	30.06** (934)

Note: The number in parentheses indicates the sample size of each group.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .0001$.

in Table 1. Regarding negotiation, six tactics were measured. The results indicate, for example, that 94% of the women reported that their partners had shown them that they care about their feelings and thoughts on an issue at least once since the engagement. Moreover, 85% of the women reported that, when they suggested a solution to a disagreement, their partners agreed to try it. In addition, following the scoring formula used for analysis of variance (i.e., 0 "Never" and 1 "At Least Once"), the overall results on all six negotiation tactics reveal that only 3% of the respondents indicated that their partners had never used any negotiation tactic to resolve conflicts with them during the engagement period.

Regarding psychological aggression, twelve acts were measured (see Table 1). For example, 48% of the engaged women reported that their partners had shouted or yelled at them, 12% reported that their partners had insulted or sworn at them or called them names, and 8% reported that their partners had called them fat or ugly or made fun of their bodies. The responses regarding these acts of psychological aggression reveal that 73% of the respondents reported that their partners had psychologically abused them at least once during the engagement period by one or more acts.

Regarding physical aggression, twelve acts are presented in Table 1. For example, 9% of the engaged women reported that their partners had slapped them on the face or on different parts of their bodies, 3% reported that their partners had kicked, punched, or hit them with something that could hurt, and 3% reported that their partners had beaten them up at least once during the engagement period. Overall, 19% of the respondents had been victims of at least one of the twelve acts of physical aggression at least once during the engagement period.

Finally, regarding sexual coercion, three acts are presented in Table 1. For example, 10% of the engaged women reported that their partners had used threats to make them

have sex; and 5% of the respondents reported that their partners had forced them to have sex at least once during the engagement period. Overall, 13% of the respondents reported that their partners had used some form of sexual coercion at least once during the engagement period, by one or more acts.

The results also reveal significant correlations among all of the predictor variables of the study. For example, the more the women had been physically beaten by their fiancés, the more likely they were to be sexually or psychologically abused ($r = .693, p < .0001$ and $r = .836, p < .0001$, respectively), and the less likely their fiancés were to use negotiation tactics to resolve conflicts with them ($r = -.608, p < .0001$). In addition, the more women were sexually abused by their fiancés, the more likely they were to be psychologically abused ($r = .695, p < .0001$), and the less likely their fiancés were to use negotiation tactics to resolve conflicts with them ($r = -.716, p < .0001$).

Psychological Impact of Negotiation and Different Patterns of Abuse and Battering

Analysis of variance presented in Table 2 reveals that the women who reported that their fiancés had used negotiation to resolve conflicts also reported higher self-esteem, $F(1, 1016) = 24.92, p < .00001$, and lower levels of depression, $F(1, 1025) = 34.45, p < .00001$, anxiety, $F(1, 1054) = 4.64, p < .05$, and stress, $F(1, 1051) = 15.74, p < .00001$, than those who reported that their fiancés had never used negotiation tactics to resolve conflicts with them.

In contrast, analysis of variance presented in Table 2 reveals that different patterns of abuse and battering have negative psychological and mental health consequences. Specifically, respondents who reported that they had been psychologically abused by their fiancés reported lower self-esteem, $F(1, 1023) = 45.04, p < .00001$, and higher levels of depression, $F(1, 1033) = 32.57, p < .00001$, anxiety,

Table 3
Regression and Multiple Regression Analysis for Self-Esteem, Depression, Anxiety, and Stress (N = 1,111)

Criterion Variables	Self-Esteem				Depression				Anxiety				Stress			
	β	Multiple R	R ² Change	SEB	β	Multiple R	R ² Change	SEB	β	Multiple R	R ² Change	SEB	β	Multiple R	R ² Change	SEB
Age	.032	.081	.006**	.153	.029	.008	.0001	.122	-.009	.054	.003	.074	-.015	.064	.004*	.125
Engaged woman's level of education	.099	.226	.040****	.609	-.018	.130	.017****	.488	-.025	.113	.01**	.300	-.033	.130	.013***	.508
Frequency of meeting fiancé	.108	.249	.015****	.452	-.142	.203	.024****	.362	-.092	.149	.009**	.221	-.100	.166	.011***	.373
Work for a salary	.003	.250	.0006	.343	-.009	.204	.0006	.276	.047	.159	.003	.169	.041	.174	.003	.285
Period of engagement (in months)	.029	.250	.0001	.034	-.039	.205	.0002	.027	.015	.163	.001	.016	.016	.178	.001	.028
Way of first meeting partner	.100	.271	.011***	.822	-.121	.240	.016****	.657	.055	.175	.004*	.403	.069	.196	.007*	.682
Physical abuse	-.213	.402	.088****	1.047	.255	.406	.107****	.854	.189	.313	.067****	.522	.241	.352	.083****	.878
Sexual abuse	-.177	.442	.036****	1.180	.162	.438	.027****	.965	.091	.330	.011***	.592	.077	.363	.010***	.997
Psychological abuse	-.110	.452	.012****	.907	.073	.441	.003	.728	.154	.359	.02****	.445	.108	.375	.010***	.751
Negotiation	.117	.466	.012****	2.400	-.153	.466	.023****	1.938	-.053	.363	.003	1.178	-.096	.387	.010***	1.991
R ² (total)			.220				.220				.130				.150	
F (Eqn) (df)		26.484	(10, 954)			25.682	(10, 960)			14.974	(10, 987)			17.385	(10, 987)	

*Sig F Change <.05; ** Sig F Change <.01; *** Sig F Change <.001; **** Sig F Change <.0001.

$F(1, 1063) = 61.49, p < .00001$, and stress, $F(1, 1061) = 43.68, p < .00001$, than those who had not been psychologically abused by their partners. In addition, respondents who reported that they had experienced moderate physical aggression by their partners were found to have lower self-esteem, $F(1, 1028) = 103.09, p < .00001$, and higher levels of depression, $F(1, 1041) = 120.31, p < .00001$, anxiety, $F(1, 1071) = 80.05, p < .00001$, and stress, $F(1, 1067) = 102.94, p < .00001$, than those who had not experienced moderate physical aggression by their partners. Moreover, respondents who had experienced severe physical aggression by their fiancés reported lower levels of self-esteem, $F(1, 037) = 128.76, p < .0001$, and higher levels of depression, $F(1, 1048) = 133.29, p < .0001$, anxiety, $F(1, 1078) = 108.58, p < .0001$; and stress, $F(1, 1074) = 134.88, p < .0001$, compared with those who had not experienced severe physical aggression by their partners.

Regarding the consequences of sexual coercion, respondents who reported that they had been sexually abused by their partners reported lower self-esteem, $F(1, 1038) = 93.05, p < .00001$, and higher levels of depression, $F(1, 1050) = 83.97, p < .00001$, anxiety, $F(1, 1079) = 44.46, p < .00001$; and stress, $F(1, 1077) = 41.75, p < .00001$, compared with those who had not been sexually abused by their partners.

Regression analysis reveals that self-esteem increased as a function of the women's age ($\beta = .032, p < .01$), higher levels of education ($\beta = .099, p < .0001$), family's permission to hold frequent meetings with the fiancé ($\beta = .108, p < .0001$), work for salary ($\beta = .003, p < .05$), and independent choice of a partner (i.e., the courtship was not arranged by a third party) ($\beta = .10, p < .001$) (see Table 3). Results of multiple regression analysis reveal that all six demographic and background variables examined in the study (as presented in Table 3) explained about 7% of the variance in engaged women's self-esteem, $F(6, 958) = 12.644, p < .00001$. Almost all of this variance accounted for can be attributed to these five variables (i.e., woman's age, woman's level of education, frequency of meetings with the fiancé, working for a salary, and dependence or independence in choosing a fiancé), and all five variables correlated significantly with self-esteem (see Table 3). Most important, the results indicate that the more engaged women were physically, sexually, or psychologically abused ($\beta = -.213, p < .0001$; $\beta = -.177, p < .0001$; and $\beta = -.110, p < .0001$, respectively), and the less their partners used negotiation tactics to resolve conflicts with them ($\beta = .117, p < .0001$), the lower their self-esteem was (see Table 3). It should be emphasized that, taken together, these four predictors of the study explained about 14% of the variance in engaged women's self-esteem, and each of the predictors made an independent and significant contribution toward explaining the variance. Although about 9% of the variance in women's self-esteem could be attributed to their experiences with physical aggression, the remaining 6% could be attributed to sexual victimization (i.e., about 4%), psychological abuse (i.e., about 1%), and fiancé's failure to

use negotiation tactics to resolve conflicts (i.e., about 1%). The demographic and background variables combined with these four predictors explained about 22% of the variance in the respondents' self-esteem, $F(10, 954) = 26.484, p < .00001$ (see Table 3).

Depression among engaged women correlated significantly with three out of six background variables. Lower levels of education ($\beta = -.018, p < .001$), family prohibiting frequent meetings with the fiancé ($\beta = -.142, p < .001$), and dependence on family for choice of a partner (i.e., the courtship was arranged by a third party) ($\beta = -.121, p < .0001$) correlated significantly with high levels of depression (see Table 3). The results of multiple regression analysis reveal that about 6% of the variance in depression among engaged women could be attributed to all six background variables of the study, whereas the three background variables (i.e., woman's level of education, frequency of meetings with the fiancé, and dependence or independence in choosing a fiancé) had the most significant impact on women's depression, $F(9, 964) = 9.813, p < .00001$ (see Table 3).

Each of the main predictor variables of the study also correlated significantly with depression among engaged women. The more they were physically, sexually, or psychologically abused by their partners ($\beta = .255, p < .0001$; $\beta = .162, p < .0001$; and $\beta = .073, p < .0001$, respectively), and the less the partners used negotiation tactics to resolve conflicts with them ($\beta = -.153, p < .0001$), the greater the extent of the women's depression was (see Table 3). Taken together, these four main predictors of the study significantly explained about 16% of the variance in depression among engaged women (beyond the 6% explained by background variables), whereas physical abuse, sexual abuse, and lack of negotiation had the most significant impact (i.e., although psychological abuse correlated significantly with depression, it did not contribute substantially toward explaining this outcome variable beyond other predictors). Specifically, although about 11% of the variance in women's depression could be attributed to experiencing physical aggression by their fiancés, an additional 3% and 2% of the variance in depression could be attributed to experiences with sexual abuse and to the fiancé's failure to use negotiation tactics to resolve conflicts, respectively. Consequently, multiple regression analysis reveal that the background variables, together with the main predictors of the study, explained about 22% of the variance in depression among engaged women, $F(10, 960) = 26.682, p < .00001$ (see Table 3).

Regarding anxiety among engaged women, the results indicate that those who had lower levels of education ($\beta = -.025, p < .01$), reported less frequent meetings with their fiancés ($\beta = -.092, p < .01$), did not work for a salary ($\beta = .047, p < .05$), and were not allowed independence in choosing their partners ($\beta = .055, p < .01$) also showed relatively high levels of anxiety (see Table 3). These four background variables explained about 3% of the variance in anxiety among the participants in the study, $F(6, 991)$

= 5.220, $p < .00001$. In addition, the more the engaged women reported that they had been physically, sexually, or psychologically abused ($\beta = .189$, $p < .0001$; $\beta = .090$, $p < .0001$; and $\beta = .154$, $p < .0001$, respectively) by their partners, the higher their level of anxiety was. Each of these three predictor variables contributed significantly toward explaining anxiety among engaged women, and all three of these predictors together explained about 10% of the variance in this outcome variable. Although about 7% of the variance in women's anxiety could be attributed to physical violence by their fiancés, about 1% and 2% of the variance in anxiety could be attributed to experiences with sexual abuse and psychological abuse, respectively. Consequently, the four significant background variables (i.e., woman's level of education, not working for a salary, frequency of meetings with the fiancé, and dependence or independence in choosing a partner) combined with the three significant predictors (i.e., being physically, sexually, or psychologically abused by one's fiancé) to explain about 13% of the variance in anxiety among engaged women, $F(10, 987) = 14.974$, $p < .00001$ (see Table 3).

Regarding stress among engaged women, the results indicate that younger women ($\beta = -.015$, $p < .05$) who had lower levels of education ($\beta = -.033$, $p < .001$), met with their fiancés less frequently ($\beta = -.10$, $p < .001$), did not work for a salary ($\beta = .041$, $p < .01$), and were not allowed independence in choosing a partner ($\beta = .069$, $p < .001$) expressed higher levels of stress. These demographic and background variables of the study explained about 4% of the variance in the level of stress among engaged women, where age, level of education, frequency of meetings with the fiancé, and lack of independence in choosing a partner were found to be the most significant background variables, $F(6, 991) = 6.585$, $p < .00001$ (see Table 3).

In addition, the results reveal that the more the engaged women were physically, sexually, or psychologically abused ($\beta = .241$, $p < .0001$; $\beta = .077$, $p < .001$; and $\beta = .108$, $p < .001$, respectively), and the less their grooms used negotiation tactics to resolve conflicts with them ($\beta = -.096$, $p < .001$), the higher their level of stress was (see Table 3). All four of these main predictor variables significantly explained about 11% of the variance in stress among engaged women. Although about 8% of the variance in the women's stress could be attributed to physical violence by their fiancés, 3% of the variance in stress could be attributed to experiences with sexual abuse (about 1%) or psychological abuse (about 1%) and to the fiancé's failure to use negotiation tactics to resolve conflicts (about 1%). Consequently, the four significant background variables combined with the four main predictors of the study to explain 15% of the variance in stress among engaged women, $F(10, 987) = 17.385$, $p < .00001$ (see Table 3).

Finally, the results reveal significant correlations among all the criterion variables of the study. Specifically, the lower the respondents' level of self-esteem, the more they felt stress ($r = -.637$, $p < .0001$), depression ($r = -.712$, $p < .0001$), and anxiety ($r = -.540$, $p < .0001$). Moreover,

the results indicate that the higher the respondents' level of stress, the higher their levels of depression ($r = .705$, $p < .0001$) and anxiety ($r = .668$, $p < .0001$). In addition, there was a significant positive correlation between depression and anxiety ($r = .646$, $p < .0001$) among the engaged women.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed at achieving two main goals: (1) to examine the incidence of abuse and battering of engaged Arab women by their fiancés, as well as use of negotiation tactics by fiancés to resolve conflicts during the engagement period; and (2) to examine some of the mental health consequences of violence against these women. The research findings indicate that, although fiancés used negotiation to resolve conflicts with their fiancées, they also psychologically, physically, and sexually abused them with varying degrees of frequency. These results debunk the existing social myth that the engagement period is like a honeymoon of love and intimacy. Although an atmosphere of honeymoon and harmony may prevail during the engagement period in Arab society, there are also incidents of abuse and battering against a substantial proportion of engaged women.

The present findings point to the need for longitudinal studies that aim at enhancing knowledge regarding the incidence and prevalence of woman abuse and battering in different marital structures (i.e., during the engagement period, when partners are not allowed to live together, compared with the marriage period). Although this study considered some of the demographic and background variables related to engaged women (i.e., age, education, etc.), future longitudinal research might focus more on socio-demographic factors, such as place of residence (rural, urban, and Beduin), religion (Muslim, Christian, and Druze), number of children, and years of marriage, as well as on socioeconomic factors, such as income and level of education, as correlates of domestic violence.

Consistent with previous research, the present study revealed that engaged women whose fiancés had not used negotiation tactics to resolve conflicts, and those who had experienced different patterns of abuse and battering expressed lower levels of self-esteem and higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress than their nonabused counterparts. Furthermore, some demographic and background variables significantly explained small proportions of the variance in levels of self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and stress among engaged women. The results revealed that the bride's level of education, frequency of meetings with her fiancé, and the way in which contact with the fiancé was initiated (i.e., arranged by a third party vs. being independently chosen by the woman) were the most significant of all the background variables addressed in the study that explained these outcomes (i.e., psychological consequences). More important, the study revealed that larger proportions of variance in these mental health consequences among engaged women are best explained by the experience of physical battering, psychological abuse, or

sexual abuse, as well as by the fiancé's failure to use negotiation tactics for resolution of conflicts.

Although the present research provides important evidence on the incidence of abuse and battering against engaged Arab women and explores some of the psychological consequences of such behavior, several drawbacks should be mentioned.

One drawback is that the study relied on measurement scales developed in Western, postindustrial societies. Although considerable efforts were made to adapt these scales to Arab society, future research should attempt to ensure that the original reliabilities and validities are maintained. Furthermore, the addition of open-ended questions after each scale measuring a certain construct would allow respondents to express themselves in their own words and thus strengthen the potential validity of the measurement as well as awareness of the sociocultural context in which these women live. Another drawback of the study relates to the relatively brief period of engagement in Arab society. As mentioned before, the average duration of engagement is only 14.5 months. As such, it may be invalid to examine the extent to which some psychological states such as stress, low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety can be explained by the experience of abuse and violence by partners during the relatively short period of engagement. This may be one of the main reasons for the relatively small percentages of explained variables in self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and stress (i.e., 22%, 22%, 13%, and 15%, respectively) revealed in the present study. Furthermore, as indicated earlier, it was found that very small percentages of the explained variance in these outcome variables were attributed to women's experiences with sexual or psychological abuse or to the fiancé's failure to use negotiation tactics to resolve conflicts, beyond the relatively large percentages of variance attributed to women's experiences with physical violence. This type of result can be primarily attributed to the multicollinearity revealed among the predictor variables (i.e., to the high correlations among women's experiences with physical violence, sexual abuse, or psychological abuse and the fiancé's failure to use negotiation tactics to resolve conflicts). It would be worthwhile to study such psychological states among Arab women and their relationships with patterns of abuse and violence in the context of other life events. Hence, future research might consider other sources of violence against women (e.g., sibling violence, parental maltreatment, abuse and battering by parents-in-law) and their psychological consequences.

A further drawback is that the present study used a cross-sectional design for data collection. Although the main untested assumption was that women's experiences with different patterns of abuse and battering precede low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and stress, it could be argued that the research design is not appropriate for examining whether the reported mental health consequences can be attributed to victimization. Contrary to this argument, there is some support for the central assumption of

the study. First, the assumption is based on Mills' (1984) equations of two-stage least-squares analysis, which "lends stronger support to the argument that violence is damaging to self-esteem . . . than to the argument that low self-esteem predisposes one to victimization. . . . The simplistic suggestion that women who are battered are simply women with already low self-esteem who 'ask for it' is certainly not supported by these data . . . [which] support the assumption that the victimization of these women *affected* their self-esteem" (Mills, 1984, pp. 259–260). Second, the results of the current study indicated that the more women reported experience with different levels and types of victimization, the more their self-esteem was damaged and the higher their levels of depression, anxiety, and stress were. These results suggest that Arab women do not habituate or become accustomed to repeated abuse and violence. On the contrary: the women reveal more devastating levels of depression, anxiety, and stress as well as lower levels of self-esteem.

Another drawback of the study relates to self-report data and the scale used to measure women's experiences with different patterns of abuse and battering. It could be argued that the women chose to avoid exposing their traumatic, painful experiences of abuse for various reasons. They may have felt the experience was too difficult to reveal; they may have felt embarrassed, ashamed, or guilty about the situation; they may have been apprehensive or frightened that their partner would take revenge if they found out about their participation in the study; or they may have thought that the incident of abuse was so minor that it was not worth mentioning. They may also have forgotten what happened, particularly if the incident was minor or took place long before filling out the questionnaire. If the experience with abuse was especially traumatic, they may have tried to block it out of their memory. Although the respondents self-administered the instrument package and were assured of confidentiality, there were still some risks, which may have caused them to underreport victimization. Thus, continued attempts should be made to overcome this problem in future research, possibly by using a scale to measure social desirability.

In addition, the CTS2 used in the present study is more comprehensive than the previous version of the CTS because it measures sexual coercion and additional acts of psychological and physical aggression. However, it is important to bear in mind that the items in the instrument dealt strictly with acts and incidents without any indication of the context in which the victimization took place. Hence, it would be worthwhile to deal with the context of this experience based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods in future research on violence against women in Arab society.

Despite these drawbacks, the contributions of the study are noteworthy. First, it is one of the first investigations to document the incidence of abuse and battering against

engaged Arab women. The evidence, as mentioned, can be used to debunk the myth that the engagement period in Arab society is characterized exclusively by love, intimacy, and harmony, and that it is a violence-free type of courtship. Second, in contrast to previous research on the psychological consequences of abuse and battering in other societies, the current study was conducted among a community sample rather than a clinical sample of women, which enhances the generalizability of the results. Third, it sets the stage for longitudinal studies of violence against women in Arab societies, especially after marriage.

Finally, it is important for researchers not only to continue documenting the presence and incidence of abuse and battering and its mental health consequences, but also to develop widespread prevention and intervention programs. The United Nations's (1993) recommendations and guidelines may be applied toward developing programs for prevention and intervention in cases of domestic violence in Arab society. Haj-Yahia's (1995, 1996) cultural sensitivity approach toward mental health and human services in Arab societies may provide an appropriate basis for implementing the United Nations's recommendations in these societies.

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