

The Impact of Marital Distress on the Marital Relationship and the Family System as a Whole: A Clinical Case Study of a Couple from a Systemic Perspective.

أثر الكدر الزوجي على العلاقة الزوجية و على أعضاء النسق ككل: دراسة اكلينيكية لحالة زوج من منظور نسقي

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Abstract :

Marital distress (la conjugopathie) is a psychological disorder that goes beyond ordinary relationship problems because it creates a dysfunctional interaction pattern affecting the entire marital system, known as the "système-couple." Spouses remain together while trapped in recurring cycles of conflict that maintain tension without resolving disagreements. The systemic approach studies marital relationships through patterns of interaction, communication, and family roles rather than blaming individuals. When both spouses experience psychological distress, the couple becomes a closed system unable to adapt, weakening family cohesion.

This study aimed to identify symptoms of marital distress and their effects on the marital bond and family members. A clinical interview with a couple was conducted, and the Spanier Marital Adjustment Questionnaire was administered. The couple scored 54 out of 160, far below the emotional divorce threshold of 70, indicating very low marital adjustment. Emotional divorce is a key symptom of marital distress and threatens family stability.

Keywords: Marital Distress; Couple; Effects of Distress; Family System; Systemic Approach.

المخلص :

يعد الكدر الزوجي اضطرابا نفسيا، لا يعني مجرد سوء تفاهم بين شخصين، بل هو خلل وظيفي مرضي يمس النسق الزوجي، حيث توصف العلاقة الزوجية بالسامة و المدمرة. يقع بذلك الزوجين في فخ الصراع الدائري المتكرر الذي يغذي باستمرار شحنة الخلاف، إلا أنهما لا يملكان القدرة على إنهاء هذه العلاقة، و تحلل المقاربة النسقية العلاقة الزوجية على أساس التفاعلات و التواصل و الأدوار للنسق الزوجي، بدلا من الأخطاء الفردية، كما تنظر للزوجين في الحالة المضطربة كنسق مغلق غير قادر على التطور و التكيف بسبب المعاناة النفسية لكليهما، هذا ما يفقداهما التناغم و الانسجام فيما بينهما و قد يتعدى الأمر إلى النسق العائلي ككل، لهذا كان هدف هذه الدراسة الكشف عن الكدر الزوجي و آثاره على العلاقة الزوجية و على أعضاء النسق ككل، قمنا بمقابلة اكلينيكية كنموذج و طبقنا استبيان (Spanier) للتوافق الزوجي الذي أسفرت نتائجه على حصول الزوج درجة 54 من مجموع 160 التي تعبر عن توافق منخفض، حيث تقترب هذه الدرجة من الطلاق العاطفي الذي يقدر ب 70 درجة حسب صاحب المقياس، إذ يعد من الأعراض الأساسية للكدر الزوجي و هذا يؤثر على النسق العائلي ككل، ما جعله اضطرابا مهددا لاستقرار العائلي على المدى البعيد كالتفكك ، فقدان الشعور بالأمان و الانتماء، تدهور الصحة الجسدية و النفسية و انحراف الأبناء وهذا ما توصلت إليه هذه الدراسة، و هو هروب الابنة من البيت العائلي، الذي يعتبر في حد ذاته كاضطراب و سلوك مخاطرة نتائجه جد وخيمة على العائلة ككل،

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكدر الزوجي- الزوج- آثار الكدر- النسق العائلي- المقاربة النسقية.

1. Introduction

Human beings need social connections because they exist as social creatures who require interaction with others to survive. The need to study relational dynamics emerged because relationships exist in various forms which include both normal and abnormal relationships and bonds between friends and between parents and their children and between people who share emotional connections. The personality of a person develops through the combination of all their relationships with others. The research by (Junior, 2015, p. 217) describes how human relationships progress through three distinct phases which start with first contact and move through an established middle stage before reaching their final conclusion. People develop their emotions through each stage of relationships which progress from start to finish. Marriage stands as the primary bond which creates social structures while defending human survival across time.

Marital relationships face multiple challenges which disrupt their natural flow to produce various types of relationship problems that include marital distress. Researchers have classified this condition among the most complex psychological disorders because it affects the entire family system and may even extend its impact to the broader society. The subject has become a main research topic which scholars across various fields actively investigate. Jacobson and Christensen defined it as situations in which partners experience difficulties in communication, problem solving, and collaborative functioning, and encounter challenges in accepting each other's differences. The relationship between these two individuals demonstrates an avoidance-based pattern which exceeds the level of avoidance that most couples experience according to (Kotsou & Heeren, 2011, p. 96). The description applies to spoken words and all other types of reward systems which people use to communicate.

The past two decades have seen social changes which led to growing divorce rates because modern society challenges traditional values that religious communities in Arab nations continue to uphold. The development of cognitive beliefs about married life and partner expectations emerged because of multiple social transformations which affected gender roles and created economic challenges and shifted educational achievements and public views about marriage and divorce. People experience conflicts between their contemporary ambitions and their traditional beliefs because of this ongoing situation. The workforce has experienced a growing number of female employees who obtained higher education which transformed how families operate and how they make their choices according to (Keddar, 2012, p. 37).

The Impact of Marital Distress on the Marital Relationship and the Family System as a Whole: A Clinical Case Study of a Couple from a Systemic Perspective

The disorder used to affect mostly elderly couples who had been married for a long time but now it affects young couples who just got married while divorce rates among these couples have increased because of different marital problems. The disorder shares multiple symptoms with depression according to various studies but it stands as an individual medical condition which can lead to depression as a secondary result. The definition of marital dissatisfaction emerges from Corsini who identified a particular threshold of spouse incompatibility which causes couples to separate because they fail to communicate and understand each other's requirements which leads to emotional separation and eventually divorce.

Research shows that this disorder will continue to harm relationships between married people while their relationship quality deteriorates because no treatment exists. The disorder creates a negative impact which reaches beyond the married couple to affect their entire family network. The systemic approach views marital distress as a problem which extends beyond two people because it exists as part of the larger family system. The family functions as a complete system through its members who continuously exchange messages and maintain contact with each other. The entire family system will experience a disturbance in its equilibrium when marital problems surface.

The perspective gains importance because nuclear families exist as separate units from extended families which maintain their own social networks that impact marriage relationships in Algeria. The nuclear family works toward independence but the extended family system enables two distinct paths which either help families during emergencies or create problems that make marital conflicts worse.

The research addresses a problem which investigates how marital problems spread their effects to affect the whole family instead of staying between married partners. The research goals focus on determining how marital problems affect both the married couple and their entire family unit through a systemic approach. The analysis needs three essential elements which include defining the disorder and identifying its causes and studying its resulting effects.

2. The Concept of Marital Distress

Psychologists define marital distress as a condition which breaks down marital bonds through the appearance of negative emotions and emotional separation and psychological pain and ongoing disputes and aggressive behavior and

increased risk of violent conduct. The existing conditions which affect someone else will result in actual psychological problems for both spouses who might develop depression and anxiety and suicide attempts. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders fourth edition describes this relational problem through partner interaction patterns which show poor communication skills and withdrawal behavior while causing major psychological issues and relationship difficulties in the person (Kafafi, 2000, p. 19).

The process leads to symptom appearance which affects either spouse or both parties until these symptoms become important because they start to control marriage through the combination of wrong beliefs and destructive ways to solve problems. The fifth edition defines this disorder as frustration resulting from a dysfunctional relationship with the partner, where the primary focus of clinical attention concerns resolving the quality of the intimate relationship between them in terms of psychological harm—whether verbal or symbolic and non-accidental—inflicted by one spouse upon the other, accompanied by reprimand, humiliation, restriction of the partner, or obstruction of their access to seeking assistance.

3. Concepts Related to Marital Distress

Numerous concepts and terms have been used by researchers to denote marital dysfunctions, among which are the following:

3.1 Marital maladjustment:

This refers to the insufficient preparedness of spouses for cohabitation or their failure to adapt to the demands of life and the multiple responsibilities they anticipate (Hussein, 2018, p. 36).

3.2 Emotional divorce:

This is a divorce without witnesses, meaning that the spouses continue to live under the same roof while remaining emotionally and affectively separated most of the time. Each spouse leads a private life about which the other knows little. This relationship is also characterized by feelings of insecurity and instability (Youssef, 2020, p. 75).

3.3 Marital dysfunction:

The Impact of Marital Distress on the Marital Relationship and the Family System as a Whole: A Clinical Case Study of a Couple from a Systemic Perspective

This denotes a state of incompatibility and tension between spouses that may persist for a long period and is characterized by ongoing conflict resulting from disparities in personality traits or from economic problems and life-related psychological pressures.

3.4 Marital misery:

Negative emotions and thoughts appear which produce anxiety and tension between the two spouses during their relationship. Both may experience a sense of unhappiness during their interactions, which imbues the relationship with aversion and negativity. One partner in a marriage might experience marital distress while the other remains unaffected yet the couple stays together through periods of emotional pain and lack of shared security feelings and unsuccessful attempts to reach their marital goals (Morsi, 2008, p. 47).

The selection of terminology reveals that these concepts share common meanings although their words differ because they all address issues related to marital problems and divorce and emotional disconnection and marital breakdown. The three conditions stem from the combination of physical strain with different personality characteristics and financial troubles and social challenges. The psychological disorder of marital distress contains specific symptoms which include all the previously mentioned terms and these factors could lead to the development of marital distress. The condition demonstrates its severity through the pain which affects both partners and the process of determining how long the disorder will last and how intense it will become and the possible dangerous outcomes which could push one partner toward suicide.

4. Factors Contributing to Marital Distress

Numerous studies addressing the causes of marital distress, under its various designations, indicate that the emergence of this disorder results from the interaction of several factors, including the following:

4.1 Communication:

Effective and positive communication constitutes one of the most important factors in achieving marital adjustment. Positive communication refers to the ability to express oneself clearly, whereby each spouse tends to present their problem with frankness and openness.

Communication is also regarded as the principal mechanism and primary tool in managing the marital relationship. This process becomes successful when each partner seeks to understand the other's temperament, needs, and desires, and expresses themselves spontaneously. Corsini considers difficulties in communication and the inability to understand one's partner among the most significant sources of marital conflict. Negative communication from one spouse necessarily elicits a negative reaction from the other. He also identified several characteristics that typify communication between spouses, as follows:

- Difficulty in expressing and listening to one another regarding their respective demands and desires.
- A tendency to hastily adopt negative interpretations of each other's thoughts.
- The distortion of one partner's statements by the other.
- The avoidance of limited positive behaviors and a greater responsiveness to negative behaviors.
- The dominance of negative emotionality within the marital relationship, characterized by one partner's criticism of the other, accompanied by contempt and devaluation (Morin, 2014, p. 281).

4.2 Dysfunction in Marital Roles:

The competence of spouses in performing family roles is considered one of the most significant predictors of marital satisfaction. Accordingly, spouses must discuss their respective rights and obligations in order to reduce tension and mutual misunderstanding. This discussion helps prevent emotional distance within the marital relationship and avoids ambiguity regarding expectations related to the roles required of each partner, thereby preventing conflicts and psychological pressures that may ultimately lead to marital distress.

4.3 The Spouses' Childhood:

The socialization of the child during developmental stages, as well as the educational approach adopted by parents in raising that child, plays a crucial role in the formation of a healthy emotional relationship and in the fulfillment of fundamental needs—both biological and psychological. This process promotes a healthy quality of life free from frustration, pressures, and violence. Consequently, the child later becomes a husband or wife, a father or mother, possessing a well-adjusted personality. Conversely, if the opposite occurs, the child may grow up internalizing a model of unhappiness, instability, and insecurity. This model subsequently manifests between spouses, often

The Impact of Marital Distress on the Marital Relationship and the Family System as a Whole: A Clinical Case Study of a Couple from a Systemic Perspective

unconsciously, as they reproduce the same patterns of interaction in which they themselves were raised.

4.4 Infertility:

After one year of marriage, spouses typically begin seeking to have children. If pregnancy does not occur, a series of medical examinations is undertaken to determine the cause of the delay. When all forms of treatment and their various methods fail, the spouses may enter a state of despair and frustration that can lead to depression and, ultimately, marital distress. This situation becomes particularly acute when infertility is attributed to one of the spouses, which may result in feelings of diminished self-worth and lowered self-esteem, accompanied by a sense of the futility of continuing the marital relationship (Hiba, 2011, p. 19).

4.5 Childbearing:

Parenthood represents a transitional stage that introduces significant changes in the roles of spouses by adding new responsibilities to their previous ones. This stage requires mutual adjustment and the capacity to perform the roles of motherhood and fatherhood. Conflicts may arise regarding child-rearing practices or preferences concerning the number of children to be raised, as well as the forms of care to be provided—whether material or emotional—thereby generating disagreements between spouses.

4.6 Pathological Jealousy:

Pathological jealousy is considered a lethal toxin to the marital relationship. Barjow indicated that the proportion of violence against women resulting from the husband's jealousy is estimated at 41 percent, a factor that leads to the deterioration of the marital relationship (Castelli & Salmon, 2017, p. 252).

4.7 Duration of Marriage:

Researchers consider the early years of marital life to constitute a decisive boundary in determining the fate of the marriage, as indicators of marital compatibility or adjustment begin to emerge despite the possibility of differences between spouses in many domains. Numerous studies have indicated that the first years of marriage are characterized by the organization of the couple's social, economic, and psychological life. Consequently, many

researchers have demonstrated a high rate of divorce during the first two years of marriage due to the spouses' lack of mutual understanding, limited experience, poor partner selection, and other factors that reinforce separation. However, other studies have shown that the prevalence of marital distress is higher among elderly couples.

4.8 Women's Employment:

Women's participation in the workforce represents one of the most significant issues that may generate marital conflicts arising from the husband's fear of women's financial independence, which may prompt him to assert his authority through violent and aggressive behavior toward his wife. Consequently, women's employment may contribute to family disintegration and negative interaction between spouses, rather than fostering support and cooperation between them in overcoming the difficulties of life that disturb the harmony of their relationship.

4.9 Sexual Relationship:

The sexual relationship is regarded as one of the factors that strengthen the marital bond, and sexual compatibility is considered the foundation of marital adjustment. This refers to the mutual satisfaction of each spouse's sexual needs through the other, achieved through psychological, emotional, and physical harmony between them. Conversely, sexual incompatibility may arise from several factors, such as each spouse's lack of knowledge of the other's needs, whether related to sexual arousal or to certain deviant sexual practices that are often rejected by women, or the absence of desire of one spouse toward the other, among other factors that lead to separation, emotional coldness, and disintegration culminating in marital distress.

4.10 Economic Factors:

Economic pressures and financial hardships produce disruptions in patterns of living, particularly with regard to the imbalance between the family's demands and needs and the resources required to meet those demands and needs. As Conger and colleagues indicate, despite the experience of economic hardship, its impact appears stronger and more direct on the behavior of husbands than wives, as husbands tend to exhibit greater aggression and provide less support toward their families. Researchers have reached a consensus that the economic factor disturbs the harmony of marital life, diminishes feelings of warmth, and increases the predominance of negativity (Kafafi, 2000, p. 09).

4.11 Other Factors:

Other psychological and social factors may also be involved, including the presence of psychological disorders and social difficulties, as well as emotional dependency of one spouse on his or her family and the influence they exert, including interference in personal matters and marital life.

Marital compatibility may also be hindered by an age difference between the spouses, resulting in a lack of equivalence in their respective desires and needs, in addition to differences in thinking and levels of maturity, which may ultimately lead to the deterioration of the marital relationship.

5. Manifestations of Marital Distress

The manifestations of marital distress include the following:

- The transformation of positive perceptions of the partner into negative perceptions.
- Divergent interpretations by the spouses of the same event.
- Rigid expectations regarding marital roles, which lead both spouses to experience frustration, anger, aggressiveness, and failure in communication, ultimately resulting in emotional distance and separation between them.
- A lack of competence in resolving marital problems, in addition to the absence of intellectual compatibility, which contributes to marital dysfunction.

6. Symptoms of Marital Distress

- Dissatisfaction experienced by both spouses.
- Psychological isolation, feelings of loneliness, and self-centeredness.
- Persistent rumination on negative thoughts.
- Lack of willingness to interact with the surrounding environment and avoidance of social encounters.
- Lack of motivation to plan for the future.
- Feelings of misery, psychological instability, tension, and distress in the presence of the other partner.
- The presence of detrimental habits affecting marital interaction, such as irritability, addiction to alcohol and drugs, sexual and behavioral deviance, irresponsibility, and neglect of marital and familial duties.

- The disintegration of the marital relationship and the absence of affection and empathy.
- Frequent and prolonged quarrels, abandonment, and absence from the home.
- Separation in the marital bed and emotional divorce (Eugene, 2020, p. 26).

7. The Effects of Marital Distress on the Family

7.1 The Effects of Marital Distress on Spouses:

The American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy indicates that marital distress is among the most common problems experienced by married couples, who often suffer profound disappointment and increasing doubts regarding the continuation of their marital relationship. Even when the marriage persists, it may be accompanied by varying degrees of strain and distress due to circumstances beyond the spouses' control. Consequently, when distressed marital relationships do not end in divorce, they leave deep and potentially indelible effects on the psychological lives of the spouses. These effects manifest in psychological, social, and physical dimensions.

- **Psychological effects:** Marital distress may lead to the emergence of depression, anxiety, persistent tension, feelings of inadequacy accompanied by low self-esteem, diminished self-worth, suspicion, and social withdrawal.
- **Physical effects:** As a result of continuous stress, psychosomatic disorders may appear in one or both spouses, including dermatological diseases, respiratory illnesses, gastrointestinal disorders, cardiovascular and arterial diseases, and endocrine dysfunctions.
- **Psychosocial effects:** These include various forms of addiction, such as dependence on sedatives, hallucinogens, narcotics, alcohol, and other substances. Such behaviors constitute an outlet to which spouses may resort in an attempt to escape marital and familial problems. As explained by Guttman and Krokoff, marital distress renders spouses vulnerable to withdrawal, reduced social competence, and the experience of health, emotional, and behavioral problems, while also demonstrating a marked deficiency in verbal and nonverbal communication skills (Gottman, 2024, p. 34).

7.2 The Effects of Marital Distress on Children

The Impact of Marital Distress on the Marital Relationship and the Family System as a Whole: A Clinical Case Study of a Couple from a Systemic Perspective

Marital disputes create an environment which produces extreme family conflicts that affect children in addition to their parents. The child develops an emotional disturbance which affects their feelings throughout their entire life span starting from infancy through to adult years. The child develops insecurity which destroys their self-confidence because they lack ability to build relationships with others. Children experience insecurity about their parents according to Horney which produces anxiety that makes them develop ineffective coping mechanisms to handle their psychological distress. Human beings tend to develop permanent personality patterns during their growth from childhood into adulthood through their repeated reactions to particular situations which produce aggressive behavior and make them excessively dependent on others while submitting to their authority. Researchers have discovered that children and teenagers who experience psychological stress while their family exhibits continuous conflicts and their parents show opposing behaviors and abusive conduct will develop various psychological problems. The pathogenic environment produces multiple disorders which include eating disorders and sleep disorders and social phobia and depression and emotional deprivation and suicide attempts and behavioral deviance and other pathological disturbances.

8. Methodological Approach

The clinical method was considered the most appropriate approach for this study. A semi-structured interview was conducted with a clinical case involving a married couple, during which the Marital Adjustment Questionnaire designed by Graham Spanier was administered in order to measure the quality of the marital relationship. The instrument consists of 32 items divided into four subscales:

- Marital consensus
- Marital satisfaction
- Marital cohesion
- Affective expression

Spanier calculated Cronbach's alpha coefficient to assess the reliability of the scale and its subscales, obtaining a value of 0.96. This result indicates a sufficiently high level of reliability to justify its use (Spanier, 1976, p. 1976).

8.1 Case Presentation

A semi-structured interview took place with a couple who have spent 24 years together as married partners while raising their three children who are now adults at 22 and 20 and 18 years old. The father who is 61 years old works as a freelance worker while his mother aged 52 stays at home because she never used her university education. The couple follows traditional marital practices while they live in an apartment which measures 57 square meters within a residential complex.

The psychological assessment received its mandate because the family's oldest daughter decided to move out after experiencing family disputes. She planned to leave her country for foreign travel while she would abandon her academic work at university and her family in her home country. The woman spent two nights at the international airport before she started ignoring all phone calls from her family members who wanted to reach her. The woman received her first phone call from her cousin who also happened to be her friend and she used this opportunity to reveal her current location. After her cousin persuaded her to reconsider her decision, the latter and her mother went to retrieve her; however, she refused to return to her parents' home. Her father subsequently brought her to a psychological specialist.

The psychological sessions revealed that the main issue stemmed from the parents who had experienced marital problems which led to their emotional separation that lasted for about ten years. The eldest daughter who experienced her parents' violent conflicts decided to move out because she saw herself as an adult who could manage her own existence to protect herself from the ongoing suffering. Both parents needed to start psychological treatment because their marriage had reached a point of extreme distress.

The participants in the study reported that they felt frustrated while experiencing anxiety and tension and psychological exhaustion and sadness which the wife showed more intensely than her husband. Their marriage began with regular stability. The husband's illness caused their marriage to fall apart after he stopped working. Their existence transformed into a series of challenges which included the man's development of a mental condition that made him accumulate excessive amounts of items. The condition created negative effects which harmed their marriage and their children while creating a family atmosphere that lacked communication and emotional connection and financial problems and social challenges and mental health issues.

The two partners recognized that their relationship contained a serious problem which they each believed the other person caused. The wife reported that her

The Impact of Marital Distress on the Marital Relationship and the Family System as a Whole: A Clinical Case Study of a Couple from a Systemic Perspective

husband left her emotionally while he treated her with rough behavior and he belittled her in front of their children and he constantly found fault with her and his hoarding habits turned their house into a cluttered storage area which impacted their entire family. The husband, for his part, complained of his wife's irritability, her emotional coldness toward their children, and her neglect of her marital responsibilities.

8.2 Presentation of the Results of the Spanier Questionnaire

Table (01): presents the results of the Spanier questionnaire

Measure	Score Obtained	Interpretation
Marital Consensus	28 out of 50	Moderate
Marital Satisfaction	12 out of 50	Low
Marital Cohesion	9 out of 40	Low
Affective Expression	5 out of 20	Very Low
Marital Adjustment (Total)	54 out of 160	Overall Adjustment Low

It is observed, based on the criteria established by Spanier for interpreting the results of the questionnaire, that a score of 70 indicates emotional divorce, a score of 98 represents the threshold marking the cessation of marital distress, and a score of 114.8 corresponds to the point of marital happiness.

Compared with these criteria, the spouses obtained a score of 54, which is a very low score and close to the level of emotional divorce. They obtained a score of 12 in marital satisfaction, which is a low score; a score of 9 in marital cohesion, which is also low; and a score of 5 in emotional expression, which is considered very low. They obtained a score of 28 in marital agreement, which represents a moderate level. However, the overall level of adjustment was low and close to the threshold of emotional divorce between the spouses, which is considered one of the principal symptoms of marital distress disorder.

8.3 Analysis of the Content of the Clinical Interview with the Spouses

The interview conducted with the spouses revealed a number of psychological indicators that clearly reflect their experience of marital distress and the impact of this condition on all members of the family system.

With regard to the wife, the factor that led to the deterioration of her relationship with her partner was hoarding behavior involving the accumulation of discarded objects, as she no longer had a personal space for herself and her children. This statement reflected a sense of dissatisfaction and psychological suffocation within the family environment, which is supposed to constitute a source of security and psychological comfort rather than the opposite. According to the study conducted by Steketee and Frost (2017), hoarding disorder often leads the other partner to experience feelings of exclusion within the relationship and distress resulting from the encroachment on shared space, which in turn generates anxiety and tension. This situation arises from the wife's inability to organize the household and dispose of useless objects, despite the considerable effort she expends in arranging and organizing the home without success. This condition reveals a dysfunction in the feedback system within the family system, as efforts that do not yield positive results lead the individual to withdraw. Within the systemic perspective, this withdrawal is interpreted as a cessation of the cycle of effective interaction, resulting in the repetition of disorder without any modification of the situation.

This also reflects the absence of effective communication between the spouses and the weakening of the interactive function, causing the relationship to become emotionally rigid both between the spouses themselves and among the family members as a whole. The wife stated that emotional and actual separation had existed for ten years, in addition to the complete absence of dialogue. According to the systemic approach, communication is not merely a means of transmitting information; rather, it constitutes a dynamic system that maintains the balance of relationships within the system and ensures its continuity. Its absence leads to a rigidity of roles that deprives the marital relationship of its flexibility and its capacity for adaptation.

A study conducted by Guttman (2007) demonstrated the existence of a relationship between patterns of interaction and conflict between spouses. This approach further clarified that the rejection, negativity, or positivity characterizing the marital relationship depends on the messages conveyed by the partner (such as facial expressions, tone of voice, and body movements). The more these signals are inconsistent or incongruent with the situation, the more negative their impact becomes. Thus, nonverbal messages influence spousal interaction in general and the intimate relationship in particular. The absence of a sexual relationship reflects an emotional withdrawal between spouses and constitutes an indicator of a profound rupture affecting both the physical and emotional dimensions, expressing the wife's dissatisfaction with the husband's

The Impact of Marital Distress on the Marital Relationship and the Family System as a Whole: A Clinical Case Study of a Couple from a Systemic Perspective

hoarding behavior, which has extended to a feeling of aversion toward the intimate relationship.

In a study conducted by Whisman et al. (2009), it was shown that the quality of the intimate relationship declines significantly among couples whose relationships are marked by conflicts and dysfunctions within the shared living environment, thereby increasing the likelihood of separation and violence. This was confirmed by the wife, who reported being subjected to violence by her husband and came close to divorcing him; however, her family refused to accept her divorce after such a period of marriage in order to preserve family traditions, without consideration for the psychological pain she was experiencing. Consequently, she began to display signs of sadness and psychological distress, social withdrawal and isolation, loss of pleasure and interest, crying, heightened sensitivity, and diminished self-worth.

As for the husband, he blamed his wife for her emotional coldness toward their children, her irritability, and her constant shouting at them over trivial matters. This led the husband to develop aversion toward his wife and to subject her to both physical and verbal violence. He also stated that she constantly criticizes him and accuses him of mismanaging the family budget. The withdrawal from family interaction and the hoarding behavior exhibited by the husband correspond to the interpretation advanced by the findings of the study conducted by (Mubqa, 2024, p. 22), which indicated that spouses experiencing accumulated psychological and familial pressures as well as marital conflicts tend to demonstrate psychological withdrawal from the relationship and seek to compensate for the loss of control through pathological behaviors such as compulsive spending, hoarding, or aggressive conduct. This leads to the obstruction of dialogue and a breakdown in communication and interaction between spouses, and may extend to all members of the family system.

Another issue also emerged, namely the daughter's running away from home as a consequence of the family climate characterized by conflict, tension, and continuous disputes between the parents. In this regard, the study by Synder and Abbott indicated that approximately 80 percent of children's psychological and emotional problems result from marital distress, which negatively affects them and produces extremely serious consequences that may reach the level of delinquency and risk-taking behaviors (Snyder, 2008, p. 20), such as running away from the family home—a phenomenon that many psychologists consider to be the product of a pathogenic environment.

The daughter stated that she no longer felt a sense of belonging to that family and that she was fully prepared to leave the home permanently, in her own words. She also expressed that she no longer had any desire to continue her studies, as evidenced by the fact that she did not attend her examinations and consequently lost an entire academic year without her parents' knowledge. She also reported having repeatedly contemplated suicide, although she resisted this thought due to her awareness of the religious prohibition, stating, "this is forbidden." All of this illustrates the extent of the psychological suffering she experienced, which led her to search for an outlet that might provide psychological relief and free her from the pressures that had accompanied her from childhood into adulthood—pressures she described as a heavy burden for which she found no escape other than running away from home.

9. CONCLUSION

Marital distress represents a psychological disorder which produces symptoms that closely resemble those found in depression and other mental health conditions. The disorder continues to present itself as a complex medical condition which doctors identify through its distinct clinical characteristics that resemble other mental health conditions. Depression and suicide attempts emerge as possible result of this condition. The research team conducted their investigation about this subject through academic work and practical fieldwork which they based on the systemic approach that studies how systems communicate and interact including the marital and family systems.

The research team aimed to identify which factors lead to marital problems because these issues generate severe effects and threats which affect both marriage and every family member. Children learn their behavior from their parents who serve as their role models through either positive or negative examples. Children who develop pathological models will experience multiple severe psychological problems which manifest as behavioral issues and deviant behavior and various addictions and academic struggles and related mental health issues.

The research study finds its core value through its effort to determine the negative aspects of this disorder which allows experts from various fields to create programs for family system transformation through prevention and education and treatment. The family serves as the fundamental social entity which creates socialization basics while it implements educational methods that help people develop into balanced personalities who maintain proper social conduct.

Study Recommendations:

The research findings lead to these vital recommendations which should guide future actions:

The Impact of Marital Distress on the Marital Relationship and the Family System as a Whole: A Clinical Case Study of a Couple from a Systemic Perspective

- The creation of marital counseling programs which will support married couples and those who want to get married.
- The reinforcement of marital guidance programs aimed at improving communication skills and clarifying marital roles.
- The establishment of listening units within relevant centers and institutions to promote constructive dialogue and effective management of marital crises.
- The intensification of awareness and educational campaigns regarding the risks threatening the family system, particularly for children in dysfunctional family environments.
- The establishment of academic programs which specialize in family psychology together with increased research activities about individual and family-related matters.
- The organization of training programs to cultivate a culture of dialogue and interpersonal skills in order to preserve marital relationships and parent–child relationships.
- The provision of specialized training courses aimed at clarifying the disorders that may disrupt marital life and the overall quality of life within the family system.

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