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Hanna Case - The Impact of Emotional Neglect in Marriages on Self Esteem: A case Study Report

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Abstract

This case study examines a complex and emotionally draining marital situation where the male partner shows no outward signs of infidelity, fulfils basic family responsibilities, and behaves as if all is normal, yet exhibits emotional disengagement. The woman in this case experiences profound loneliness and emotional neglect despite living in a conventional family setup. This case highlights the challenges of dealing with silent emotional damage, the difficulty in articulating the problem to others, and the impact on emotional well-being and self-esteem within a marriage. It also underscores the necessity of addressing silent estrangement in relationships to promote mental health and familial harmony.

Keyword: *Emotional estrangement in marriage, Work-life balance challenges, Gender dynamics in emotional neglect, Family dynamics and emotional health, Motherhood and emotional well-being, Relationship stressors in dual-income household.*

INTRODUCTION

Marital relationships are often a cornerstone of emotional and social stability. However, when one partner becomes emotionally disengaged, it creates a void that can lead to feelings of isolation, confusion, and psychological distress. (Brenda Lyon, 2017) Unlike overt issues such as infidelity or abuse, emotional neglect is subtle, making it harder to identify and address. This case study presents a woman in a marital relationship where the husband, despite being physically present and responsible, is emotionally unavailable. The study explores the dynamics of the relationship, the impact on the individual's mental health and self-esteem, and possible approaches to addressing the issue.

Emotional neglect, often characterized by the insufficient fulfilment of emotional needs such as love, support, and belonging, is a subtle yet impactful form of relational harm. While traditionally studied in the context of caregiver-child relationships, it is equally relevant in marital dynamics, where one partner's emotional (Zhong et al., 2024) unavailability can deeply affect the other. Unlike overt conflicts, emotional neglect is tied to the quality of the relationship and often lacks identifiable incidents, making it harder to recognize. This silent form of maltreatment can erode self-esteem, foster feelings of rejection, and contribute to long-term psychological issues like depression and anxiety in women.

BACKGROUND

Emotional neglect in marital relationships can have profound psychological consequences, often leading to mental health conditions such as depression or anxiety disorders. Unlike physical absence, emotional unavailability (Dash & Jena, 2019) creates a pervasive sense of loneliness, even when the partner is present. This silent disconnection can lead to significant stress, self-doubt, and feelings of unworthiness in the neglected partner.

When a spouse is emotionally disengaged, it often disrupts the balance of emotional reciprocity, which is fundamental to healthy relationships. Over time, the emotionally neglected partner may begin to internalize the lack of (Beyazit et al., 2024)emotional connection as a personal failing, leading to chronic feelings of inadequacy and self-blame. This emotional turmoil may evolve into depressive symptoms, such as persistent sadness, low energy, loss of interest in daily activities, and difficulty concentrating.

Anxiety disorders can also emerge in such scenarios. The neglected partner might experience constant worry or fear about the stability of the relationship, often feeling on edge or hypervigilant to signs of further emotional (Taylor et al., 2023)withdrawal. This heightened state of arousal can result in physical symptoms like restlessness, fatigue, and sleep disturbances, compounding the psychological strain. Sometimes these conditions are mostly in synchronous with state of loneliness in many persons.

The long-term impact of such emotional neglect is particularly damaging, as the sense of abandonment and invalidation can erode self-esteem,(Kumari V, 2020) intensify feelings of helplessness, and create a pervasive fear of rejection. Moreover, these emotional wounds often go unaddressed due to the subtle nature of the issue, allowing negative patterns to persist and mental health to deteriorate over time.

By examining the case of a woman facing emotional neglect in her marriage, this study will illuminate the intricate connections between emotional disconnection and the onset of depression or anxiety, highlighting the urgency of recognizing and addressing these patterns in intimate relationships.

CASE REPORT

Patient Description: The patient named Hanna is a 35-year-old married woman with two children, aged 8 and 5. She has been in a marital relationship for over 10 years. Both partners are employed and contribute to the household.

Case History: The woman reports that her husband has been emotionally distant for approximately two years. Despite returning home on time, sharing meals with the family, and performing routine family responsibilities, he does not engage in meaningful conversations. Their physical intimacy remains unchanged, but it is devoid of emotional connection. Attempts to communicate with him result in dead-end responses or complete silence.

Physical Examination Results: The woman shows no outward physical signs of distress but reports chronic fatigue, difficulty sleeping, and occasional loss of appetite. She describes feeling emotionally “empty” and “lonely” despite being surrounded by her family. She also reports a gradual decline in her self-esteem, feeling inadequate and questioning her worth as a partner.

Results of Pathological Tests and Other Investigations: No physical abnormalities were identified in routine health check-ups. Psychological evaluations reveal mild symptoms of depression and anxiety linked to chronic emotional neglect, as well as diminished self-esteem.

Treatment Plan

1. Initiating open and non-confrontational conversations with the spouse to understand his perspective and emotional state.
2. Introducing joint activities, such as counseling sessions or shared hobbies, to rebuild emotional intimacy.
3. Encouraging the patient to establish a strong support system outside the marriage through friends, family, or community groups.
4. Providing individual therapy for the woman to manage feelings of rejection, loneliness, and low self-esteem.
5. Exploring the feasibility of (Mu et al., 2019)family counseling to address the emotional disconnect as a unit.

Expected Outcome of the Treatment Plan

- Improved communication between the couple.
- Enhanced emotional intimacy and understanding within the marriage.
- Reduction in symptoms of depression and anxiety for the woman.
- Restoration of self-esteem and confidence in the woman.
- Development of a supportive and cooperative family environment.

Actual Outcome: The initial phase of the treatment plan yielded mixed results. Individual therapy helped the woman build resilience, improve her coping mechanisms, and begin to rebuild her self-esteem. However, efforts to engage the husband in meaningful conversations were met with resistance. The couple has not yet agreed to attend joint counselling sessions, highlighting the complexity of addressing emotional disengagement.

DISCUSSION

Emotional neglect in marriages (Jonice Webb, 2022) is often underreported due to its subtle nature and the lack of physical evidence. This case is noteworthy because it reflects the paradox of living in close proximity with a partner while feeling deeply alone. Research indicates that emotional neglect can have a profound impact on mental health, contributing to depression, anxiety, and diminished self-esteem.

Theories on emotional neglect suggest that unresolved personal issues, societal pressures, or communication barriers may contribute to a partner's (Jabulile Mutale, 2022) emotional withdrawal. In this case, the husband's resistance to communication might stem from internal conflicts or external stressors that remain unexplored.

Existing literature emphasizes the importance of open communication, empathy, and mutual respect in resolving marital conflicts. However, when one partner is unresponsive, the burden of maintaining emotional stability often falls disproportionately on the other. This case highlights the need for tailored approaches, such as individual therapy and community support, to empower individuals facing such challenges. The profound impact on self-esteem further underscores the necessity of timely intervention, as prolonged emotional neglect can erode an individual's sense of self-worth and overall well-being.

CONCLUSION

This case study underscores the emotional toll of silent estrangement in marriages and the challenges of addressing emotional neglect in the absence of overt conflict. While the woman in this case has developed strategies to cope, the underlying issue remains unresolved due to the husband's continued disengagement. Clinicians, counselors, and researchers must explore innovative interventions to address emotional neglect and foster healthier marital relationships. The profound impact on self-esteem necessitates a holistic approach that not only addresses relationship (Steven D. Brown, 2020) dynamics but also empowers individuals to

reclaim their confidence and emotional well-being. Future studies should focus on understanding the root causes of emotional withdrawal and developing tools to facilitate communication and connection between partners.

Notes on Patient Consent The patient's identity and specific details have been anonymized to ensure confidentiality. Consent for sharing this case study was obtained, with the understanding that the information will be used solely for educational and professional purposes.

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