

## Sexual Talk with the Spouse: Sarcastic or Soothing?

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### Abstract

**Background:** Sexual talk with spouse has a dual role: it can lead to either compatibility and satisfaction or harassment and separation between the couple. This article explores the concept and dimensions of sexual talk with the spouse.

**Method:** This qualitative study with a conventional content analysis was conducted in 2014 and 2015 wherein 26 Iranian married men and women were individually interviewed.

**Results:** Sexual talk with the spouse is the conversation about planning, performance and evaluation of sexual relationship that leads to sexual agreement, intimacy, resolving the existing problems and greater sexual compatibility and satisfaction of the couple. Sexual talk should be romantic, pacific, clear, continuous, with admiration and without shame, sarcasm, anger, comparison, reproach. Couples can express their views about the partner's sexual behavior, but expressing partner's incurable physical problems is not helpful. Shyness, fear of being stigmatized as impolite and promiscuous, fear of being rejected or breaking pride, to expect the spouse to read minds, lack of opportunities, presence of children and failing to receive sexual conversation skills from adolescent are among the main barriers against sexual talk with the spouse

*conclusion: Sexual talk with the spouse is necessary throughout the marital life: During the early days of marriage, in order to attain initial sexual coordination and agreement and to avoid early divorce and after several years of marriage, in order to give variety and freshness in relationship and to resolve the problems.*

**Keywords: sexual talk, sexual satisfaction, sexual compatibility, sexual agreement, sex education, Qualitative study.**

### **Introduction**

Verbal language and words have constantly played a dual role. Words can be either sarcastic or soothing (Jackson, 2008). Words can lead to beginning or ending of a relationship. In a sexual relationship as other human relationships, words and verbal communication play a critical role so that they may improve or ruin the sexual relationship.

In order to achieve the sexual objectives in marriage, both verbal and non-verbal communications are necessary. Although people most often use non-verbal communication, verbal communication is also vital (Hess & Coffelt, 2012).

“Let’s talk about it”: This phrase was the motto on the first world sexual health day in 2010 (“<http://www.worldsexology.org/news/world-sexual-health-day>,”), indicating that talking about sexual issues is considered necessary all around the world in order to acquire sexual health. Conversation concerning sexual issues might occur at different levels: It can take place at the social level. Social discussions and conversations may lead to sexual health or lack of sexual health (Fletcher et al., 2015), and can affect the marriage and divorce behaviors (Karabulatova, Khachmafova, Bricheva, Nescheretova, & Bersirova, 2015). Moreover, the definitions of femininity, masculinity, responsibility and violence in society, influence people’s sexual behavior and performance (Gilmore & Wheeler, 2012; Salazar & Öhman, 2015).

Another level of sexual conversation refers to the dialogues and questions asked by doctors and health service providers (Henderson & Johnson, 2002).

Sexual conversation with adolescents and their awareness about sexual issues is another level of sexual talk in the published articles (Dennis & Wood, 2012; Portier-Le Cocq, 2016; Rogers, Ha, Stormshak, & Dishion, 2015; Sanjakdar, 2009; Satterwhite & Ramaswamy, 2015).

The other level of sexual conversation exist between the couple and three categories of articles in this respect are: some articles stress on negotiation skills between partners and prevention from AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (Wamoyi et al., 2015). The second category of articles addresses sexual conversation and retrieval of sexual relationship after a disease like cancer or surgery (Guo et al., 2015; Seidler, Lawsin, Hoyt, & Dobinson, 2015; Verschuren et al., 2013). A large number of articles also address violence in marital relationships. Verbal reinforcers may aggravate domestic quarrels (Giordano, Copp, Longmore, & Manning, 2015). In romantic relationships, women use more verbal quarrel than men (Ye, 2011). A few number of studies have addressed sexual conversation between non-distress heterosexual couples. These studies demonstrated that talking about sexual issues is a very difficult task for many couples and they prefer to remain silent or not to use open and frank words. It is more likely among women to avoid stating their sexual needs than among men (Træen & Skogerbø, 2009). Sexual disorders in

women is associated with their ability to express their sexual desires (Tehrani, Farahmand, Simbar, & Afzali, 2014). As women have fear of being stigmatized shameless and indecent, they hardly talk to their husband about sex (Huong, 2010). Many couples don't talk about sexual issues in the same way that they don't speak about children and financial issues and if the husband is depressed, it is more probable that their conversations lead to nervousness and quarrels (Papp, Goeke-Morey, & Cummings, 2013). In sum, husbands and wives are confused and indecisive in having sexual conversation together (Huong, 2010; Papp et al., 2013).

### **Research in Context**

Evidence before this study:

In Iranian community and culture, talking about sexual issues is accompanied by reservation and specific complexities. Because of sociocultural consideration, sexual conversation is bounded at the social level. Even many physician and health service providers do not know how and with what words speak about sexual issues with their patients. At the family level, as parents are afraid their children become indecent or have an early sexual relationship, they fail to speak about sexual issues with their children and adolescents. Also, after marriage, the couples do not know how to express their sexual needs or problems.

### **Value of this study:**

Current study addresses sexual conversation between Iranian couples because:

The most common form of marriage in Iran is a formal heterosexual marriage and in Iranian Islamic culture, marriage and having a family is very popular and admirable ("<http://hadith.anhar.ir/hadith-998.htm>").

In another study conducted by this research team on sexual compatibility in Iranian couples, it was found that those couples who talk together about their sexual issues are more compatible. Therefore, in order to specify the concept and dimensions of sexual talk in Iranian couples more precisely, this study was done.

A scarce number of research have addressed sexual talk between non-distress heterosexual couples and no article is found to use a qualitative method to explore the manner of healthy sexual conversation without violence.

The majority of articles on sexual talk is from the Western countries and the eastern countries, particularly Muslim nations have a little contribution in such articles. This indicates that talking about sex is not common even in scientific communities is wrapped in an aura of shame and silence. As a result, research on sexual talk is necessary in societies like Iran.

### **Implications of all the available evidence**

Conversation is a two-sided sword: it can lead to either intimacy or annoyance between the couple. So it is essential to clarify the quiddity and nature of sexual conversation and why and how it should occur to provide the necessary training for the couples regarding verbal skills. In this article, Iranian couples speak of the concept of sexual talk with the spouse, its dimensions, barriers and borders.

### **Methodology**

**Procedure:** This article is part of a PhD dissertation results. It is a proposed research and funded by research deputy of nursing and midwifery School of Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences. Its ethical code is SBMU2.REC.1394.73. This research is conducted during 2014 and 2015. Verbal and written informed consent form taken from participants. The researcher reminded the participants of her obligation to observe all ethical principles such as secrecy, anonymity and allowing the participants to leave the study whenever they wished. Research setting included two health care centers, one health house of municipality, one religious forum (Heiat) in Tehran and Telegram cyberspace. Purposive sampling started and continued until data saturation occurred (Guarte & Barrios, 2006). All interviews were performed by a single person (the first author). Duration of interviews varied between 20 to 90 minutes, depending on the participants' interest. Unstructured interviews began with an open ended question (Geer, 1988):

What does the phrase "sexual talk with the spouse" remind you of?

As interviews proceeded, new questions were posed and different dimensions of sexual talk between the couple were explored.

**Participants:** The participants of this study included 26 married people (15 females and 11 males) with different ages, education, occupation, years of marriage and number of children. 24 participants were sexually compatible with their spouses and 2 participants had gotten divorced. The youngest participant was 19 and the oldest was 50 years old. Duration of marriage varied between 1 to 30 years. The number of children varied in the range of 0 to 3. In terms of education, 9 participants had high school degrees, 9 participants had bachelor degree and 8 participants had degrees higher than a bachelor degree. Participants in this study were couples, mostly living in Tehran with at least a 1-year record of marital life, fluent in the Persian language and lacking any disease affecting their sexual performance. They were interested to take part in this research and were able to communicate and state their sexual life experiences. Demographic characteristics of participants are provided in table 1.

**Measurements:** Interview transcription was analyzed using conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Data analysis started with frequent reading and perceiving a general sense of text and ended with extraction of codes and their placement in subcategories and categories. In order to assure the trustworthiness and rigor of qualitative data, Guba and Lincoln criteria including: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were used (Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

### **Findings:**

After content analysis, sexual talk with spouse, was explored in 4 categories, 7 subcategories and 46 codes (Table 2).

#### **What is sexual talk?**

The participants raised several cases as the topics of sexual talk:

Hoda: sexual talk is a conversation concerning sexual affairs such as sexual humors during the day and night and dialogues during courtship and intercourse (W19, Teologe student, 1, 0).

Mehran: Sexual conversations take place when the partners ask each other to have sex or talk about the quality of their sexual relationship (M40, Physician, 15, 1).

Ashkan: I think sexual talk means a discussion between the couples concerning sexual affairs to know about each other's traits in order to promote the quality of relationship and to express positive qualities of spouse, such as his/her good style and beauty (M36, B.A. 7, 2).

Jalal: Sexual talking means that the couple easily makes love as they wish and exchange sexy words. However, I couldn't do so, but we talk about our problems in sex (M40, Physician, 17, 1)

### **Why is sexual talk necessary?**

Participants in this study considered sexual conversation necessary and essential.

Mehran, uses an interesting interpretation. He considers sexual conversation as necessary as exercising for a marital life:

Sexual conversation is something like exercising that is good and everyone knows that, but they lack the firm decision for it (M40, Physician, 15, 1).

Reply to this question "Is sexual dialogue essential?" Hoda said:

Of course! It helps the couple to get informed about their relationship, to know each other better, and to remove any problem, if existing. Apart from it, it makes the couple feel closer and more intimate. I enjoy such discussions whether we are together or not (W19, Teologe student, 1, 0).

In the first phase of study, in order to explore the concept and factors affecting sexual compatibility, we asked the couples how they reached an agreement and compatibility in their sexual relationship after their marriage. In most answers, talking to the spouse was considered as the main way for achieving sexual agreement:

- Over the years of marriage, how did you achieve sexual agreement with your spouse?
- Atefeh: Through talking and mutual understanding (W32, A.A. Housewife, 10, 2)
- Jafar: With love, affection and verbal communication (M46, S.S. Blacksmith, 22, 2)
- Ehsan; Through conversation, practice and active participation (M34, M.A. Employee, 4,1).
- Yashar: Through speaking and exchange of opinions with spouse and testing the prior knowledge (M35, PhD. Faculty member,8 , 1).
- Akram: Coordination and agreement were present from the beginning. If it was absent in some occasions, he raised his demand and sometimes I did so (W43, PhD. Faculty member, 22, 2).
- Soheila: Over time and through talking and learning we have achieved an optimal level of sexual compatibility. (W33, B.S. Housewife, 12, 2).

Ilia believed sexual talk can lead to refreshing the sexual relationship:

The sexual conversation with spouse correct defects, improve coordination, prevent monotony in sex, and refresh sexual relationship (M 41, Physician, 16, 1).

Sexual conversation may lead to further sexual satisfaction. Ashkan, states in this respect:

- With sexual conversation we get acquainted with the needs and qualities of our partner so that we try to make our relationship as satisfactory as possible.
- Some couples comment that “after so many years we understand each other without talking. There is no need for talking. What do you think?”
- I think love words before sexual relationship are not dedicated to a special time because they arouse both partners and enhance the quality of sexual relationships (M36, B.A. Teacher, 7 , 2)

Yasaman, considers sexual conversation as the main factor for achieving more pleasure and satisfaction:

About one or two years after our marriage, the degree of satisfaction was enhanced. However, we talk too much in this regard that helps us very much (W35, PhD. Faculty member, 8, 1).

### **Why I cannot talk to my spouse about sexual subjects (Talk Barriers)**

Some participants considered sexual conversation essential and necessary in order to establish sexual compatibility and coordination, however, they expressed that they have not been able to talk about sexual topics with their spouse. Shame, pudency, and decency were considered the most important barriers against sexual conversation:

Mina: During the first two years after our marriage, shame and decency hindered me to tell my problem (W50, B.A. Houswife\_Translator, 30, 2)

Simin: 10 years had passed and I told him about my needs. I put away bashfulness and asked him to do what I wanted (W48, B.S. Employee, 15, 2).

Behzad: We could have a talk but not from the beginning; My wife was shameful (M38, B.A. Publisher, 10, 1).

Hamid 's ex-wife who was separated after 13 years of marital life considered sexual conversation rude and obscene.

- How easy and comfortable did you feel to talk concerning sexual issues with your ex-wife? Did you raise your sexual needs and demands?
- My ex-wife considered talking about sex and our demands offensive and she never agreed to listen, learn and act. She supposed to talk about sexual issues rude, impolite and foolish and as such sex became one of the main challenges in our life so that along with other differences led to divorce (M38, M.S. Engineer, 13, 0, Divorced).

Baran, is afraid to be stigmatized rude, if she expresses her sexual needs to her husband, but on the other hand, she considers care for sexual needs as necessary as food and water:

If I state my needs to my husband without bashfulness, he may even realize me impudent. However, they are included in my demands as I need water, food and clothing. So I should care about my sexual needs and put them into words (W28, Diploma, Houswife, 8, 1).

Lack of sexual education from early childhood due to family silence and the silence of the educational system, were mentioned another causes of embarrassment in sexual talk:

Laleh: Our parents didn't talk to us regarding sexual issues and we have not learned to do so (W37, S.S. 8, 1, divorcee).

Mehran: Anyway, as we have not learned to talk about our sexual needs, it is difficult for us now. I think sexual education should be provided from adolescence to break down this taboo about sexual relationships and establish a better and stronger relationship (M40, Physician, 15, 1).

Failing to provide a background by husband to make overtures is another barrier of sexual talk:

Azita assumes her husband's role very effective in providing a background for sexual talks:

I think women, due to more decency and shyness, may not begin the conversation, but if their husband shows an undisturbed behavior, they will be encouraged (W21, Midwifery student, 1, 0).

Behzad also considers his own role very principal in opening a conversation, particularly during the early days of their marriage:

When we got engaged, my wife was young. She was shameful and didn't know how to make a relationship until I began talking with her. I told her to feel easy. Gradually, after two years, she put away her shyness so that most of the times she proposes to begin the relationship (M38, B.A. Publisher, 10, 1)

.... Behnaz, Behzad's wife laughs and says: yeah, thanks God we feel really easy and comfortable in sex and if I don't like something in that, I will express it and it never happens again (W29, B.A., Housewife, 10, 1)

Failing to talk with spouse due to fear of being stigmatized brazen and being suspected by the spouse was obviously in an interview with Laleh:

If I expressed my sexual needs, he might address me concupiscent or barefaced! If I once said, he asked how I learned such words and somehow he suspected (W37, S.S. 8, 1, divorcee).

Failing to state sexual needs and demands may be due to fear of being rejected and consequently hurting pride and self-esteem: Susan said:

One reason that I didn't approach my husband in the early days of our marriage was that I was not sure if he would accept me or break my dignity. However, whenever I have asked my husband, he has not rejected me! (W39, Dip. Housewife, 5, 1).

Expecting the spouse to read his/her partner's mind was considered as another barrier for failing to sexual talk.

Susan: I expected and waited for my husband to notice my sexual needs and when he didn't, I got ill-tempered, but now I remember what inappropriate expectations I had! Well, how should he understand my need?! I must state it (W39, Dip. Housewife, 5, 1).

Lack of opportunity, presence of children and feeling iteration were among other barriers against sexual conversations.

- Ashkan: Before the birth of children, we talked too much, but after that, we had fewer opportunities. Apart from it, a sense of becoming ordinary and repetitive may prevent from talking (M36, B.A. Teacher, 7, 2)

Reyhaneh loves her husband, but she is not satisfied in her sexual relationship. She needs some lead-up works and she has talked about it with her husband several times but he didn't observe. Now she has got disappointed and considers the conversation useless:

I have told him several times to take a shower before the relationship and to put on perfume. He regarded for some time, but he continued his old behavior and I didn't warn again. I am disappointed and I feel that talking is useless (W38, B.A. Employee, 19, 2).

### **Dos for sexual conversation:**

The participants stated that sexual talking to the spouse has special requirements. Ashkan stressed on soft and erotic words:

- Couples must admire each other with a soft and erotic tone and state each other's sexual appeal. It is better they just comment on positive physical qualities of their partner, for example, you really have a nice style or you are good-looking (M36, B.A. Teacher, 7, 2).

Mehran wishes her wife speaks clearly:

I'd like my wife speaks clearly and comfortably without shyness. I listen and try to get better as much as possible (M40, Physician, 15, 1).

### **When I should talk about sex with my spouse?**

Hoda said: "Dialogue and sexual humor throughout the day and night is essential for the couple" (W19, Theologe student, 1, 0).

Yasaman also considers constant talking as the secret of her sexual satisfaction with her husband:

I and my husband continuously exchange opinions about our sexual issues which has led to our increased agreement and satisfaction with sex (W35, PhD. Faculty member, 8, 1).

Iliia, deems sexual conversation essential throughout marital life:

Sexual talking must happen before marriage, in its early days and continue throughout the marital life: before marriage, it causes more acquaintance, on the early days of marriage, it leads to more agreement and coordination and after marriage, it resolves conflicts and shortcomings and prevents from dullness and lack of excitement (M41, Physician, 16, 1).

### **Don'ts for sexual conversation**

In sexual talks between the couple, there shouldn't be scorned, reproach and comparison with others. Moreover, incurable physical problems shouldn't be mentioned.

Human emphasizes on sexual talk without ridicule and regrets his mistake for mocking his wife once in the past:

Once we had a dispute and in the middle I told her "look at your big belly". After that my wife got sensitive about her belly and we had much less relationship. It was my fault. I shouldn't mock her! (M40, A.A. Spare parts salesman, 5, 1).

Ashkan emphasizes that we must avoid stating negative points:

- Couples shouldn't mention each other's negative trait to hurt their spouse and causes lack of interest in sexual relationship. For example, don't say that this mole on your face is ill-looking, you are overweight, you have a bad style or such an organ is too big.... But if



something was wrong with the spouse's sexual behavior, it should be remembered. Similarly, couples shouldn't compare their spouses with others or blame them (M36, B.A. Teacher, 7 , 2).

### **Considering the differences in the level of talk:**

Sexual talk with the spouse is different from sexual talk with another.

Azita is a 21 years old woman who has got married one year ago. She considers the sexual conversation with spouse as the symbol of freedom and relaxation after marriage.

- What does this word remind you of? "Sexual talk with spouse"
- I remember the freedom and relaxation that I am experiencing.
- How interesting! Could you explain more about it?
- According to our customs and traditions, we are not able to easily talk about sexual issues. But when we are married, we more easily state our feelings and this is a symbol of freedom in speaking about sexual issues post-marriage. I think when someone states his feelings, s/he will experience a peace of mind.

Ashkan says about the differences between sexual talks with spouse and non-spouse:

Talking to the spouse is more comfortable without censorship and with passion and eagerness which may provide a ground for establishing a sexual relationship...but when you talk with a doctor and so on, you just want to solve the problems or gain more information (M36, B.A. Teacher, 7 , 2).

Hoda considers talking to spouse more effective than any other person in order to resolve the problems:

If we talk with others, even a doctor, it will be less effective than when we talk with our spouse. I mean the couple finally will solve their problems through talking (W19, Theology student, 1, 0).

Mahsa also thinks that sexual conversation with the spouse is easier and causes intimacy:

Sexual conversation with the spouse is easier and in more details. It may either solve and improve the problems or be a joke or a mutual secret that leads to more intimacy, but talking to others is just for solving the problems (Mahsa, 40, BSc. in math)

### **Discussion**

The Current research explores the concept and dimensions of sexual talk between Iranian couples. The participants mentioned several topics for sexual talk:

Planning: verbal sexual humors during day and night, request for beginning the relationship

Performance: talking about how making the relationship, verbal courtship for sexually arousal, admiring each other's sexual appeal.

Evaluation: stating sexual do's and Don'ts, and talking about the problems and quality of the relationship.

Sexual conversation between couples is essential because it leads to more acquaintance, comfort, intimacy and the freshness of the relationship. Husband and wife must talk together to know

each other, to resolve their sexual problems and to evaluate their sexual relationship over time. Likewise, in order to achieve sexual agreement and understanding and more sexual pleasure and satisfaction, sexual talk with the spouse is vital. Other studies also point out the importance and advantages of sexual conversation: a research conducted by Denes and Amanda on sexual conversation titled “pillow talk” demonstrated that reciting positive feelings after sexual activity was accompanied by the couple’s confidence, satisfaction with the relationship and intimacy(Denes, 2012). However, in our research, sexual talk was not necessarily confined to bed and included the couples’ sexual conversations during the day, too. Easy talk about sex is related to feeling as a useful and good person(Mastro & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2015). There is a relation between use of sexual words and phrases, specifically vulgar words, and sexual satisfaction and intimacy(Hess & Coffelt, 2012). Expressing internal feelings is more effective in the couple’s intimacy than stating the facts and information(Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998). Those couples who state each other’s sexual pleasure and displeasure have higher sexual satisfaction(MacNeil & Byers, 2009).

Despite the positive effects of sexual conversation with the spouse, some couples avoid talking about this issue with their spouse. In this research, embarrassment was considered as the main barrier for sexual conversation. In Nepali women also shame was the main barrier for sexual talk with spouse where after training interventions, shyness lowered and couples felt more comfortable in their sexual expressions(Harman, Kaufman, & Shrestha, 2014).In our study, embarrassment to speak of sexual issues was seen in both women and men.

The couple’ shyness of sexual conversation originates from their sexual education in family. It’s been cited in other studies that although parents are the best sexual educators for their children, most parents are embarrassed and confused about sexual conversation with their children(Elliott, 2010). An effective strategy to teach the parents how to talk to their children is to use the art of drama and play actions(Causey, Zuniga, Bailer, Ring, & Gil-Trejo, 2012).Training interventions include: to hold meetings for parents and children at the same time, sexual training courses for parents, to practice updated communicative skills with adolescents by their parents. In a systematic review of studies on parents-children sexual conversation conducted from 1988 to 2012, interventions exercised to improve the effective relationship between parents and children had led to enhancement of adolescents’ sexual health(Sutton, Lasswell, Lanier, & Miller, 2014). Besides the family’s silence, educational system also has been reticent about sexual education of adolescents that can be a reason for couples’ embarrassment about sexual conversation.

Failing to train sexual conversation skills at high schools in some countries has led to early marriage with unknown men, pain and fear of sexual intercourse, and early and unwanted pregnancy(Stillman, 2014). Shyness in couples may lead them to individual sexual behavior (masturbation and see pornographic films) that can threaten their relationships over the long term(Luster, Nelson, Poulsen, & Willoughby, 2013). Over recent years, the possibility of sexual education has increased in Iranian society and in this study, it was observed that embarrassment was less seen in younger couples so that they could attain the ability to talk about sexual issues earlier after marriage.

In the current study, some women stated that they fail to express their sexual demand to their husbands because they are afraid that their husbands address them rude and shameless. From the

standpoint of a researcher from Vietnam, sexual conversation between the couple has more inclination for silence than open and frank talking because women are expected to be inactive in a sexual relationship and if they say a word, they will be considered shameless (Huong, 2010). From an American researcher's point of view, in American society women are not interested in sexual talks because it has become a masculine issue and women are afraid to be judged if they talk about sexual relationship (Montemurro, Bartasavich, & Wintermute, 2015). In other Iranian studies, silence and fear of being stigmatized as shameless can be seen in the field of sex (Rahmani et al., 2015).

The man plays a larger contribution to initiate sexual talks because in Iranian culture, as women are more shameful, it is possible that women have difficulty to begin sexual talks. In a general conclusion obtained from interviews, if the man is introvert, sexual talks hardly or never occur. In other related studies, introversion has gone along with lower quality of sexual life (Mölleken, Richter-Appelt, Stodieck, & Bengner, 2010). Similarly, some researchers believe that when in a culture a young man is expected to initiate sexual activities, extrovert men can act better than the introvert ones (Schenk & Pfrang, 1986). In other Iranian studies the language of silence and fear of promiscuous label on sexual issues is seen (Rahmani et al., 2015).

In an overview of interviews; if husband is introverted, sexual talk is more difficult formed or not formed at all. In another studies, introversion is associated with reduced quality of sexual life (Mölleken et al., 2010). Some researchers also believe in a culture that young man is expected to be initiator sexual interaction; extroverted men act better than introverted men (Schenk & Pfrang, 1986).

In another study among Iranian women, sexual interactions in silence continued from their girlhood to their womanliness period so that in order to break this silence, stress on the husband's role has been described very significantly (Janghorban, Latifnejad Roudsari, Taghipour, Abbasi, & Lottes, 2015).

Another barrier of sexual talk between husband and wife is that one of them without saying a word expects the other to read his/her mind and act accordingly. Although after many years of marital life, the couple can notice each other's sexual needs from their looks without the need for verbal communication, they must talk together to reach this level of understanding. This result is consistent with Thomas and Fletcher's study: "mind reading means the ability to understand others' feelings and thoughts which can be considered as a factor of successful relationship and a bridge among people's internal world (minds). However, there are personal difference in the ability of mind-reading. Mind reading accuracy is more in friends or partners who speak about their relationship problems. As well as mind reading ability and accuracy in long-term relationships is more than short-term relationships (Thomas & Fletcher, 2003).

Sexual talk with spouse has specific conditions: It should be gentle and romantic, begins with admiration sexual attractiveness of each other, without shame, transparent, clear, continuous and permanent. Although there are some differences in love expression between man and woman (Barbara, 2008), but to achieve a common language, they must be constantly talk together. As well as Religious culture of Iran emphasizes "tell well hear well" ("<https://rasekhoon.net/hadis/show-15422.aspx>"). Also romantic dialogue is mentioned in Iranian poetic culture: Hafez in his poems likens dialogue between lover and beloved into the fine

dialogue between flower and nightingale and emphasizes that no lover talk to beloved hard("http://ganjoor.net/hafez/ghazal/sh81,").

There shouldn't be any kind of anger, derision, comparison with others, reprimand and reproach in sexual conversation. Moreover, incurable physical problems shouldn't be disclosed. From the standpoint of Laurenceau et al., avoiding from mutual reprimand is necessary for effective relationship and enhancement of mutual understanding(Laurenceau et al., 1998). There is a strong emphasis on lack of violence in our religious culture and the best men described are those who are not violent toward their families and don't insult(" http://www.aviny.com/hadis-mozooee/ejtemai/khanevade.aspx ").

The results that are characteristic of this research and are considered as barriers for sexual conversation between Iranian couples include:

- Fear of being rejected and refusal of sexual request by the spouse and a sense of hurting their pride are barriers in both men and women for expressing their sexual wants.
- Lack of opportunity and presence of children are among other barriers of sexual conversation between couples.
- A sense of repetition or uselessness of sexual conversation with spouse due to having useless talks in the past were other confining factors for sexual talk with the spouse.
- As in lay language, some sexual words are used as curse, the couples may feel confused in using sexual words and since they are afraid to be judged rude and shameless, they avoid talking about sex.
- Due to the value of modesty and decency at the social level, particularly before marriage, some couples may dispense with talking about sex against their spouse after marriage. while in religious teachings, decency with non-spouse is admirable, it is forbidden and unaccepted between husband and wife("http://www.tebyan.net/newindex.aspx?pid=218302,"). Therefore, in marital training courses, the difference between decency and sexual conversation with spouse and non-spouse must be emphasized. It seems that sexual talks in society should occur with the respective scientific language to increase awareness. However, sexual talk with spouse takes place with more open and frank words to promote mutual pleasure and satisfaction. Outlining the difference between these two kinds of conversation can lead to initiation of sexual talks both in society and between couples.

### **Conclusions**

In this study, we explored the concept and dimensions (What, Why, When, How) of sexual talk with the spouse in Iranian couples. Sexual talk with the spouse is the conversation about planning, performance and evaluation of sexual relationship that leads to intimacy,

resolving the existing problems and greater sexual compatibility and satisfaction of the couple. Sexual talk should be romantic, pacific, clear, continuous, with admiration, and without shame, sarcasm, anger, comparison and reproach.

Perhaps at the first glance, sexual talk between husband and wife seems evident, but this research indicated the opposite because many Iranian couples don't talk about their sexual issues and this silence results in conflicts and incompatibilities between them.

Embarrassment and shame, fear of being stigmatized as indecent, lack of sexual education in family and school, fear of being rejected or hurting their pride and expecting the spouse to read his/her partner's mind, lack of opportunity and presence of children, sense of repetition or uselessness of sexual conversation were the main barriers of talking about sex with spouse. Some couples, after several years of marital life are able to recognize each other's sexual wants from their looks and without the need for verbal communication. However, the ability to read one's mind is not the same in all people and couples must talk together to reach this level of understanding. It should be noted that during early months or years of marriage, couples are not familiar with each other's sexual interests and lack of conversation may lead to incompatibility, misunderstanding and sometimes separation of marital relationship. However, after several years, sexual talks with the spouse can lead to resolution of problems arising from age, variety and freshness of sexual relationship. Therefore, in marital educations and consultations, at any stage of marital life, increasing sexual talks between the couple must be emphasized.

**Contributors:**

M.N: literature search, Data collection, Data interpretation, Writing

ZK: Corresponding Author, Study Design, Data interpretation, Editing

MS: Study Design, Data interpretation, Editing

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We declare no competing interests.

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Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants (Gender, Age, Education level, Occupation, Years married).

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Gender	Pseudo	Ag	Education	Occupation	Years of	Numbe
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			Age	Education	Occupation	Years of marriage	Number of children	
1.	Women	Hoda	19	Teologe student	Housewife	1	0	
2.		Azita	21	Midwifery student	Housewife	1	0	
3.		Baran	28	Diploma	Housewife	8	1	
4.		Atefe	32	Associate degree	Housewife	10	2	
5.		Soheila	33	Bachelor degree	Housewife	12	2	
6.		Laleh	37	Secondary school	Housewife	8- Divorced	1	
7.		Susan	39	Diploma	Housewife	5	1	
8.		Mahsa	40	Bachelor degree	Housewife	18	3	
9.		Akram	43	PhD	Faculty member	22	2	
10.		Simin	43	Bachelor degree	Employee	15	2	
11.		Mina	50	Bachelor degree	Housewife- Translatore	30	2	
12.	Men	Ehsan	34	Master degree	Employee	4	1	
13.		Ashkan	36	Bachelor degree	Teacher	7	2	
14.		Hamid	38	Master degree	Engineer	13- Divorced	0	
15.		Mehran	40	Doctorate	Physician	15	1	
16.		Jalal	40	Doctorate	Physician	17	1	
17.		Ilia	41	Doctorate	Physician	16	1	
18.		Jafar	46	Secondary school	Blacksmith	22	2	
19.		Couples	Woman	Homa	28	Associate degree	Housewife	5
20.	Man		Hooman	40	Associate degree	spare parts salesman		
21.	Woman		Behnaz	29	Bachelor degree	Housewife	10	1
22.	Man		Behzad	38	Bachelor degree	Publisher		
23.	Woman		Yasaman	35	PhD	Faculty member	8	1
24.	Man		Yashar	35	PhD	Faculty member		
25.	Woman		Reyhaneh	38	Bachelor degree	Employee	19	2
26.	Man		Reza	42	Bachelor degree	Employee		

Notes: W=woman, M=men, P.S. = Primary school, S.S. =Secondary school, Dip= Diploma, A.A. = Associate degree of art, B.S. Or B.A. = Bachelor degree, M.A. = Master degree, PhD=Philosophy of Doctorate  
For example in the text: ( W32, A.A. Housewife, 10, 2) is abbreviation for Atefeh, 32 years-old woman, associate degree, housewife, 10 years of marriage, 2 children

Table 2: Codes, Subcategories, and Categories Retrieved from this qualitative research

	Categories	Subcategories	Codes
Sexual talks with spouse	What?	What is sexual talk?	Planning: Verbal sexy humors during day and night Request for beginning the relationship Performance: Talking about the conditions for the relationship Verbal courtship to promote sexual motivation To admire partner's sexual appeals Evaluation: Speaking about each other's sexual desirable and undesirable activities Sharing opinions about problems and quality of sexual relationships
	Why?	Why is sexual talk essential?	Sexual talk is as necessary as doing exercise. To know and get acquainted with each other To feel intimate and easy with the spouse To recognize and resolve sexual problems To make sexual relationship fresh and various To achieve coordination and agreement in sex To obtain sexual understanding To attain greater sexual pleasure and satisfaction
		Why I cannot talk?	Shame and shyness To consider sexual talks obscene and bad Lack of sexual training from adolescence period Failing to provide a background for conversation by the husband  Fear of being stigmatized as impolite and indecent Fear of hearing "No" and breaking pride Expecting the spouse to read minds Lack of opportunity Presence of children Feeling sexual talk as a repetitive talk Feeling sexual talk as a useless and futile talk
	When?	When I can talk about sex with my spouse?	Continues and constant During day and night During marital life
	How	Dos	Kind, gentle and amorous tone Commencing with sexual admiration each other

			Clear and Frank
		Don'ts	Anger Ridicule Compare and blame Expressing physical and incurable problems
		Paying attention to the differences in the level of conversations	Sexual conversation with spouse is: Open, easy and straight With humor More efficient in resolving the problems Intended to make a more pleasant relationship Sexual conversation with a person other than spouse Just to receive information or to resolve problems

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