



Level of marital satisfaction in couples living in Iran

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ABSTRACT

Background: Family is one of the most important social institutions which are based on marriage and about 95% of people will experience marriage in their lifetime. During marital life, various variables affect on how couples communicate with each other. These variables lead to satisfaction or dissatisfaction of couples with marital relationships.

Objective: This study aimed to determine the level of marital satisfaction and individual factors affecting on consents among couples in Lar city of Fars province.

Materials & methods: This cross-sectional study consisted of 202 couples residing in Lar city, selected by 20 cluster sampling method. Data were collected using a questionnaire including personal information and marital life satisfaction. After data collection, t-tests, one way ANOVA and Spearman correlation coefficients were used to analyze the data.

Results: In dimension of sex and equality between men and women, men were significantly more satisfied than women, and they were more satisfied with their marital issues generally. Women's education was effective on marital issues. So, illiterate and elementary educated women had more satisfaction. Men working in the Persian Gulf regions and unemployed men also showed less consent than men employed in governmental and non-governmental sectors. Husband's addiction was also one of the variables that strongly influenced the satisfaction of marital issues. There was also significant association between income level and marital satisfaction. Variables such as, age at the marriage and number of children were also significantly contributed to the satisfaction of marital issues. With increasing the women's age at marriage time, their marital satisfaction were more ($R=0.435$, $P=0.031$), and the score of marital satisfaction increased with the numbers of children ($R=0.511$, $P=0.018$).

Conclusions: Various individual factors are involved in marital satisfaction that we may provide solutions to improve marital relations, and it's fundamental role in the success of marriage by identifying these factors.

KEYWORDS

Marital satisfaction, Couples in Lar city, Iran.

Introduction

Family is one of the most important social institutions which are based on marriage. Sharafi (1997) believed that family is among the most important social institutions which are an absolute necessity for human vital and emotional needs and for survival of society¹. Marriage is an important social and legal institution which supports stable marital relations through providing specific set of rights, privileges, obligations, responsibilities and expectations of the new role, which leads to the survival and continuity of family and social structure². Marital satisfaction is one of the most important indicators of life satisfaction which affects the level of mental health, level of life satisfaction and even the level of income, academic success and satisfaction of couple's job³. Roche et al. (1981) defined marital satisfaction as general attitudes or feelings toward spouse and his relation⁴. Marital satisfaction is introduced as contentment, happiness and compatibility in the marital relationships⁵. On the other hand, dissatisfaction in relationships between spouses leads to decreased level of mental health, decrease in life satisfaction and problems in their social relationships. In 2008, Joneidi et al. showed that incompatibility in relationships between couples cause disorder in social interactions, tendency toward social deviations and decline of cultural values among couples³. In addition, Waring et al. (1981) found that marital turmoil and lack of satisfaction in marital life is significantly associated with the prevalence of affection-emotional disorders in the society⁶. Whereas, satisfac-

tory marriages causes improving spouses health and prevents from negative events in life or psychological problems. In fact, marital satisfaction offers a general assessment of the current situation.

Numerous scientific efforts have been done to increase marital satisfaction. We have assessed herein various factors influencing marital satisfaction, such as: age of husband and spouse at the marriage time, level of education, employment, income level, husband's addiction, age difference between spouses, duration of marriage and number of children.

Materials & methods

The couples living in Lar city were the target group in this cross-sectional study. 202 couples were selected by cluster sampling, so that the city was divided into 20 clusters, then 10 clusters were selected randomly. After choosing clusters, the first house in that geographic area was selected as cluster head and inquiry continued by questioning in a certain line and finally 20 individuals enrolled in each cluster. A couple was selected from every house and a total of 202 couples were studied.

The data collection tool was ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire and every one of the subjects were related to one of the important fields in this questionnaire. Evaluating these fields within a marital relationship can describe couples

potential problems or can identify areas of strength and enhance them. By using this questionnaire you can distinguish between happy and unhappy couples with accuracy of 85-95%. ENRICH scale is a general measurement of marital relationship, including idealistic distortion, marital satisfaction, personality issues, communications, conflict resolution, financial management, sexual relationship, children and parenting, family and friends, egalitarian roles related to man and woman, religious orientation, couples solidarity and marital changes. The questionnaire considered five options for every one of the article including fully agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree and completely disagree which they will receive a score from 1 to 5. Alpha coefficient of questionnaire for subscales of marital satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution and idealistic distortion is 0.86, 0.80, 0.84, 0.83 respectively and test-retest reliability of the questionnaire for each subscale were 0.86, 0.81, 0.90, 0.92 respectively⁷ and Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of questionnaire in Asudeh research (2010), consisting of 365 couples 730 people, was 0.68, 0.78, 0.62, and 0.77 respectively⁸.

Personal information of participants was collected by another questionnaire designed by researcher. Data analysis was conducted by SPSS ver. 16 and T-test software, one way ANOVA and Spearman correlation coefficient.

Results

The mean age of the women was 31.90 ± 9.92 (17-81 years). 19.3% of the studied women had an associate degree and 68.81% were housewives. The mean age of the men was 36.25 ± 10.29 (20-86 years). 31.7 % of men had a diploma degree and 52.5 % were employed in non-governmental institutions. The average age of marriage for men was 25.83 ± 4.37 (18-50 years). The average age of marriage for women was 21.46 ± 4.24 (14-42 years). Also, the average duration of marriage was 10.42 ± 10.04 (1-63 years). Average number of children was 1.28 ± 1.20 (0-6). In terms of age difference, men were older than women in 87.1% of cases and in 2.5% of couples men were not addicted to any particular drugs. 80.7% of couples lived in their own houses and 40.59% of them earned 312-625 Dollars monthly (Tables 1, 2).

As specified in Table 3, in dimensions of sex and equality between men and women, men were significantly more satisfied than women, and in general, men were more satisfied in their marital issues. Women's education level was effective on their satisfaction of marital issues. So, illiterates or women who have not graduated from high school were more satisfied than women with college degree (Table 4). Also, men working in the Persian Gulf regions and unemployed men were also less satisfied than men working in government and non-governmental institutions and achieved lower scores. Men addiction was also one of the variables that influenced strongly on satisfaction of marital issues (Table 4). Variables of age at marriage and number of children were also significantly contributed to marital satisfaction issues. So, by increasing the women age at marriage, their marital satisfaction increases as well ($R=0.435$, $P=0.03$). There was correlation between increasing the number of children with marital satisfaction ($R=0.511$, $P=0.01$) (Table 5).

Discussion

The findings showed that men were significantly more satisfied than women in sexual relationships and men were generally more satisfied with their marital issues than women. In consistent with our results, Zandipour et al. (2011) also showed that men are more satisfied than women in marital issues⁹. Shah Siah et al. (2009) showed that the mean scores of sexual satisfaction in men is higher than women, which is also consistent with our results. This finding confirms that the number and variety of sex create more satisfaction in sexual relationships in men, and emotional conditions and general intimacy of marital relationship in life usually provide sexual satisfaction in women¹⁰. Women dissatisfaction compared with men may be due to the late onset of sexual life, conservatively sexual attitudes, lack of sexual importance in life, lack of sex-

ual expression, and using limited sexual techniques¹¹. In studying marital satisfaction, Hamidi (2007) found that more men have reported their marriage more positive than women due to the financial indicators, parents, family, friends and wife's character¹². Sex is a factor influencing the success or failure of marital life¹³. In general, sexual intercourse between spouses is a two-way process that any disruption can cause problems and destabilize the family. With increasing duration of marital life, frequency of sexual intercourse decreases, which can be due to reduced attractiveness of sex partners, age increasing, more concerns over time, job busyness, child care and so on.

There is also problems in sexual issues such as lack of desire, impotence, premature ejaculation that have been hidden and don't be expressed because of fear and anxiety, shame or feeling of inadequacy. These hidden problems may occur with symptoms, such as physical disorders, depression and dissatisfaction of marital life and lack of marital commitment and eventually cause severe disagreements and divorce in marital life. Another finding of this study was that the level of women's education was effective on their satisfaction of marital issues. So, the illiterate women and the ones who have not finished high school compared with women with higher education were more satisfied. Farasat (2004) concluded that housewives are more satisfied with their marital life in Tehran¹⁴. Barrientos et al. (2006) found that high level of education is just associated with sexual satisfaction in women, and not effective on men's sexual satisfaction¹⁵. Shah Siah et al. (2009) showed that marital satisfaction increases with increasing the level of education¹⁰, probably due to higher awareness of educated people, which was not consistent with our results. Cilli et al. (2006) also indicated that satisfaction of marital life in employed women is more than housewives which was not consistent with our results¹⁶. Norouzian (2006) showed that level of education couldn't influence on level of women's marital satisfaction, this outcome was also not consistent with our data¹⁷. Results of research Hashemi et al. (2007), which was conducted among Pakistani women, showed that women with higher education which were mainly employed women were more compatible and satisfied than women with low education which were mostly housewives¹⁸. Since, women with university education are mostly employed and these women, and are at work during a day, when come back to home are expected to fulfill the role of wife, housewife and mother, so doing these roles requires additional power. Research has shown that women who work outside the home and experience long and difficult jobs are more tired and bored compared with housewives in fulfilling home duties. Therefore, this issue caused emotional problems for employed women more than before¹⁹. In other words, fulfilling the job role doesn't weaken the women roles but rather women are often compelled to do those roles well. In addition, employed women don't forget motherhood duties to do household tasks. Thus, women are wandering among traditional and modern roles that lead to the emergence and increasing sense of dissatisfaction. Since, most illiterate women are housekeeper and can spend more time on various activities (parenting, religious matters, leisure), are more satisfied with their marital life.

Findings also showed that men working in the Persian Gulf states and unemployed men were less satisfied than men employed in the government and non-governmental agencies and got lower score. In this region, some men are working in the Persian Gulf states and are forced to be away from their family for a long time. Being away from family affects on all aspects of life and makes men to be less satisfied with their marital life. Another finding in this research is the effect of income on marital satisfaction. Results showed that income has a positive impact on marital satisfaction. Also, Moghadam et al. (2006) showed that the income level is effective on satisfaction of finance issues, personality, relationships with friends and relatives, that this finding is consistent with our results²⁰. Jinajun (2004) also indicated that people in higher socio-economic level are more satisfied than others²¹. Barrientos and colleagues (2006) showed that high socio-economic level

is associated only with the consent of women and not with consent of men¹⁵. Farasat in 2004 showed that income level is not effective on marital satisfaction which this finding was not consistent with our results¹⁴. Research conducted by Fox and Chancey (1998) showed that husband's job insecurity is high positively correlated with women's reports of marital conflicts²². About unemployed and with no income men, we can say that generally when couples are constantly worry about money they will have lower satisfaction, and marital satisfaction is related to job satisfaction^{16, 23}. Economic pressures gradually increase the hostility between the couples. By increasing the hostility, warmth and intimacy and marital quality decreases and relationships will be unstable²⁴. Conger and Elder (1990), by assessing level of tension and conflict in marital relationships, showed that economic problems (low income, no income, no job stability) decreases quality of marital life²⁵. Conger et al. (1999) also showed that the impact of economic problems on marital quality is represented by increasing violence and loss of mutual support in marital relationships. Satisfaction or frustration in marital life can be predicted or expressed by level of violence or warmth and affection in marital interactions²⁴. Other studies showed that unemployed workers have lower consultation, communication, coordination in family relationships and stressful relationships²⁶. Anyway, unemployment and lack of income is negatively associated with marital satisfaction on one hand and with changing in marital happiness on the other hand²⁷. The results indicate that husband's addiction is also a variable that strongly affects on satisfaction of marital issues, this finding is consistent with results from Rahmani et al. (2010)²⁸. Taghvaaee et al. (2005) found that there is a significant inverse relationship between addicts' marital satisfaction and their age, it means that with increasing the age of addicts, their marital satisfaction reduces, and also showed that marital satisfaction in addicts who use crystal or other drugs is higher than those who have used opium and sap²⁹. A research conducted in 1996 by Christopher showed that there is more aggression toward female among addicted men. The research also indicated that addicted men have lower tendency to make emotional connection with their wife³⁰. Schaefer and Stewart (1997) showed that addiction is associated with increase in aggressiveness, and drug abuse has been proposed as a risk factor for violence³¹. Drugs have detrimental effects on marital relationships as well as physical and psychological health. Using these drugs under any pretext will have adverse impact on sexual issues. In general, using drug causes dysfunction in three sexual stages including desire, stimulation and orgasm phase. We can also point out that drugs, of any type, have negative and destructive effect on relationship between the addict and his wife, especially in emotional and non-sexual relationships³². During a time when he is emotionally detached from the family and get joy and satisfaction by using drugs, he can't understand the time. The drugs also can cause symptoms of lack of motivation and volition in addicted men in all aspects of life, so that nothing else is important to him, he doesn't enjoy of anything and he feels passivity even in sex. Therefore, addicted man has no volition, desire and willingness to do sex and this can cause problems both in the consumer and in his wife and generally decrease marital satisfaction. The results of this study also showed that marital satisfaction in women increase with increasing their age at marriage which is probably due to higher level of awareness toward sex and marital issues. Moghadam et al. (2006) showed that there is a significant association between women's age at marriage and their satisfaction, that this finding is consistent with our results²⁰. Farasat (2004) showed that

there is no significant association between age and marital satisfaction, so this finding is not consistent with our results¹⁴. Another finding was the positive effect of increasing the number of children on marital satisfaction, marital satisfaction scores also increase with increasing number of children. Norouziyan (2006) showed that the number of children couldn't be effective on women's marital satisfaction¹⁷. Farasat (2004) showed that there is no significant correlation between number of children and marital satisfaction that this finding is not consistent with our results¹⁴. In general, if couples are more satisfied with their marital life, they will have greater marital life expectancy, longer planning for their life, and can have more children.

In conclusion, the importance of this study is its findings application to improve health of family and society. In addition, the results have been used in completion and development to promote awareness programs for couples in premarital counseling centers. Programs that can be applied in this case includes empowerment of women, training various methods of establishing intimate sex relationships between couples, training safe sex relation to partner of a drug addict, and educating compatibility skills among couples. Thus, we can maintain the family health and reduce vulnerability even in critical conditions by getting necessary information.

Table 1: Frequency and percentile of qualitative variables frequency.

Variable	Frequency	Percentile of frequency
Woman education		
Unlettered	6	3.00
Below diploma	44	21.8
Diploma	57	28.2
AA(associates of arts)	99	19.3
BA(bachelors of arts)	44	21.8
MA(masters of arts) and PHD	12	5.9
Men education		
Unlettered	4	2.0
Below diploma	28	13.9
Diploma	64	31.7
AA(associates of arts)	46	22.8
BA(bachelors of arts)	56	27.7
MA(masters of arts) and PHD	4	2.0
Women working		
Unemployed / Housewife	139	68.81
Working in governmental institution	36	17.82
Working in non-governmental institution	27	13.36
Man working		
Unemployed	76	37.6
Working in governmental institution	106	52.5
Working in non-governmental institution	15	7.4
Working in Persian Gulf States	5	2.5
In come		
Less than 156 Dollars	21	10.4
156-312 Dollars	29	14.36
312-625 Dollars	82	40.59
625_937 Dollars	53	26.24
More than 937 Dollars	17	8.416
Accommodation		
Rental	39	19.3
Personal	163	80.7
Age difference		
Men older than women	176	87.1
Men and women of the same age	19	9.4
Women older than men	7	3.5
Spouse addiction status		
Yes	11	97.5
No	191	2.5

Table 2: The average, standard deviation, minimum and maximum of quantitative variables.

	Average	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Age of man	36.25	10.29	20	86
Age of woman	31.90	9.92	17	81
Age of man at marriage	25.83	4.37	18	50
Age of woman at marriage	21.46	4.24	14	42
Duration of marital life	10.42	10.04	1	63
Number of children	1.28	1.20	0	6

Table 3: The mean comparison of various aspects of marital satisfaction in men and women.

	man	woman	P-Value
Satisfaction of finances	3.37±0.60	3.41± 0.63	0.51
Satisfaction of character issues	3.52±0.51	3.35±0.48	0.156
Satisfaction of leisure activities	3.81±0.62	3.47±0.57	0.399
Satisfaction of sexual intercourse	3.79±0.68	2.83±0.72	< 0.001
Satisfaction of communication issues	3.65±0.75	3.64±0.71	0.890
Satisfaction of parenting	3.51±0.64	3.77±0.65	0.121
Satisfaction of family and friends issues	3.63±0.67	3.56±0.66	0.290
Satisfaction of religious issues	3.73±0.63	3.81±0.66	0.213
Issue related to equality between men and women	3.82±0.70	2.76±0.81	< 0.001
Overall satisfaction	3.76±0.64	3.61±0.59	0.014

Table 4: the mean comparison of marital satisfaction score according to woman education, man education, man employment, housing, age difference, man addiction and residence.

Variable	average	standard deviation	P- Value
Woman education			
Unlettered	3.71	0.64	0.024**
Below diploma	3.77	0.61	
Diploma	3.52	0.64	
AA(associates of arts)	3.35	0.71	
BA(bachelors of arts)	2.84	0.69	
MA(masters of arts) and PHD	2.92	0.68	
Men education			
Unlettered	3.61	0.59	0.244**
Below diploma	3.59	0.61	
Diploma	3.51	0.60	
AA(associates of arts)	3.74	0.66	
BA(bachelors of arts)	3.65	0.73	
MA(masters of arts) and PHD	3.72	0.74	
Women working			
Unemployed / Housewife			0.082
Working in governmental institution	3.41	0.71	
Working in non-governmental institution	3.54	0.66	
Man working			
Unemployed			0.009**
Working in governmental institution	2.84	0.72	
Working in non-governmental institution	3.81	0.69	
Working in Persian Gulf States	3.79	0.62	
	2.21	0.65	

In come				0.003
Less than 156 Dollars	2.92	0.61		
156-312 Dollars	3.11	0.65		
312-625 Dollars	3.21	0.52		
625_ 937 Dollars	3.52	0.68		
More than 937 Dollars	3.28	0.59		
Accommodation				0.319*
Rental	3.72	0.68		
Personal	3.69	0.64		
Age difference				0.823**
Men older than women	3.71	0.63		
Men and women of the same age	3.62	0.60		
Women older than men	3.69	0.72		
Spouse addiction status				< 0.001*
Yes	2.91	0.68		
No	3.88	0.64		

*Mann-Whitney test

**Kruskal-Wallis test

Table5: Spearman correlation coefficient between the mean of marital satisfaction scores and quantitative variables.

	correlation coefficient	P-Value
Age of man	0.129	0.076
Age of woman	0.153	0.082
Age of man at marriage	0.047	0.531
Age of woman at marriage	0.435	0.031
Duration of marital life	0.074	0.276
Number of children	0.511	0.018

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