

Case Study

The relation between attachment styles, marital satisfaction and self-regulation of emotion in married people.

A case study: Kish Island

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Abstract: Marriage is one of the most important decisions that an individual may make in their life. Marital satisfaction is among the main determinants of life quality and psychological health. The manner of regulating the couples' emotion, which is affected by attachment styles, accounts for the degree of their marital satisfaction. The current research aims to investigate the relation between attachment styles, marital satisfaction and emotion regulation among married people. For this purpose, the questionnaires for intimate relations (attachment styles) (ECR-S), difficulty in emotion regulation (DERS), and empowering marriage life for couples (ENRICH) were distributed among 89 married men and women who expressed their willingness to respond and cooperate in the research. The responses were analyzed by SPSS. The results reveal that the anxious attachment style is the predictor for happiness with sexual relations and religious orientation of the couples.

Keywords: attachment styles, marital satisfaction, emotion, married people

I. Introduction

Marriage is one of the main decisions that an individual may make in their life and marital satisfaction constitutes the main determinant of life quality and psychological health. Family is a social and natural system with a complicated emotional structure and features affection, loyalty and continuation of membership (Goldenburg & Goldenburg, 2006). The psychological health of the family will be affected negatively if the intimate relations of the couples are damaged (Milanifar, 1991). Happiness and adjustment of the couple is a broad concept and determines the degree of countenance and sustainability of the family. This is a situation where in both the husband and wife experience the most feelings of happiness and satisfaction with being together (Sineha and Mckerji, 1991). Roof (1989) believes that marital satisfaction arises from the compliance between the existing conditions of intimate relation for an individual and the conditions that they already expect. Roof attributes several aspects to marital satisfaction but, in general, he defines it as positive feelings, love, sexual satisfaction, agreement on household economic affairs, housekeeping, and raising children (Frost, 2002). Satisfaction with and adjustment in marriage affect various aspects of social and individual lives while, at the same time, it facilitates parental roles (Coming and Watson, 1997). Clover (2000) believes that marital satisfaction refers to marriage gratification, adjustment and understanding which are the sub-categories of marriage quality.

Beck (Moradi, 2007) maintains that marital satisfaction is in fact the positive and enjoyable attitude that a husband and wife receive in various dimensions of their intimate relations.

This positive attitude may range from the desirable to undesirable. Another definition (Brazetno and Yogman, 1986) describes marital satisfaction as the feeling of satisfaction which each spouse may receive due to coordination and matching with their partner in areas such as leisure, house chores, mutual interactions, sexual relations, and expressing feelings and sentiments.

Marital satisfaction and adjustment is a situation where both husband and wife feel happy and satisfied with each other most of the time. Their satisfaction can be assessed via observation of their mutual affection, care for each other, acceptance and mutual understanding (Sineha and Mckerji, 1990). According to Waring et.al (1981) there is a significant correlation between disorganization of marriage and dissatisfaction with life on one hand, and spread of emotional psychological conflicts in public domain. Satisfactory marriages promote the health of spouses and prevent unpleasant events or psychological problems in life whereas unhappy marriages lead to negative consequences for emotional and physical health of the couples.

Research findings identify numerous factors that influence satisfaction with marriage. These factors include; education and social class (Jalili, 1996. Moradi, 2007); personality (Schurman-Kruk, 2000); religious beliefs (Arafi, 2006); financial issues, affection, attention and support (Hashemi Golshan Abadi, 2007); understanding the spouse, women employment, number of children (Turk, 2006); duration of marriage (Yoston et.al, 1994); sexual affairs (Franken 1998, Shamlou 2002); cooperation spirit (Gutman 1997); severe

dependency of the couples on relatives and friends (Soleimani 1994); Spending leisure time together (Huston 2004); strategies for resolving conflicts by the couples (Gutman 1998); and, finally, attachment styles (Bunz, 1994).

Attachment is a very important concept in the process of human growth and transformation. Attitudes, desires and understanding the sexual partner may act as representations of attachment to parents (Khatibi, 2004). The attachment theory was first introduced by Bowlby in 1969. It was called Attachment and Separation and defined attachment as an emotional passionate link which is formed between a child and their main caregiver (mother) during childhood and affects the emotional and social growth of a child all through their life. It also extends itself to their intimate relations such as romance or love (Laurent and Pavro, 2007).

Emotion is the first element that organizes behavior in an attachment case (Johnson and Greenberg, 1994). Emotions provide an individual with the opportunity to express its feelings towards everything. This emotional manifestation is the link between internal experience and external world (Kennedy-Moore and Watson, 1999) which holds a bilateral transaction with cognition and assists individuals in evaluating those circumstances that relate to personal values, needs, goals or interests. An example is the Amygdala activities that play a significant role in warning us against threats or dangers (Greenberg, 2004). According to attachment theory, emotion and emotional expressions are considered as the main linking loop between themselves and system, a guiding element and an organizer in transactional cycles. Bowlby believes that the main function of emotion stems from the incentives of an individual (Johnson and Viffen, 2003). Emotion regulation based on the theoretical model is an exclusive process for adjusting emotional experiences in order to achieve social popularity and remain in a physical and psychological preparation to respond to both internal and external demands. Emotion regulation is the "setting" of feelings in line with the comparable performance. Therefore, disorganized feelings include those regulatory processes that eventually distort the comparable performance (Hawang, 2006).

This study attempts to identify any relation between emotion regulation, attachment and marital satisfaction.

II. Research objectives

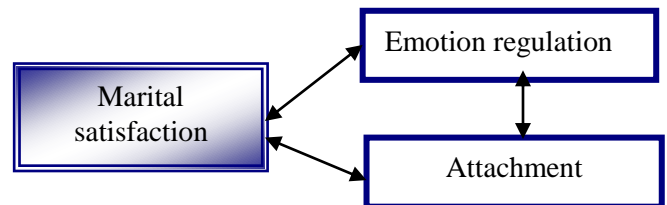
1. Determination of the relationship between attachment styles and marital satisfaction among married people.
2. Determination of the relationship between attachment styles and emotion regulation among married people.
3. Determination of the relationship between emotion regulation and marital satisfaction among married people.

Research hypotheses

1. There is a correlation between attachment styles, marital satisfaction and emotion regulation among married people.

2. There is a correlation between attachment styles and marital satisfaction among married people.
3. There is a correlation between attachment styles and emotion regulation among married people.
4. There is a correlation between emotion regulation and marital satisfaction among married people.

Research Model



Research methodology

This research is descriptive and correlational. It belongs to the category of correlation based studies.

Research domain

The current study is conducted in Kish Island.

Research population and sample

The research population includes all married people living in Kish Island from among which the available sample was selected. An announcement was made and the respondents were studied.

Based on Kohn formula, with a first type error of 0.05, study power of 80%, and according to $r=0.05$ obtained from similar studies, it was calculated that the research required a sample of 83 people. With 10% probability of reduction, 100 people were selected and, eventually, a sample of 89 people remained.

The 12 criteria of the questionnaire are described as below;

1. **Conventionality:** This criterion measures the personal tendency to give an unreal or unconventional response to questions. It was deleted from the 47-item questionnaire.
2. **Marital satisfaction:** This criterion measures the degree of people's satisfaction with the 10 aspects of marital relations described below.
3. **Personality issues:** This criterion measures the degree a person understands their spouse's behaviour and characteristics as well as their satisfaction/dissatisfaction with such issues. A low score represents a low level of acceptance of discomfort with their spouse's behaviour and personality. A high score indicates adjustment and satisfaction with the spouse's personality.
4. **Marital communication:** This criterion measures feelings, beliefs and personal attitudes towards the amount and features of marital communication. A high score shows the couple's awareness of and satisfaction with the level and type of communication in their

- relations whereas a low score represents dissatisfaction with the communication.
5. **Conflict resolution:** This criterion assesses the attitudes, feelings and beliefs of a spouse while creating or resolving conflicts as well as the approaches that the couples adopt to settle the debates. A high score shows realistic attitudes towards conflicts in marital relations whereas a low score indicates dissatisfaction with conflict resolution.
 6. **Financial management:** This criterion measures the couple's interests and attitudes regarding management of financial matters in the family. A high score represents satisfaction with financial management and a realistic attitude towards dealing with family finance whereas a low score identifies various concerns regarding financial management.
 7. **Pleasure activities:** This criterion measures the personal preferences of the husband and wife about how to spend leisure times. A high score represents adaptation, flexibility and agreement on how to spend pleasure time while a low score highlights dissatisfaction with pleasure activities in marital relations.
 8. **Sexual relation:** This criterion surveys an individual's feelings and concerns about sexual relations and emotional intimacy with their spouse. The elements of this criterion reflect the amount of satisfaction with intimacy and comfort in discussions about sexual relations. A high score represents satisfaction with and positive attitudes towards sexual affairs or agreements regarding having children.
 9. **Marriage and children:** This criterion investigates personal feelings and attitudes towards having kids, number of children, and the way to raise them. A high score shows agreement on having children, their number, and a realistic understanding of how children are affected by marital relations. It also represents satisfaction with how parental roles and responsibilities are defined. A low score indicates dissatisfaction with decisions concerning having children, their number and raising.
 10. **Family and friends:** This criterion measures the feelings and willingness towards relations with the spouse's relatives and friends. The relevant questions represent the attitudes of friends and family towards marriage as well as the expectations regarding spending time with friends and relatives. A low score indicates conflicts in relations with family and friends.
 11. **Egalitarian role:** This criterion assesses an individual's feelings, beliefs and attitudes regarding various marital roles. A high score shows egalitarian values while a low score points to sexual discrimination in life and marital relations. This criterion was omitted from the 47-item questionnaire.

12. **Religious orientation:** This criterion evaluates an individual's feelings, attitudes and interests regarding religious beliefs and rituals in their marital life. A high score introduces religion as an important element in marriage and the couple's agreement on religious affairs and spiritual behaviour while a low score attributes an insignificant role to religion in marriage and marital relations.

Having completed the sampling, we analyzed the data in a computer adapted with IBM and via SPSS 21 software. At first, the data were described through tables, simple charts, as well as the main statistical indices and dispersion (mean and standard deviation). Later, we used simple regression (Pearson correlation coefficient) as well as linear multi-regression models to investigate the correlation between the variables.

III. Research results

Hypotheses 1 and 4: There is a correlation between attachment styles, marital satisfaction and emotion regulation among married people. There is a correlation between emotion regulation and marital satisfaction among married people.

Due to the overlapping of variables of both hypotheses, the findings of Pearson correlation analysis were studied simultaneously. Studies revealed a reverse relation between most indices of difficulty in emotion regulation and marital satisfaction (table 4-10). It means that people who find difficulties in emotion regulation including controlling shocks, access to emotion regulation methods, understanding emotions and emotional responses, experience less convergence with their spouses in their intimate relations particularly in areas such as financial management, resolution of interpersonal disputes and relations with close friends and relatives. They may have negative feelings, beliefs and attitudes towards the level and type of their marital relations. They consider the behaviors and characteristics of their spouses as lower compared to those people who are able to regulate their emotions better.

Findings show that none of the indices of attachment of intimacy was significantly correlated with the indices of marital satisfaction. The index of anxiety was only correlated with both sexual relations and religious orientation. It means that an increase of an individual's concerns about being excluded by the others may result in less satisfaction with sexual relations with their spouse. It may happen because the anxiety may prevent a person from enjoying relationships with their partner. In other words, the fears of isolation, exclusion, or inefficiency may override the emotional and passionate process that prevails in a sexual relation. The very fear of negative judgments by the others (emotional partner or spouse) constitutes the underlying psychological processes.

The study conducted by Besharat and Ganji (2012) indicates that expression of feelings is a main contributor to satisfaction with relations. Mutual expressions of affection provides a secure environment and leads to more self-assertion in

relations. People with avoidance attachment style are cold in their interpersonal relations and their ability to create intimate relations is restricted. Self-assertion or declaring emotions and thoughts to others is a main contributor to intimacy in relations. As any difficulty in expressing emotions and understanding other's feelings leads to suppression of emotions, insecure attachment can reduce the tendency and ability of couples to show their needs and emotions and, eventually, affect their marital satisfaction.

Emotional-cognitive regulation is one of the most important requirements for physical and psychological health particularly in marital relations since strategies for emotional-cognitive regulation are actions that represent ways to deal with life conditions and stressful circumstances and, therefore, affect the quality of marital life. Ineffective cognitive factors such as self-reprimand or reprimanding others result in vulnerability against emotional problems. Modern approaches consider deficiency in emotion control as a contributor to emotional distortions. Suppression of emotions will lead to abundance of dreams and failure of people in controlling them. It affects the emotional status of people directly. Such affects appear in the forms of stress, anxiety, depression, sadness, and social and physical problems among different people. The inefficient emotional dimensions (self-reprimand and scolding others) make people demonstrate a set of negative or passive reactions and fail to accomplish successful individual and social lives. It is therefore, understandable to predict negative aspects of sexual relations due to inefficient emotions. As Johnson et.al (2005) specify, the low levels of positive affection and high levels of negative skills will expedite the collapse of relations, since the more negative attitudes a person holds, the more negative behaviours they show towards their spouse. Naturally, those with inefficient emotions fail to behave appropriately and demonstrate their love and compassion to their spouses.

Findings of a research by Heidari and Egbal (2010) identified a significant negative relation between difficulty in emotion regulation and marital satisfaction and also between avoidant attachment style and marital satisfaction whereas there was a significant positive relationship between secure attachment style and marital satisfaction. No significant relation was observed between ambivalent attachment style and marital satisfaction while there was a significant positive relation between intimacy and marital satisfaction.

Mohammdi, Farnam and Mahboubi (2011) conducted a research into the relations between attachment styles, difficulty in emotion regulation and marital satisfaction among teachers in Kish Island. They discovered multi-lateral relations between these variables. Secure attachment style and marital satisfaction relate positively and significantly while there is a negative relation between ambivalent avoidant attachment style and marital satisfaction. Ambivalent attachment style is the best predictor of marital satisfaction.

Researches conducted by La Guardia, Ryan, Councman and Deci (2000); Kafetsius and Sideridis (2006); Lavy, Litman and Ovadias (2011); and Wie, Liaio, Kuy and Shaffer (2011) reveal the relation between attachment, resilience, and emotion regulation on one hand and welfare on the other. Secure attachment leads to better welfare while both anxiety and avoidant attachments relate with less welfare. Those with high passive attachment style may turn to re-evaluation and have more resilience. These two variables are the mediators for the positive impacts on welfare.

To explain this hypothesis, it should be mentioned that those with avoidant attachment styles cannot trust other people and keep an emotional distance with them. Such individuals are usually alone and aggressive. Their aggression stems from an un-answered attachment need accompanied by the expectation to be rejected by others. Adults with avoidant attachment keep themselves away from intimate relations with others and score lower regarding inventory of romantic and love affairs. Besides, this group demonstrate more aggressive conflicts with their spouses.

Hypothesis 2: There is a correlation between attachment styles and marital satisfaction among married people.

Research findings fail to identify any significant relation between attachment styles and marital satisfaction among married people. However, they reveal an adverse relation between anxiety and sexual relations and a direct relation between anxiety and religious orientation.

Research results contradict those obtained by Hamidi (2007); Beirami et.al (2012); Mazaheri, Heidari and Momenzadeh (2005); Mazaheri(2000); Besharat et.al (2012); Feeney (1994); Buner (2004); and Simpson (1990). In their review of studies concerning attachment and performance of couples, Mickolinsler and Shower (2007) state that regarding the relation between marital satisfaction and attachment styles among dating couples, insecure people (whether ambivalent or avoidant) report less satisfaction with their relations, which is in line with the attachment theory. However, results of those studies that used self-reports tools indicate that insecure couples experience less marital satisfaction compared to secure ones.

Five out of seven studies that used interviews to measure adult attachment styles fail to identify a significant relation between insecure attachment and marital dissatisfaction. This finding contradicts that of the studies which used self-report tools. Although the difference may be attributed to different tools (interviews and self-report questionnaires), it reveals that the present insecure attachment in adults particularly with regard to intimate relations (whether measured by interview or self-report questionnaires) is a better predictor of marital dissatisfaction compared to the expressions that a person makes about their mentality towards parents and other childhood caregivers. This finding contradicts those regarding the relation between attachment and passionate intimacy. Surprisingly, Kohn et.al (1992) observed that men and

women's scores in self-report questionnaires on marital satisfaction were unrelated with attachment. The observed interactions of couples distinguish secure and insecure husbands and maintain that secure husbands have better efficiency in their relations and demonstrate more positive behaviours and less incompatible ones. In their post-analysis results, Ahmadi et.al (2012) reveal a low-level relationship between attachment styles and marital satisfaction in Iran based on Kohn table (0.21). They also maintain that attachment styles are - to some extent- influential in marital satisfaction though the influence is minute. They explain that maybe other intervening factors adjust the relation. That is why some caution is needed while analyzing the results of relations between marital satisfaction and attachment styles. For further explanation, they refer to Feeney's findings (1994) that maintain that anxiety over relation –which is a feature of ambivalent attached people- is the most important aspect of attachment in satisfaction with the relation. The aspect of comfort with closeness remains an important variable in creation of intimate relations, while it is less influential in preserving the relation.

The other point which can be made regarding lack of correlation between attachment styles and marital satisfaction is the fact that the present study ignores the spouse's attachment style and, hence, some data and factors which influence marital satisfaction. Some studies consider the combination of attachment styles of the spouses as a very important determinant of marital satisfaction. For instance, Eidi and Khanjani (2006) conclude that couples with secure attachment report more marital satisfaction. Besides, the average marital satisfaction for those couples who hold the same attachment style is significantly higher than the same average for those couples with different attachment styles. These researchers argue that couples with similar attachment styles have convergent behaviour and personalities that reduce conflicts. They can understand each other better and find their own features in the other party. The researchers explain that the avoidant attachment of a spouse is a better predictor of an individual's anxiety attachment compared to other features. An increase in the spouse's avoidant attachment leads to the increase of the other party's anxiety attachment. It means that more avoidant attachment of the spouse increases indifference, avoiding intimacy, lack of support and motionlessness in people. It is in such circumstances that a person misses an available source of attachment in hard times. It seems that some part of the negative effect of the avoidant attachment style can be attributed to the marital satisfaction of the other partner. This research does not use pair samples and, hence, fails to consider this impact.

Hypothesis 3: There is correlation between attachment styles and emotion regulation among married people.

Results of Person Correlation Analysis reveal an adverse relation between anxiety and variables of lack of emotional knowledge, limited access to emotion regulation methods, lack of emotional transparency and the total score of difficulty in

emotion regulation. They also fail to identify any significant relation between other components of attachment styles and difficulty in emotion regulation. Since anxiety is an outstanding feature of the people with ambivalent attachment style and people with avoidant attachment styles fret being rejected by others, it can be concluded that the results of this study pinpoint an adverse relation between both ambivalent insecure and avoidant attachment styles on one hand and difficulty in emotion regulation on the other.

In line with the results of current hypothesis, Simpson et.al (2007) conducted a research into the relations between emotion assertion and attachment styles in romantic relations. Their results show that people recognized as having secure attachment styles during infancy, demonstrate more capabilities and social merits in their childhood compared to their peers. They also exhibit more appropriate emotional and affectionate assertions in their close relations with friends and partners during their adolescence and early adulthood. Based on such finding, it can be argued that there is a relationship between the ability to regulate emotions and attachment styles though the opposite is not necessarily true. Therefore, it should be taken into consideration that deficiency in emotion regulation can stem from insecure or anxious attachment styles. As already mentioned, people with anxious attachment styles usually acknowledge their worry about being rejected. It shows that there is no causal mutual relation between attachment and emotion regulation.

A person's ability to regulate their emotion requires a secure attachment. Attachment is an interpersonal link and affectionate relation. Obviously, various emotions are involved and the relation is relatively sustainable. Given the sustainable internal patterns, the quality of this relation will affect a broad range of interpersonal and intrapersonal relations both now and in future. It also effects an individual's emotion regulation directly.

Surprisingly, the results of testing this hypothesis reveal an adverse relation between anxiety and difficulty in emotion regulation. So far researches have reported an adverse relation between insecure attachment styles (either ambivalent or avoidant with anxiety) and emotion regulation. In other words, we anticipated to unravel a direct relation between anxiety and difficulty in emotion regulation. Using the Psychodynamic Diagnostic Manual (PDM) (2006), we can explain this adverse relation in the following way. Those people who have a dominant anxiety (anxious personality types) are consciously aware of their anxiety since their efforts to distance from their worries fail. These people are fully aware of their emotions and hold a clear picture of them. Fear of rejection, which is a sub-criterion of anxious attachment, remains no exception for such people. That is why, if we ask a person with an anxious attachment style what frightens them most in their relations, they will probably point to rejection in one way or another.

IV. Summary and conclusion

Based on the results of this study and previous research, it is understood that awareness of emotions and having emotion regulation skills can affect various aspects of life in different ways and, consequently, influence the marital satisfaction of both men and women. Emphasis on teachings that promote emotion regulation skills in families can result in improvement of family life and lead to psychological health of both the family and the society.

V. References

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