

## **Developing a marital satisfaction model for Iranian couples**

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**ABSTRACT:** The main aim of this study is to develop a marital satisfaction model amongst Iranian couples. For purpose of this study, mixed method approach was selected in order to utilizing the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research. For implementing qualitative part of research 10 Iranian couples will be selected based on purposive sampling. After reviewing literature, maximum variation sampling was selected, because this method enables researcher to collect data to describe and explain the key themes that can be observed. Participants are selected among Iranian couples with first marriage, more than seven years marital experience, with varies education and income level. For implementing qualitative part of research, grounded theory will be used for analyzing data gathered by interview. For implementing quantitative part of the research, Iranian couple respondents will be requested to fill in , Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI,1997) to get the most suitable marital satisfaction(MS) factors among the Iranian couples. Next, by utilizing SPSS model, these suitable items will be selected for Iranian couples context. Lastly, by triangulation data, a model for Iranian context will be developed. This model will provide a framework for understanding significant factors for Iranian couples. At the end, by using findings from this research design, some recommendations can be made for offering to counselors in Iranian counseling centers and authorities related to marriage field.

**Keywords:** *Marital Satisfaction, grounded theory, Purposive sampling*

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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In all communities, marriage is a human institution which can be found in all cultures. Larson and Holman (1994), believed that marriage is the most significant and essential human connection because it offers main structure for launching a family relationship and rising the next generation. This popularity of marriage in all societies suggests that marriage is a social foundation that usually result in a number of important individual and social benefits. The benefits of healthy marriage are not limited to a greater sense of spouses' welfare, lower rates of illness, and a longer life duration. These benefits also include the promotion of improved physical condition and emotional happiness for spouses' children, the generation of children and the promote of future citizen, and the overall blooming of community life.

Despite of popularity of marriage in all societies, marriage has been perceived differently in various countries. For Americans, marriage has been represented as an essential factor of the human relationship (Rosen-Grandon, Myers, & Hattie, 2004). They will make a promise to marry in their lifetime, and marriage is seen as a pleasing state in society ( Foster,2008). Egyptians believe that marriage is the basis of family life, spine of social life and apparatus that support family as a corporate unit (Atta-Alla, 2009). In this line, one of the most important attributes related to marriage is satisfaction in marriage.

Yet, while marriage may be a relationship desirable to many, research suggests that marital satisfaction (MS) is not easily achieved. Marital satisfaction is one of the fundamental

constructs in this study, being considered in line with Hawkins' (1968) suggestion, i.e. "the subjective feelings of happiness, satisfaction and pleasure experienced by a spouse when considering all current aspects of his [her] marriage". Indeed, MS is an important issue to marriage longevity and has many additional positive influences on the relationship and personal behaviour (Halford, Sanders, & Behrens, 2001).

Research identified the benefits of a satisfying marriage, such as improved finances, family structure, and emotional support (Gonzaga, Campos, & Bradbury, 2007). It was also found that a person's health improved when involved in a satisfying marriage (Wells & Zinn, 2004). Wilcox (2005) emphasized the benefits of marriage to include family, economic, physical health and longevity, mental health, and emotional well-being. Having a satisfying marriage proves beneficial to couples, their children, and members of the surrounding community. Interestingly, (Collins and Coltrane, 1991) reported that according to public belief, the most important elements of marriage are faithfulness (93%), understanding (86%), a good sex life (75%), children (59%), common interests (52%), sharing household chores (43%), having enough money (41%), and sharing similar backgrounds (25%). Another advantage of a satisfying marriage could be staying out of divorce court (Hogue, 2009).

In the literature of marital satisfaction, researchers have strived to discover factors that distinguish between satisfied and dissatisfied couples in order to toughen the marital bond, marriage and family. John Gottman (2002) suggests that those who remain married report a wide range of marital happiness. Only in the last decade have researchers begun to examine the positive features of healthy marriages. Bradbury et al. (2000) reviewed the key concepts and empirical advances that have emerged since the 1990s, and they suggest that there is a continued need for theoretical progress in understanding the nature and determinants of marital satisfaction.<sup>33</sup>

Above mentioned research indicate that there is a large body of literature relating to investigating factors of marital satisfaction in western communities, but very little of researches has focused on uncovering MS factors in Islamic-Eastern societies like Iran. In this line, this paper contributes to bridging this gap and tries to shed light on factors that discriminate between satisfied and dissatisfied Iranian couples by developing a Marital Satisfaction model in this context.

## 2.0 THEORETICAL MODEL

This study attempts to uncover how spouses perceive their satisfaction of marriage and the factors that influence it positively and negatively based on the Social Exchange Theory (Nakonezny & Denton (2008)). The Social Exchange Theory (Nakonezny & Denton (2008) presents that the exchange of social, goods and services is a fundamental form of human interaction. This theory considers rewards and costs of a relationship for explaining stability of it. It suggests people view a relationship with one another like joining to a partnership. With this perspective, this theory explains how people view a relationship with one another, based on their perceptions of: (a) the balance between what they place into the relationship and what they gain from it, (b) the kind of relationship they merit, and (c) the opportunity of having a better relationship with someone else. It considers the concept of transmitting one type of goods or service in exchange for another within relationship between people (Klein & White, 1996; Roloff, 1981, 1987).

Social Exchange Theory, in turn has based on Equity Theory. This theory suggests that the importance of an impartial exchange within an interpersonal relationship puts down the foundation for the Social Exchange Theory. Adams (1965) states that equity is gained if the ratio of rewards to costs be equal for both partners if the relationship is considered

equitable. Hatfield, Traupmann, Sprecher, Utne, and Hay (1985) suggested that Equity Theory contributes to understanding close, intimate relationships as well as its explanatory power in casual relationships. On the other hand, there have been some critiques on the ability of Equity Theory in explaining close relationships. These critics argue that since hypothesis of Equity Theory (and Exchange Theory in general) is that individuals are selfish, and self-motivated (Adams, 1965; Klein & White, 1996; Roloff, 1981; Peterson, 1986), then this theory cannot be applied for explaining close relationships. In the other words, love is believed to rise above individual rewards and costs (Fromm, 1956; Rubin, 1973).

### 3.0 METHOD

For the purpose of this study, mixed method approach was selected in order to utilizing the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research. At the first stage, literature of Marital Satisfaction (MS) was deliberated for achieving measuring instruments of MS. It was uncovered that most of researches have used 4 questionnaire, i.e. DAS (1976), MSI (1997), EMS (1993) and MAS (1959), as measuring instruments for marital satisfaction. After comparing these instruments, it was found that MSI (1997), include almost all dimensions of other questionnaires and is relatively complete questionnaire. Thereby, researcher selected MSI (1997) for implementing pilot study.

In the first stage of this research, researcher will perform pilot study. For implementing pilot study, 30 Iranian couples will be selected based on simple random method. Main aims for implementing pilot study are finding out internal reliability of the items and modifying items which are not suitable for measuring MS from in the context of Iranian culture. For finding internal reliability of the questionnaire, SPSS software will be used for analyzing data gathered from the respondents. All items will be examined by using Alpha Cronbach's coefficient. The criterion for accepting or rejecting one item is 0.7. According to Hair et al. (2003), if size of this coefficient is more than 0.7, the questionnaire has a good internal reliability. Also, researcher asks from respondents their possible suggestions for modifying the instrument.

In the second stage, researcher will distribute the modified questionnaire amongst about 330 Iranian couples for measuring MS among them. According to Zikmund (2003) a total number of 330 sample size is suitable, when volume of population is more than 500,000. The data gathered from these respondents will be analyzed for finding relationship between MS and demographic specifications. This analysis will be started by using bivariate T-test. Because men and women are considered two independent samples, bivariate T-test will be used for finding differences in perception of MS based on gender. Using bivariate T-test, requires two conditions: normality of population, and the variances must be equal. Because volume of sample in this study is more than 30, normality of population isn't at issue (Berenson, 2006).

For checking equity of variances, Levene's test will be performed by using SPSS. The null hypothesis in Levene's test is based on equity of variances of the two populations. The criterion for rejecting this null hypothesis is that p-value must be greater than 0.05 (Hair *et al.*, 2003). After checking assumptions for T-test, equity mean will be examined between men and women.

In the next step, level of MS will be compared in term of years after marriage categories. Years after marriage will be categorized to four category: 7-10, 10-15, 15-20 and more than 20. For this comparison, one way ANOVA test will be performed. According to Berenson et al. (2006), to determine whether there is a significant difference between the means of more than two groups, a one-way ANOVA test can be used. One-way ANOVA

requires three conditions for reliable results: independent samples, normal populations and homogeneity of population variances. The first condition is not at issue, due to design of sampling. With large samples, homogeneity of variance is more critical than normality. To test validity of homogeneity of variance assumption, Levene's test will be performed. Also, level of 0.05 for p-value will be considered as criterion for rejecting null hypothesis.

In the second stage, qualitative research will be performed. In this stage, main purpose is to explore and understand through categorization (Polkinghorne, 1991) and theme building, details about factors that have impact on MS of Iranian couples. The main data collection procedure will be interview. The researcher adopted grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) qualitative analysis method as the leading framework in analyzing the qualitative data. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), a qualitative data analysis consists of three stages: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) referred to "data reduction" as the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming data that appears in the researchers reported notes. In the next stage, data display, the researcher tries to organize and compress assembly of available information that consents conclusion drawing. Finally, "conclusion drawing and verification" is involved with the emerging, and inducing of meanings from the data and testing them for their credibility, their robustness and their validity. Strauss and Corbin (1998) maintained that because the process is rather continuous and iterative in nature, the analysis process needs to be well documented in order to enhance the validity and credibility of the analysis.

The researcher will be used the above content-analysis approach to analyze the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews of the respondents. The above process is similar to the content-analysis process described by Patton (1990), where he also explained that the fundamental task in the analysis process is the critical examination of the text for meaning from the various "units" that describe the central aspects of the respondents' experience. These "units" are then synthesized to provide a general description of the "whole" (Patton, 1990).

To ensure that the data was accurately captured, the researcher will audio tape the interviews and will transcribe the responses immediately after each of the interviews was completed. In addition, in every session, researcher will write important points of responses simultaneously with taping through interview sessions.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

This study tries to develop a marital satisfaction model for couples in Iranian context. In the other words, one of the main expected outcomes from this research is identifying constructs that have impact on marital satisfaction. Second expected outcome is creating a model for determining the role of demographic specifications. Third, expected outcome is uncovering determinants of marital satisfaction from mathematical perspective. Finally, this study findings will help Iranian family counselors by providing professional knowledge from their clients. Furthermore, this study will offer recommendations for administrators of marriage institutions in Iran for improving and maintaining marriage amongst Iranian spouses.

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