

Predicting Marital Satisfaction Based on Attachment Styles, Defense Mechanisms and Quality of Life in Married Students, Mashhad City, Iran

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ABSTRACT— The relationship between attachment styles, defense mechanisms, quality of life, and satisfaction with marital life of married students living in Mashhad city was examined. To this end, 250 students (125 male, 125 female) were selected through convenient sampling and Enrich's marital satisfaction questionnaire, Collinz and Rid's attachment style, defense style questionnaire (DSQ 40), and quality of life questionnaire (SF36) were used for data gathering. Regression analysis test showed that safe attachment style explained 23% of variance of satisfaction with marital life; adaptive/maladaptive defense mechanism jointly explained 39% of variance of satisfaction with marital life; and general health, liveliness, social performance, mental problem and mental health jointly explained 48% of variance of satisfaction with marital life.

KEYWORDS: attachment styles; defense mechanisms, quality of life, satisfaction with marital life

Introduction

Stability of family depends on stability of marital relationship; that is, any threat and problem in marital life or dissatisfaction with marital life threatens peace and mental health of the couples and survival of the family. Marriage is a multivariate phenomenon (Sohrabi M, 2015). What matters in a marriage is the couple's satisfaction with their marriage, which is generally defined by the experts as mental assessment of the couples regarding the quality of their relationship. Winch et al. argued that satisfaction with marital life depends on the distance between what should be and what actually is; therefore, satisfaction with life happens when what is expected with marital life fits what is actually experienced (Sohrabi M., 2006). Family psychologists usually use quality of marital relationship as a measure of satisfaction with marital life. Satisfaction with marital life is one of the main factors effective on realization of life purposes, which is influenced by emotional stability of the couple. Hisman et al. believed there is significant relationship between the five factors that constitute mental health including satisfaction with life, and self-esteem and marital adaptation. Some have argued that satisfaction with marital life is the outcome of three factors (general satisfaction with marital life, satisfaction with sexual relationships, and emotional satisfaction). Hakins stated that satisfaction with marital life is an objective sense of satisfaction and enjoyment that the couple experiences by looking at all aspects of their lives. Watson and Hamrich found that the spouse's assessment was more effective than personal's assessment in accurate determination of marital satisfaction (Asadbeigi, Sepah M., 2006). Several studies have dealt with the different factors effective on satisfaction with marital life and each has focused on a specific aspect of personal and social aspects effective on satisfaction with marital life. Getis et al. argued that there was significant relationship between satisfaction with marital life and defense mechanism used by an individual. In line with this, some works have emphasized on mental health and mature defense mechanisms on satisfaction with marital life (Bani Jamali, 2004). Moreover, studies have reported on the positive relationship between attachment styles and satisfaction with marital life. Fiket et al. maintained that quality of life was effective on perceived satisfaction with marital life. Adde found that agreement between life values was a subset of the elements of quality of life and related to satisfaction with marital life (Bani Jamali, 2004). Defense mechanisms are among the variables that consciously and unconsciously influence cognitive and emotional process level of one and may lead to distortion of one's emotional system. According to definition, defense mechanisms are autonomous self-adjusting processes that function to reduce cognitive incongruity and minimize sudden changes in internal and external reality by influencing the way perception of threatening events acts (Bani Jamali, 2004). Defense mechanism distort emotional perceptions as they distract the individual from realities (Alstein, 2002). Therefore, studying the role of defense mechanism at the positive emotional level that the couple hold toward each other opens their way toward satisfaction with marital life. On the other hand, we need to deal with attachment style. According to attachment theory (Balbi, 2010), there are healthy, unhealthy, and growth functions that influence maladaptation in the couples. The attachment theory leads to the theory of need as to the love relationship in adulthood (Raden, et al., 2003). As it implies, a large portion of the experience of satisfaction with marital life depends on formation of functional internal pattern of the couples, where lies an experience of peace and trust (Gabard et al., 2002). According to the above introduction, the present study tries to answer if attachment styles, defense mechanisms, and quality of life are significantly are related to satisfaction with marital life.

Methodology

The study was carried out as a descriptive correlative work aimed at predicting satisfaction with marital life based on attachment styles, defense mechanisms, and quality of life. Study population was comprised of all students at Ferdousi University, Mashhad, Iran. A sample group with 250 participants (125 male and 125 female) was formed through convenient sampling. The sample group size was determined based on Chorkran’s formula with a study population of 1000 individuals. To examine satisfaction with marital life, Enrich’s questionnaire was used. The scale was revised by Elson in 2006 and the new scale is comprised of 4 subscale with 35 statements. The scale gives a general measure of marital relationship including goal distortion, satisfaction with marital life, personal matters, communications, conflict solving, financial management, leisure time activities, sexual relationships, children and parenting, family and fields, equality seeking roles, religious attitudes, solidarity between the couples, and changes in marital life. Retest validity of the questionnaire for the subscales was obtained 92, 90, 81, 86 (Soleimanian, 1994). Collins and Rid’s attachment questionnaire includes self-assessment of the skills of creating relationships and self-assessment of formation of attachment relationships with close persons. The questionnaire is comprised of 18 statements designed based on Likert’s five-point scale with three subscales of affection, dependence, and anxiety. Reliability of the questionnaire is 0.92 (Pakdaman, 2001). The third questionnaire used in the study is Defense Mechanism Style questionnaire (DSQ-40), which is designed by Adrose et al. in 1993. It is a self-statement scale with 40 statements designed based on Likert’s nine-point scale. Reliability of the questionnaire is reported 81% (Heidary Nasab, 2006). In addition, Life Quality questionnaire (SF-36) with 36 statement and 8 subscales (physical performance, limitation in fulfillment of responsibilities due to physical problems, physical pain, general health, limitation in fulfillment of responsibilities due to emotional problems, mental health, tiredness, and social performance) was also used for data gathering. Reliability of the questionnaire is reported 75% (Tobaie et al., 2012). The collected data was analyzed using MANOVA and hierarchy approach.

Findings

As the results indicated, 31% of the participants were at age range 18-20 (the majority) and average age of the participants was 23 with standard deviation of 5.

Hypothesis one: Attachment styles, defense mechanisms, and quality of life are related to satisfactions with marital life.

Table 1- Variables inserted to and removed from regression equation

Model	Inserted variables	Removed variables	Method
1	Adaptative defense mechanism, safe attachment style, general quality of life	Maladaptive defense mechanism, neurotic defense mechanism, avoidance attachment, two-ended attachment	Step by step

As listed in the table above, only adaptive defense mechanisms, safe attachment style, and general quality of life were taken into account in regression equation.

Table 2- Correlation between the predictor and predicted variables

Variable		Defense mechanism	Attachment style	Quality of life	Satisfaction with marital life
Pearson’s correlation	Adaptive defense mechanism		0.21	0.31	0.39
	Safe attachment style	0.39		0.3	0.29
	Quality of life	0.31	0.3		0.48
	Defense mechanism		0.00	0.00	0.00
Significance	Attachment style	0.00		0.00	0.00
	Quality of life	0.00	0.00		0.00

As listed in Table 2- variables adaptive defense mechanism, safe attachment, and quality of life jointly explain 0.38 of variance of satisfaction with marital life.

Hypothesis two: there is a relationship between attachment style and satisfaction with marital life in married students in Mashhad, Iran.

Table 3- Variables inserted to and removed from regression equation

Model	Inserted variables	Removed variables	Method
1	Safe attachment style	Avoidance attachment style, two-ended attachment style	Step by step

Clearly, only safe attachment style was inserted to regression equation.

Table 4- Summary of the model

Model	Correlation coefficient	Square correlation coefficient	Adjusted coefficient	Standard error
1	0.36	0.32	0.29	1.08

As listed in Table 4, adjusted coefficient is 0.29, which means safe attachment style explains 29% of variance of satisfaction with marital life.

Hypothesis three: There is a relationship between defense mechanism and satisfaction with marital life among married students in Mashhad, Iran.

To test the hypothesis, step by step MANOVA test was used. (Table 5). There were two predictor and one predicted variables in the test.

Table 5- Variables inserted to and removed from the test

Model	Inserted variables	Removed variables	Method
1	Adaptive defense mechanism-maladaptive defense mechanism	Neurotic defense mechanism	Step by step

Clearly, adaptive and maladaptive defense mechanisms were added to the regression equation.

Table 6- summary of the model

Model	Correlation coefficient	Square correlation coefficient	Adjusted coefficient	Standard error
1	0.43	0.41	0.30	2.3
2	0.49	0.44	0.39	3.04

As listed in Table 6, adjustment coefficient is 0.39, which means that adaptive and maladaptive defense mechanisms jointly explain 39% of variance of satisfaction with marital life.

Hypothesis four: there is a relationship between quality of life and satisfaction with marital life in married students, Mashhad Iran.

To test the hypothesis, MANOVA test was used (Table 7). There are eight predictor and one predicted variables in the test.

Table 7- The variables inserted to and removed from the test

Model	Inserted variables	Removed variables	Method
1	General health, liveliness, social performance, mental problem, mental health	Physical performance, physical problem, physical pain	Step by step

Clearly, General health, liveliness, social performance, mental problem, mental health were added to the regression equation.

Table 8- summary of the model

Model	Correlation coefficient	Square correlation coefficient	Adjusted coefficient	Standard error
1	0.36	0.39	0.28	1.1
2	0.43	0.43	0.33	2.3
3	0.49	0.47	0.39	2.5
4	0.52	0.51	0.43	1.6
5	0.58	0.53	0.48	2.11

As listed in Table 8, the adjusted coefficient at the last stage of step-by-step method is 0.48, which means that the variables general health, liveliness, social performance, mental problems, and mental health jointly explain 0.48 of variance of satisfaction with marital life.

Discussion and conclusion

One of the supported hypotheses by the results was the relationship between attachment styles, defense mechanisms, and quality of life and satisfaction with marital life in married students of Ferdousi University, Mashhad, Iran. According to the findings, adaptive defense mechanism, safe attachment style, and total quality of life had significant contribution in the variable of satisfaction with marital life. This is consistent with Besharat (2005). Miklonser (2001) showed that individuals with safe attachment demonstrated more positive emotional responses toward positive life events and the individuals with unsafe attachment styles showed negative emotional reactions to negative events with higher frequency. Positive emotion is an outcome of safe attachment styles and related to satisfaction with job and marital life. The relationship between these variables can be complicated and bilateral. Positive sensitiveness enables individuals to enjoy more of their job and relationship and being happy at work and in love relationships, in return, increases positive sensitiveness (Karlson, 2010). On the other hand, adaptive defense mechanism is in line with improvement of adaptation with the environment so that emotions and feelings are adjusted in a healthy manner and preserves internal mental balance. In fact, adaptive defense mechanism ensures one's satisfaction with inter-personal relationships including marital relationship (Kramer, 2006). Shternbert (1987) argued that love is categorized in three categories: temptation, affection, commitment; and affection refers to behaviors that improve emotional closeness. Affection in marital relationship from quality of life viewpoint includes support, mutual understanding, communicating, participating, and sharing activities and assets (Bolien, 2011). To explain the second hypothesis, one may say that only safe attachment style had significant share in explaining variance of satisfaction with marital life. Attachment styles, which are closely related to its communicational functions and the outcomes, function like models and attachment behaviors. Therefore, it is concluded that attachment styles are closely related to old cognitive schema or beliefs about oneself and others; in addition, it is influenced and affected by the interactions with others. Taking into account that attachment styles are considered as personal specifications; it is assumed that individuals experience different levels of security in their relationships. Therefore, what influences one's satisfaction with marital life is the attachment styles of the couple (Bartolomio and Morovitz, 2002). Additionally, the attachment styles might be affected by the experiences with special relationships. In other words, peoples' experience in special relationship changes their attachment styles. One may describe safe attachment as: the extent of positive style that people have about themselves and others; or if the one finds themselves worthy of love and affection, accepts affectionate relationship, acts independently, and if others are seen as acceptable individuals to offer help and support. Safe attachment style is found in people with positive attitudes toward oneself and others. Safe individuals feel no threat when they develop close relationship with others and easily accept others' support. In general, they feel that they deserve others' love and affection and therefore, they enjoy good close relationships (Collins and Rid, 1990). Hypothesis three "the relationship between defense mechanism and satisfaction with marital life" was also supported. The results showed that adaptive and maladaptive defense mechanisms are significant elements in explaining variance of satisfaction with marital life. According to definition by the 4th ed. Of clinical diagnosis and statistics (2000), defense mechanisms are psychological self-efficient processes that support individuals against anxiety and information about internal and external threats. These mechanisms act as the intermediate between one's reaction to emotional conflicts and internal/external stressors. Indeed, the ego takes into account the reality principle (internal and external realities) of the expectations using control by defense mechanisms, which are also acceptable for oneself. These mechanisms are the tools that help one to stop the endless natural and irrational needs; moreover, the mechanisms take into account that reality and behaviors can satisfy the principle needs in a rational and socially acceptable manner. Without the mechanisms, the natural needs might take over control of one's behavior (Palhouse 1997, cited from Nemat, 2008). When one's satisfaction from inter-personal relationship are explained based on defense mechanism, the person can be characterized with mental maturity and acceptable performance level in the face of stressors and daily stresses; this needs an integrated mental organization to deal with the stressful environment. Therefore, what counts in satisfaction with marital life is the one's ability for mental management to control anxieties, emotions, pressures, and daily stresses. This function depends on effective and adaptive defense mechanism that preserve one's health in dealing with daily challenges and inter-personal relationship so that an acceptable level of satisfaction with marital life is achieved. When the individual is characterized with maladaptive defense mechanism, as supported by the results, a specific level of negative satisfaction with marital life due to inability to deal with marital life problems is predicted. To explain the last hypothesis, affection is a key process in development of friendly and marital relationships. Therefore, a portion of the quality of life that one experiences is rooted in their inter-personal relationships. This indicates that marital relationship is a key element in one's life and leads one to a specific level of happiness and satisfaction with daily life. General health is an element that indicate one's efficient function regarding all aspects of life so that they evaluate all aspects of their lives at a good level. This factor plays the main role in predicting satisfaction with marital life. (Demir, 2010)

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