Predicting marital satisfaction based on emotion regulation in married women considering the mediating role of happiness

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Abstract

Original Article

BACKGROUND: Marital relationship is described as the most important and fundamental human relationship. This study was conducted aiming to predict marital satisfaction based on the emotion regulation in married women, considering the mediating role of happiness.

METHODS: This was a correlational study conducted based on a communicational design using the drawing conceptual model and path analysis method. The data of the present study were collected during February to May 2017. For this purpose, among married women with chronic diseases who referred to the subspecialty Naft Hospital of Tehran, Iran for annual check-ups, 350 women were selected based on the average of the three recent related studies and using the respondent-driven sampling (RDS) method. Data were collected using a demographic checklist, the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMS), the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS), and the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ). For data analysis, regression analysis, drawing conceptual model, and path analysis method were used in LISREL software and SPSS software.

RESULTS: The data analysis showed that the emotion regulation variable with the coefficient of $\beta = -0.258$ and happiness variable with the coefficient of $\beta = 0.475$ correlated with the marital satisfaction variable. Additionally, the emotion regulation variable predicted the happiness with the coefficient of $\beta = -0.436$ (P < 0.0001 for all variables).

CONCLUSION: The results of this study, in line with research background, indicate a significant role of emotion regulation in explaining the marital satisfaction index with mediating role of happiness. The results of this study can be associated with clinical applications in the field of family interventions, couples therapy, and sex therapy.

KEYWORDS: Personal Satisfaction; Emotion Regulation; Happiness; Marriage; Women

Introduction

Background and scope of research: Marital satisfaction is described as the most important aspect of marital relationship, because it is the basis for creating a desirable family relationship and upbringing the next generation. One of the common concepts for showing happiness and stability in marriage is the concept of marital satisfaction.[3] Marital satisfaction is a state that

the couples are satisfied with each other and their marriage in most cases. One of the indicators related to psychological flexibility is emotion regulation. Emotion regulation is usually recognized as an important component in interpersonal relationships.

Literature review: The 20th century's psychology focused more on negative emotions such as depression and anxiety rather than on emotional excitement such as happiness and well-being. Positive psychology is a pioneer in changing the attitude of psychiatric pathology to human potentials. Happiness is defined as an important indicator

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of psychological well-being. Research findings also show that emotion regulation can also be a predictor of happiness.

Importance of the study: Due to the significance of the balanced function of the family and preventing it from breaking up, it is necessary to know the effective factors in marital satisfaction which is the strengthening basis for married life. Despite various studies about variables of marital satisfaction, happiness, and emotion regulation, to date, the relationship among these three variables has not been studied in the form of a research model.

Study purpose; important aspect of the study: Given the lack of research in the field of the relationship among the above-mentioned three variables and the necessity of examining marital satisfaction and its various dimensions, as well as the factors affecting marital satisfaction, the present study was conducted aiming to investigate the prediction of marital satisfaction based on emotion regulation considering the mediating role of happiness.

Overall purpose of the study: The present study was conducted aiming to investigate the prediction of marital satisfaction based on emotion regulation considering the mediating role of happiness.

Family is considered to be the most natural social institution.[1] Marriage is described as the most important and fundamental relationship of the human race due to its role in establishing the family system and upbringing the next generation.[1]

Marital satisfaction is described as the most important aspect of marital relationship, as it is the basis for creating a desirable family relationship and upbringing the next generation.[2]

One of the common concepts for showing happiness and stability in marriage is the concept of marital satisfaction.[3] Marital satisfaction is a state in which the couples are satisfied with each other and their marriage in most cases. Marital satisfaction is a general assessment of the current situation of couples.[3]

Marital satisfaction is a very important and complex aspect of marital relationship. In other words, a vital aspect of the marital system is the satisfaction that the couples feel in their relationship. Maintaining family stability is an important principle and marital satisfaction is one of the important components of family stability.[1] Marital satisfaction is a sense of happiness, satisfaction, and enjoyment experienced by couples, which is an important part of mental health.[3] Since marital satisfaction has a significant effect on physical and psychological life satisfaction and professional and social satisfaction, it acts as a protective factor against psychological trauma.[3] Meanwhile, one of the most important factors in marital satisfaction is sexual satisfaction between the couples.[2]

One of the best definitions from marital satisfaction is provided by Hawkins.[2] He defined marital satisfaction as the sense of happiness, satisfaction, and pleasure by husband and wife that embraces all aspects of their marriage.[2] Satisfactory marital relationships increase the ability of adaptation in individuals, and these people usually have longer lives and experience less psychiatric disorders and their children have good academic achievements.[2] If the couples do not have a satisfactory sexual relationship, it can lead to frustration, deprivation, lack of security, and reduced mental health, thereby reducing marital satisfaction and eventually the collapse of the family.[2] Studies show that marital satisfaction is a complex and multi-dimensional concept that can be influenced by cultural, economic, and social contexts.[4] Marital satisfaction can also be affected by the psychological and personality status of the couples.[5]

Despite the fact that in Iran, due to religious beliefs, specific cultural structures, and moral values, the severity of family problems is not high compared to other countries, the existence of dissatisfaction and problems in

this area cannot be ignored.[3] In recent years, Iranian society and families have undergone many changes, such as increasing marriage age, changing marriage patterns, and improving the educational and occupational status of women.[3] According to the reported results in Iran, many couples suffer from dissatisfaction with marital affairs, and this explains 50-60 percent of divorce cases and 40% of betrayals and hidden relationships.[2]

From the psychological point of view, psychological flexibility increases the sense of intimacy and more favorable interaction in couples.[6] One of the indicators related to psychological flexibility is emotion regulation. Emotion regulation is usually recognized as an important component in interpersonal relationships.[7] Emotion regulation does not mean suppressing emotions, but it is necessary that a person be always in a controlled state of emotional excitement. Emotion regulation refers to a process in which individuals can see what kind of emotion they are experiencing and how they express emotions. Emotion regulation may moderate, intensify, or maintain excitement and involves monitoring and changing the emotional experiences of a person. Few studies have been performed on the role of emotion regulation in marital satisfaction. Research findings show that reducing the disturbing experiences of emotion regulation is predictive of marital satisfaction and quality of life (QOL) in spouses.[7]

The twentieth century's psychology focused more on negative emotions such as depression and anxiety rather than on emotional excitement such as happiness and well-being. Positive-oriented psychology is a pioneer in changing the attitude of psychiatric pathology to human potentials.[8] Happiness is defined as an important indicator of psychological well-being.[9] Research findings also show that emotion regulation can also be a predictor of happiness.[10]

Therefore, due to the significance of the

balanced function of the family and preventing it from breaking up, it is necessary to know the effective factors in marital satisfaction which is the strengthening basis for married life. Despite the various studies about variables of marital satisfaction, happiness and emotion regulation, to date, the relationship between these three variables has not been studied in the form of a research model. Considering this, due to the lack of research and the necessity of examining marital satisfaction and its various dimensions, as well as determining the factors affecting marital satisfaction, the present study was conducted aimed to investigate the prediction of marital satisfaction based on emotion regulation considering the mediating role of happiness.

Methods

This was a correlational study carried out based on the descriptive design using the drawing conceptual model and path analysis method. The data of the present study were collected during February to May 2017. To this end, 350 women were selected using the respondent-driven sampling (RDS) method among married women referring to the subspecialty Naft Hospital of Tehran, Iran for annual check-up.

The sample size was estimated based on the average of the three recent related studies. After obtaining written informed consent and considering the inclusion criteria, the subjects entered into the study process. The inclusion criteria were age range of 18-45 years, a history of at least two years of common life, a minimum level of education of diploma, and residence in Tehran and the suburbs with a standard deviation (SD) of 30 km^2 from the center. The exclusion criteria were single women and divorced women. To collect the data, a demographic checklist, a short form including 47 questions of the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMS), the Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ),

Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ), and the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) were used. Incomplete questionnaires were removed from the analysis process and the lost scores were replaced with the average. In order to analyze the data, multiple regression analysis, the drawing conceptual model, and the path analysis method were used in the software environment of SPSS software (version 23, IBM Corporation, Armonk, NY, USA). All stages of the study were carried out after obtaining informed consent and based on the latest version of the Declaration of Helsinki (DoH).[11]

Tools

Demographical checklist: This questionnaire was developed by the researcher to collect personal information such as age, marital status, number of children, number of marriages, and quality of interactive relationship.[12]

Short form of EMS: It is the short form of ENRICH marital satisfaction which was designed by Olson as a 47-item scale designed in the form of a 6-point Likret scale (1 and 6 indicating completely agree and completely disagree, respectively) in which higher scores show more satisfaction and includes four categories of marital satisfaction, ideal distortion, conflict resolution, and communications. Studies show the reliability of this scale based on the Cronbach's Alpha Index. The reliability of the marital satisfaction scale in the Iranian sample was estimated to be 0.91.[13]

DERS: This questionnaire was designed by Gratz with the aim of evaluating emotion regulation patterns. This questionnaire has 36 items that measure the emotion regulation patterns in six subscales of accepting emotional responses, difficulty in performing purposeful behavior, difficulty in controlling impulse, lack of emotional awareness, limited access to emotion regulation, and lack of emotional clarity, in which more emphasis is placed on the problems of emotion regulation. This tool was designed in the form of a 5-point Likert scale

(1 and 5 indicating very rarely and almost always, respectively) in which higher scores show more difficulties in emotion regulation. The validity and reliability of this tool have been reported as desirable in prior studies.[14]

OHQ: This questionnaire was first prepared by Argyle et al. They reversed 21 questions from the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) and added 11 additional questions to it in order to cover other well-being aspects. Finally, the final version was designed with 29 points in the form of 4-point Likert scale in which the respondent evaluates his status from uneasiness to happiness. This tool was designed in the form of a 6-item Likert scale (1 and 6 indicating completely disagree and completely agree, respectively) in which higher scores indicate more happiness. The validity of this tool was reported to be acceptable and it was estimated as 0.94 in the Iranian sample.[15]

Results

Prior to using the regression and path analysis, the assumptions were examined. Normality of the data distribution was examined by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($P > 0.05$). Moreover, the linear relationship between predictor variables and dependent variables and co-linear variables was confirmed by calculating the inflation factor of variance and tolerance with values less than 10 and more than 1.

In terms of demographic characteristics, the mean age of the study participants was 38.27 ± 8.66 years, of whom the youngest and the oldest were 22 and 62 years of age, respectively. Furthermore, the mean age of marriage was 14.23 ± 10.20 years.

The minimum and maximum duration of marriage was respectively 2 and 43 years. In terms of the number of children, the number of subjects with no children, 1 child, 2 children, 3 children, 4 children, 5 children, and 6 children was 89, 104, 112, 26, 12, 1, and 1, respectively.

Table 1. Distribution of marital satisfaction scores among participants

Index variable	Mean	SD	Variation range	Minimum	Maximum
Personality topics	3.40	1.06	4.0	1.0	5.0
Marital relationship	3.38	1.13	4.0	1.0	5.0
Conflict resolution	3.51	1.06	4.0	1.0	5.0
Financial management	3.78	0.93	4.0	1.0	5.0
Leisure activities	3.69	1.02	4.0	1.0	5.0
Sex	3.62	0.91	4.0	1.0	5.0
Marriage and children	3.38	0.83	3.8	1.2	5.0
Relatives and friends	3.57	0.80	3.8	1.2	5.0
Religious orientation	3.89	0.87	4.0	1.0	5.0
Total score	169.21	35.21	166.0	59.0	225.0

SD: Standard deviation

94.3% of the participants had only one marriage, 4.9% had married more than once, and 0.9% percent did not respond to this question. 199 (56.9%), 83 (23.7%), 45 (12.9%), and 14 (4.0%) of the subjects reported that their relationship with their partners was respectively warm and intimate, normal, respectable, and cold, and 9 (2.9%) did not respond to this question. The highest frequency was related to the subjects with warm and intimate relationship and the lowest frequency was related to the cold relationship.

The distribution of marital satisfaction scores is presented in table 1.

The distribution of difficulty in the emotion regulation scores is presented in table 2.

The mean happiness score of the participants was 4.26 ± 0.64.

The simple relationships between the study variables as well as the relationship between the subscales of the variables were calculated using Pearson' correlation method, as presented in table 3.

Given the results of table 3, all correlation coefficients are significant (P < 0.01). In other words, the predictors of emotion regulation and happiness variables have a significant relationship with the dependent variable of marital satisfaction.

In order to predict the relationship between marital satisfaction and emotion regulation and happiness, multiple regression analysis was used. The results are presented in table 4.

As shown in table 4, the emotion regulation variable is related to the marital satisfaction with the coefficient of $\beta = -0.258$ and the happiness variable with a coefficient of $\beta = 0.475$. In addition, the emotion regulation variable predicted happiness with a coefficient of $\beta = -0.436$ (P < 0.0001 for all variables).

Table 3. Correlation matrix of relationships between study variables

	Marital satisfaction	Body image	Happiness
Marital satisfaction	1		
Emotion regulation	-0.258[**]	1	
Happiness	0.475[**]	-0.436[**]	1

[*]P < 0.05, [**]P < 0.01

Table 2. Distribution of marital satisfaction scores among participants

| Index dimensions	Mean	SD	Variation range	Minimum	Maximum
Accepting emotional responses	12.90	5.63	24	6	30
Difficulty in performing purposeful behavior	13.35	4.61	20	5	25
Difficulty in controlling impulse	14.05	5.61	24	5	30
Lack of emotional awareness	14.58	3.92	21	6	27
Limited access to emotion regulation	18.99	6.17	32	8	40
Lack of emotional clarity	9.80	3.53	19	5	24
Total score	83.73	21.3	111	45	156

SD: Standard deviation

Table 4. Results of multiple regression analysis to predict the relationship between marital satisfaction and emotion regulation and happiness

Model	Standard coefficients B	Non-standard coefficients Mean standard error	β	T	P
(Constant)	204.938	7.395		27.715	0.000
Emotion regulation	-0.472	0.086	-0.258	-4.985	0.000
(Constant)	59.104	11.068		5.340	0.000
Happiness	25.839	2.568	0.475	10.062	0.000

To evaluate the main hypothesis of the study, the LISREL software, drawing conceptual model, and path analysis method were used.

According to the results of table 5, the study model has a good explanatory power. Additionally, the effect of independent variables on dependent variables is significant and the fit of the model is consistent with the desirable statistical criteria. Therefore, evidence and results support well the study hypothesis. The conceptual model of the relationship is presented in figure 1.
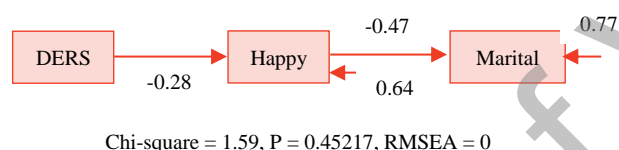
Chi-square = 1.59, P = 0.45217, RMSEA = 0

Figure 1. Conceptual model of prediction of marital satisfaction based on emotion regulation considering the mediating role of happiness

Discussion

The present study was conducted aiming to predict marital satisfaction based on emotion regulation considering the mediating role of happiness. The results suggested that the emotion regulation and happiness variables were predictors of marital satisfaction. Moreover, the emotion regulation variable significantly predicted happiness.

Although a similar study has not been conducted so far, these variables have been studied separately. A part of the results of this study showed that emotion regulation has a significantly positive relationship with marital satisfaction. In line with the current findings, the results of the study by Meleddu et al.[16] showed that emotion non-regulation has a conflict with marital satisfaction in couples. However, emotion regulation is a complex index that, in addition to interactive style and psychological potentials, also is affected by personality traits.[17]

A part of the results of this study showed that there is a significantly positive relationship between emotion regulation and happiness. In this regard, the results of the study by Merida-Lopez et al.[10] showed that emotion regulation can be accompanied by increased happiness by improving social interactions and satisfying interpersonal communication.

Table 5. Interpretation of goodness-of-fit (GFI) index of the model

Model fit criteria	Nick name	Amount	Desired limit
Chi-square	χ2/df	(p-0.45)1.59	P > 0.05
Goodness-of-fit index	GFI	1.000	P > 0.90
Normed goodness-of-fit index	AGFI	0.990	P > 0.90
Normed fit index	NFI	1.000	P > 0.90
Comparative fit index	CFI	1.000	P > 0.90
Incremental fit index	IFI	1.000	P > 0.90
Relative fit Index	RFI	0.990	P > 0.90
Standardized root mean square residuals	SRMR	0.016	Close to zero
Root mean square error of approximation	RMSEA	0.000	P < 0.08

Besides, in line with the results of this study, the results of the study by Ghahari et al.[18] showed that emotion non-regulation is related to the lack of sexual satisfaction in women. In fact, if the three-step emotion adjustment includes the process of recognition of the need for emotion regulation, deciding how to regulate and illustrating a strategy for adjustment lead to overcoming a wide range of common clinical problems, including depression and anxiety and a dramatic increase in the level of happiness, as well as improvement in the relations and management of mood swings. Individuals with greater emotion regulation can understand what kind of emotion they have, when they obtain that emotion, and most importantly, how they experience or express their emotions, and as a result they are more successful in their relationships and experience more positive emotions such as happiness.

In line with our results, the results of Tavakol et al.[3] showed that marital satisfaction has a significant relationship with happiness. Happiness is considered as an important issue for couples which enhances their QOL by influencing the mental components of marital quality. As shown in this study, happier individuals experience more marital satisfaction. Marital life can lead to the development of people and lovely interaction between them, which certainly needs the pass of time and awareness of oneself and each other. Family consultants need the perception of how couple's interaction is, also they need to understand about couples who can communicate well with each other so they can overcome many other deficiencies of life.

The present study was accompanied by some limitations in the implementation process. The sample of this study consisted of women who referred to the subspecialty Naft Hospital of Tehran for annual check-ups, so the generalization of the results to other communities or the opposite sex can be associated with difficulty. Furthermore, the use of self-measurement tools, especially for sensitive variables, can be associated with the subject's bias in response. It is suggested that in future studies, along with the paper and pen tool, biological markers as a cortisol levels be used to evaluate the psychological changes.[19,20] Additionally, a similar study on male samples could be a good route for future studies.

Conclusion

The present study was conducted aiming to predict marital satisfaction based on emotion regulation considering the mediating role of happiness. The findings indicated that emotion regulation and happiness variables are predictors of marital satisfaction. Besides, the emotion regulation variable significantly predicted happiness. The results of this study, in line with the research background, reflect the role of emotion regulation in explaining the marital satisfaction with the mediating role of happiness, and can be associated with clinical applications in the context of clinical interventions.

Conflict of Interests

Authors have no conflict of interests.

Acknowledgments

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