

The Relationship between Spousal Intimacy, Perceived Equity and Marital Quality in Married Employees

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Abstract

The present research aimed to investigate the relationship between spousal intimacy, perceived equity and marital quality in married employees of National Iranian Oil Company. To this aim, the research employed a correlational method. The statistical population of the research included all the married employees of National Iranian Oil Company, out of which, a sample of 400 employees (186 females and 214 males) was selected through random cluster sampling. The research tools included Intimacy Scale (IS), Perceived Equity Measure (PEM) and Quality of Marriage Index (QMI). The results of data analysis using Pearson correlation coefficient indicated that there is significant relationship between intimacy with spouse and perceived equity. Moreover, the results of regression analysis indicated that, the variables of intimacy with spouse and perceived equity can be good predictors for the criterion variable of quality of marriage.

Keywords: intimacy with spouse, perceived equity, marital quality, employees

1. Introduction

Marriage is the most intimate type of relationship during adulthood that is considered as the main source of affection and support (Rovin, 2005; cited in Izadi Panah, 2014). Hence, marriage and spouse selection lay the foundations for families (Khojasteh Mehr, 2005). Families might be in an unfavorable and adverse condition if they are not supportive and functional and therefore, familiarization with the aspects that lead to the stability of marriage and family is of essential importance for all the different strata of the society that care about this unit's survival. Family is a dynamic and changing identity that organizes a whole and expands throughout time and space using its members and in constant, interactional and planned process (Ahmadi et al., 2010).

Based on this, the marital quality is a multi-dimensional aspect that has been in the lime-light of researchers in recent years and includes aspects such as adjustment, satisfaction, cohesion and commitment. Marital quality is a dynamic concept and the identity and quality of marital relationships can change throughout time (Larson & Holman, 1994). Marital quality is not an unchanging image of constant classifications, but rather a continuum of distinct and perceptible marital performances and interactions (i.e. high marital quality versus low marital quality (Lewis & Spanier, 1979). Hawkins & Booth (2005) assert that low marital quality can affect some of the features of marital life including happiness, satisfaction, health and self-confidence (Christensen, Atkins, & Baucom, 2010; Helms et al., 2010).

One of the important factors that impacts marital quality and has been recently brought to light is the perceived intimacy by the spouses (Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003). Intimacy is a broad concept that can involve talking about the details of life and even the disclosure of the most private sexual feelings between a husband and wife. Friendship and friendly behavior with the spouse is one of the determining factors of marital life quality (Beck, 1921; translated by Gharacheh Daghi, 2008). Perceived intimacy is associated with the decrease of loneliness and depression and also coping better with stress (Prager & Buhrmester, 1998). This component is often claimed to be an indicator of ideal type of marriage and family relationship (Scheafer & Olson, 1981). Accordingly, Figuerres (2008) has considered intimacy to embrace the concepts of satisfaction, attraction, unity and intimacy in marital relationship.

Lippert and Prager (2001) and Sanderson (2008) demonstrated that couples who are not intimate with one another report to have lower levels of marital satisfaction; whereas, couples who have higher levels of

self-disclosure, trust and mutual interdependence report to have higher levels of interpersonal satisfaction and more stable relationship. Lower intimacy can be associated with more failed and ruined relationships. The results of a study by Cohen et al. (2012) that evaluated 156 in committed and intimate relationships indicated that, higher levels of husband's empathy is associated with higher levels of wife's satisfactions. The results of the research by Cramer & Jowett (2010) and Lemay, Clark & Feeney (2007) indicated that, individuals whose partners understand their experience are more satisfied with their relationship and have higher feelings of intimacy.

Moreover, perception of the fairness and equity in marital relationship is one of the factors that affect the quality and stability of marriage. Social exchange theory is the basis of the theory of equity perception (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). This theory can be applied for understanding and explaining the dynamics of marriage and proposes that perception of the equity is a vital aspect in healthy relationships and human beings always yearn for fairness (Lambert, 2003). Fast-paced and sweeping changes in cultural, economic, and social realms have given rise to fundamental transformations in the structure of families and relationship patterns among the members particularly the couples. The consequence is higher levels of tendency toward fairness and equity in marital relationship (Nokarizi, 2014). Faramarzi (2009) found out that, fair relationships are well-adjusted relationships. Moreover, men and women are happier and more satisfied in equity-based relationships as compared to women and men who have received below or above their rights in relationships. The theory of fairness predicts that the lack of happiness due to the inequity in the relationship is associated with decreased levels of commitment and satisfaction that undermine the relationship. The results of the study by Hatfield & Trupmann (1983) indicate that perception of fairness is the strongest predictor of marital satisfaction in the preliminary stages of the relationship between couples.

The research by Khojasteh Mehr, Faramarzi and Rajabi (2012) indicates that there is positive correlation between perceived fairness and the quality of marriage. In the preliminary stages of marital life, the couples' reaction to fairness and unfairness can differ greatly from the spouses who have experienced decades of marital life (Feeney, Peterson & Noller, 1994). According to the theory of fairness, individuals in fair marriages have higher levels of satisfaction; whereas, in unfair marriages that is beset with distress and sadness, individuals have lower levels of marital satisfaction (Walster, Traupmann, & Walster, 1978). Nelson (2000) contends that fairness is one of the most important predictive constructs of marital quality. Sweeney (2008; cited in Jafari Nezhad, 2011) asserts that unfairness can ruin the fair route of conversation. According to him, if one of the partners doesn't have feelings of fairness, s/he may employ conflict styles to his/her benefits and when there is the sense of equity in the relationship, couples will have higher levels compromise. The research literature shows that fairness is an important factor in the relationship that can be maintained with higher levels of adjustment, social support and intimacy. It's predicted that, individuals who are involved in unfair relationships end it (Walster, Traupmann, & Walster, 1978).

Many researchers like De Maris (2010) and Frisco & Williams (2003) have shown the principles and rules of the theory of fairness in efficient romantic relationships. Larson et al. (1998) assert that no intimacy can be created before solving the fundamental issues such as justice and equity. Intimacy is like a pyramid and the base of this pyramid is mutual trust. The spouse is committed to behave fairly while facing with conflicts in his/her needs and interests; therefore, intimacy is experienced along with trust and having this notion in mind that the partner acts fairly and in accordance with fairness. Claffey & Mickelson, (2009) showed that increase in marital incompatibility can explain the relationship between the perception of unfairness and personal anxiety. Willigen & Drentea (2001) have investigated the effect of fairness in intimate relationships in two groups of white and colored-skinned people. Their findings indicated that the perception of fairness not only increases the perception of social support but also decreases the depression. This finding has also been confirmed in studies carried out by Whitton & et al. (2002, cited in Parker & Pattenden, 2009). Cohen et al. (2012), Greenstein (2009), Saginak & Saginak (2005) and Willigen and Drentea (2001) have all confirmed that intimacy with spouse has significant relationship with the perception of equity and quality of marriage.

Regarding the above mentioned literature, the present research aims to explore the multiple relationships between spousal intimacy, perceived equity and marital quality in married employees of National Iranian Oil Company. Therefore, the research's question is that whether or not there is any significant relationship between intimacy, perceived equity and marital quality of married employees?

2. Method and Material

The research employed a correlational method. The statistical population included all the married employees of Iranian National Oil Company (N=8500). The research sample comprised 400 individuals who were selected

through random cluster sampling and based on Krejcie & Morgan table. First, different deputy departments were determined and then the number of employees working in each department was counted. Finally, the subjects were selected in accordance to the number of male and female employees working in each department.

Intimacy with Spouse questionnaire was designed and developed by Walker & Thompson (1983, cited in Sanayi, 2008). This 17-item questionnaire is scored on a 7-point Likert scale. Walker and Thompson have reported the reliability coefficient of this scale using Cronbach alpha to be between .91 and .97. Moreover, the face validity and content validity was evaluated by some of the experts in counseling and psychology. Etemadi (2005) has also reported its reliability using Cronbach alpha to be .96. The Cronbach alpha in the present research was equal to .96 which proves to be acceptable.

Perceived Equity Measure (PEM) was designed by Perry (2004). This questionnaire deals with equity in four realms. The test is scored on 5-point Likert scale from 1 (very unfair from my point of view) to 5 (very unfair from my spouse's point of view). Perry (2004) has reported the Cronbach alpha to be equal to .55. Faramarzi (2009) has reported the reliability using Cronbach alpha and bisection to be equal to .80 and .82, respectively. The construct validity using Enrich satisfaction scale was reported to be .66 at significance level of $P < .001$. The Cronbach alpha in the present research was equal to .70 which proves to be acceptable.

Quality of Marriage Inventory was designed by Norton in 1983. This 6-item questionnaire evaluates the quality of marriage. Fincham, Paleari & Regalia (2002) evaluated the reliability of this questionnaire using internal consistency (Cronbach alpha) which was equal to .96. Moreover, the Cronbach alpha in the research by Schnurman- Crook (2001, cited in Fincham et al., 2002) was equal to .97. Khojasteh Mehr et al. (2010) used ENRICH scale to investigate the QMI's construct validity and the result was equal to .77 which was significant at $P < .001$. The Cronbach alpha in the present research was equal to .95 which proves to be acceptable.

Administration

Having received the required certificates and determined the sample members, the researcher established a relationship with the participants, explained to them the reasons of their selection, decreased their sensitivity towards the questions and administered the questionnaires. The subjects were demanded to ask for more clarity if faced with ambiguity in the questions and were also assured of the confidentiality. The data were analyzed using Pearson correlation and multivariate regression by SPSS20.

3. Results and Findings

Mean and standard deviation of the scores of intimacy with spouse, perceived equity and marital quality have been presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of the scores of intimacy with spouse, perceived equity and marital quality

| Variable | Mean | S.D. | N |
|----------------------|--------|-------|-----|
| Intimacy with spouse | 99.65 | 18.12 | 400 |
| Perceived equity | 185.43 | 25.91 | 400 |
| Marital quality | 30.71 | 5.56 | 400 |

As observed in Table 1, the mean and standard deviation of intimacy are equal to 99.65 and 18.12, respectively. Moreover, the mean and standard deviation of perceived equity are equal to 185.43 and 25.91, respectively. Finally, the mean and standard deviation of marital quality equal 30.71 and 5.56, respectively.

Research hypotheses

First hypothesis: there will be significant relationship between intimacy with spouse and marital quality in married employees.

Second hypothesis: there will be significant relationship between perceived equity and marital quality in married employees.

The results of simple correlation coefficients between intimacy with spouse, perceived equity and marital quality have been presented in Table 2.

As observed in Table 2, there is significant and positive relationship between intimacy with spouse ($r = .78$ and $p = .0001$) and perceived equity ($r = .39$ and $p = .0001$) with marital quality of married employees. Therefore, the first and second hypotheses are confirmed.

Table 2. Simple correlation coefficients between intimacy with spouse, perceived equity and marital quality

| Criterion variable | Predictive variables | R | P | N |
|--------------------|----------------------|-----|-------|-----|
| Marital quality | Intimacy with spouse | .78 | .0001 | 400 |
| | Perceived equity | .39 | .0001 | 400 |

Third hypothesis: there will be multiple relationships between intimacy with spouse, perceived equity and marital quality of married employees.

The results of multiple correlation coefficients between predictive variables (intimacy with spouse and perceived equity) and marital quality of married employees have been presented in table 3.

Table 3. The results of multiple correlation coefficients between predictive variables (intimacy with spouse and perceived equity) and marital quality of married employees

| Method | Predictive variables | R | R ² | F | p= | β | T | P= |
|-----------|----------------------|-----|----------------|---------|-------|---------|-------|-------|
| Entry | Intimacy with spouse | .78 | .61 | 314.815 | .0001 | .74 | 21.62 | .0001 |
| | Perceived equity | | | | | .07 | 2.24 | .025 |
| Step-wise | Intimacy with spouse | .78 | .60 | 618.33 | .0001 | .78 | 24.86 | .0001 |
| | Perceived equity | .78 | .61 | 314.85 | .0001 | .74 | 21.62 | .0001 |
| | | | | | | .07 | 2.24 | .025 |

As observed in Table 3, prediction regression of married employees' marital quality by intimacy with spouse and perceived equity is significant ($F=314.815$ and $P<.0001$). Therefore, the third hypothesis is also confirmed. Results of step-wise regression analysis indicated that the variables of intimacy with spouse and perceived equity can predict married employees' marital quality.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The research purpose was to investigate the relationship between spousal intimacy, perceived equity and marital quality in married employees of NIOC. The results of the research indicated that there is significant relationship between intimacy with spouse and marital quality of married employees ($r=.78$ and $p=.0001$). This finding is in line with the results of the studies by Izadi Panah (2014), Bahrapour (2012), Cohen et al. (2012), Cramer & Jowett (2010) and Lemay et al. (2007). This finding shows that, intimate relationship between the couples is a fundamental factor based on which we can perceive marital satisfaction (Robinson & Blanton, 1993; cited in Asad Pour, 2012). Intimacy is a broad concept that can involve talking about the details of life and even the most private sexual feelings between a husband and wife. Friendship and friendly behavior with the spouse is one of the determining factors of marital life quality (Beck, 1921; translated by Gharacheh Daghi, 2008). Attachment regulation model of Murray & Holmes (2000) shows that spouses who had tendency for intimacy described their spouses as intimacy seeking, as well. This perception positively affected the relationship between intimate aims and marital satisfaction (Sanderson & Cantor, 2001). Therefore, the rate of intimacy with spouse and intimate relationship with one's partner has significant effect on the level of marital quality.

Results also indicated that there is significant relationship between the perception of equity and the quality of marriage among the married couples ($P=.0001$, $r=.39$). This finding is in line with the results of the research by Khojasteh Mehr, Faramarzi and Rajabi (2012), Jafari Nezhad (2011), Faramarzi (2009), Greenstein (2009), Claffey & Mickelson (2009) and Perry (2004). The findings show that the research literature is relatively vast regarding the fairness in household chores. A number of researchers have evaluated the effect of fairness in carrying out the house chores on satisfaction, quality, mental health and decrease of depression (Coltrane, 2000; Lavee & Katz, 2002, Greenstein, 2009). Regarding the research done in fairness, it can be clarified that perceived fairness in doing the house chores is associated with marital quality. When the men participate more in doing the house chores, women are more likely to describe the situation as fair and report higher levels of marital satisfaction. Therefore, the quality and level of marital satisfaction can be predicted by the variables of fairness and its perception. In addition to performing the house chores, love and emotional association with spouse are regarded among the factors that trigger the partner to express the same emotions seeking for fairness in this area, as well. And it's regarded as one of the effective factors of marital quality.

Moreover, the prediction regression of married employees' marital quality by intimacy with spouse and perceived equity was found to be significant ($F=314.815$ and $P<.0001$). Therefore, the third hypothesis is also confirmed. It was found out that the variables of intimacy with spouse and perceived equity can predict married employees' marital quality. This finding is in line with the studies carried out by Cramer & Jowett (2010) and Lemay et al. (2007) and Willigen & Drentea (2001). This finding shows that a specific feature in cemented and intimate relationships is that each individual is unconditionally responsive to the needs and wants of the partner (Clark et al., 2008; Clark et al., 2010). Furthermore, romantic relationships as an example of interactional relationships (Kogan et al., 2010) should be rooted in accurate rules dominating the interpersonal relationships. Based on this, the rate of romantic and intimate relationships with spouse is related to their sacrificing behaviors and all these factors can bring them satisfaction. Individuals always make a review of the costs and benefits of their marital life and consider the observation of the justice and fairness as an ideal state (Clark et al., 2010). Figuerres (2008) asserts that perception of fairness and equity is reflected through affection, satisfaction and forgiveness resulting in either decreasing or increasing marital satisfaction. Being fair to one's spouse in marital relationship can increase intimacy with spouse and bring about higher levels of marital satisfaction. Therefore, the components of intimacy with spouse and perception of fairness can be considered as the indicators of marital satisfaction.

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