

Relationship between Optimism, Religiosity and Self-Esteem with Marital Satisfaction and Life Satisfaction

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Abstract

The purpose of the current study is to investigate the relationship between Optimism, Religiosity and Self-esteem with Marital Satisfaction and Life Satisfaction in married university students. The research method was a descriptive study kind of correlation. The sample group included 200 married students that were selected using a simple random sampling method. For collecting data, Attribution Style Questionnaire, Religious Attitude, Cooper Smith Self-Esteem Questionnaire, Enrich Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire and Satisfaction with Life Scale were used. The findings indicated that marital satisfaction not life satisfaction was predicted by Optimism, Religiosity and Self-esteem. Religiosity showed the greatest relationship with marital satisfaction. Base on this study, family therapists should consider the role of religious or spiritual couple's attitude as a vital factor in reveal and solving the marital conflict. Consistency and inconsistency of the results were discussed.

Keywords: optimism, religiosity, self-esteem, marital satisfaction, life satisfaction

1. Introduction

Family is the most important core of every society and it is the center for the preservation of mental health. It has an important role in the formation of children's (future parents) characters. Family cannot be replaced by any other institution. A society will be healthier and more dynamic if parents are believers and have healthy characters (Datilive & Birshak, 2007). Their physical and emotional health depends on having a healthy marital relationship and continuation of marriage. Marital satisfaction is one of the most important determinants in having a healthy family (Greef, 2000) and it is influenced by many factors such as: social and demographic characteristics, mental and physical health, intimate relations, social support and beliefs and cultural values such as religion (Sanchez-Fuentes, Santos-Iglesias, & Sierra, 2014). Marital agreement is related to the understanding of the couple's characters because if the couple understands each other precisely, they will be known as a happy couple. When a person experiences marital agreement he shows fewer signs of mental disorders (Navabinezhad, 2004).

Life satisfaction is a kind of self-assessment of one's life and it is an internal evaluation of quality of life. The meaning of life satisfaction is the person's attitude towards life in general or special aspects of life such as family life and learning experience. Satisfaction with the past, satisfaction with the present and satisfaction with the future are the three kinds of life satisfaction. Other psychological variables related to life satisfaction such as hope and optimism have been thought of in a future-oriented perspective. Nejatian and Danesh (2009) found that satisfaction in marriage increases the level of life satisfaction. An increase in marital and life satisfaction causes personal growth and development of society.

Once of the effective factors in creating marital satisfaction is optimism. Optimism shows a positive correlation with good behavior, perseverance, personal and professional success, health and longevity (Rogers et al., 1997), as well as with desirable expectations from the future, coping effectively with stress and higher income (Carver et al., 2010). Couples who have pessimistic views are in higher risk of being conquered by emotions. They become angry, sad and disappointed easily by what their partner does. They each think that their spouse has fundamental flaws which cannot be changed (Henry et al., 2007). Researchers say that the couples' understanding of life, social support and having characteristics such as physical health and optimism have an important role in a successful life among couples (Ko et al., 2007). Optimism in couples is the predictor of marriage quality (Smith et al., 2013). Some researchers have shown that there is a positive correlation between

optimism and marital satisfaction (Mardani & Heydari, 2010).

Also, optimism as a main variable in positive psychology is effective in increasing life quality and satisfaction (Rostami, 2010). An increase in people's optimism will cause higher levels of life satisfaction (Hamarat et al., 2001; Noori et al., 2009; Seligman & Csikszent, 2000). Optimism will lead to having hopeful views. One will expect positive and stable consequences and as a result will have a positive and satisfactory assessment of life (Strassle et al., 2000). An increase in optimism will lead to a decrease in mental and emotional problems, an increase in mental health and as a result an increase in life satisfaction (Fruhwald et al., 2001; Poursardar et al., 2012; Nazari-Fagni et al., 2013).

Self-esteem is a factor that can have a positive effect in life problems and tension among couples. Cooper Smith (1997) came to the conclusion that high self-esteem strengthens the person in facing life problems. Self-esteem is a factor that will determine the way to cope with stressful circumstances. It also determines the person's insight to stressful situations and if he can control these situations. It has been shown in previous studies that self-esteem influences interpersonal skills in people. The ways in which people effectively interact with each other can reduce tension and effectively control mental pressures (Steer, 1997, translation, Birshak, 2005). People with high self-esteem have great goals in mind and they expect to reach success in all circumstances (Azimi, 2005). Lower self-esteem in couples has a negative effect in understanding and creating a close relationship (Peterson et al., 2014). The result of many studies that have been done about the relationship between self-esteem and marital satisfaction has shown a positive and meaningful relation between them (Shanavas & Venkatammal, 2014; Schaffhuser et al., 2014). Therefore, self-esteem is a predictor of marital satisfaction and satisfaction with the spouse (Erol & Orth, 2013; Oprisan & Critea, 2012). The results of this research show that a decline in self-esteem causes stress and dissatisfaction with life (Lu, 2015).

Religiosity is an effective factor in marital satisfaction because it determines the framework of beliefs and values as well as showing guidance for life which can affect marital life (Hunler & Gengoz, 2005). People's views towards responsibilities, the way to love, providing peaceful environments and faithfulness are affected by religion. This demonstrates religion's influence on marital relationships (Mahoney, 2005). It is mentioned in the Quran that a bond between man and woman in marriage is a strong pact and the two will be the source of comfort for each other. In many studies it has been shown that religious views and marital satisfaction are positively correlated in women (Khodayari-Fard et al., 2013; Zulling et al., 2006), female teachers (Asghari et al., 2014), male teachers (Heydari, 2003) and employed women (Attari et al., 2006; Hosseinkhanzadeh & Niazy, 2011). Therefore, none of the other socio-demographic factors can predict marriage quality as well as religious belief (Onsy & Amer, 2014). Religion can be a positive force for low income couples. Mutual beliefs can neutralize the negative effects of financial stress. Religious institutions might be able to have a strong role in nurturing spiritual life and increasing the quality of marriage (Lichter & Carmalt, 2009). Also, religious belief causes satisfaction with life (Lelks, 2006; Gruber, 2005; Soydemir et al., 2004). There is a positive correlation between having religious information and life satisfaction in teenagers (Brown & Tierney, 2009) and between participating in religious ceremonies and life satisfaction in the elderly (Swinyard et al., 2001). Results indicate that there is a positive and meaningful relationship between religious beliefs and life satisfaction (Krause, 2003; Keshavarz et al., 2009; Hadianfard, 2005).

Marital satisfaction is an effective factor in strengthening the foundation of the family. Preserving the family and identifying its effective factors is a necessary obligation for every society. The first step is to identify the most important variables in preserving families. In order to strengthen this important institution, awareness should be increased and effective courses should be planned. To this direction, this study tries to answer this question: Is there a positive relationship between Optimism and Religious Beliefs and Marital Satisfaction in married university students in the Azad University of Ahvaz?

2. Method

The research method was a descriptive study kind of correlation. The statistical population of this research includes all of the married students of the faculty of humanities of the Azad University of Ahvaz. From this population 200 people were selected by the cluster sampling method. From all of the bachelor subjects in the faculty of humanities (7 subjects) in the year 2013-2014, three subjects were randomly chosen (Law, Geography and Economics). Then in each class almost all married students were chosen and the questionnaires were given.

2.1 Data Collection Tools

Enrich Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire: This marital satisfaction questionnaire is made by Olson, Fornier and Drankmen (quoted from Asgari, 2009). Its long form consists of 115 questions and its short form consists of 47. Each question has 5 answer options from completely agree to completely disagree which are numbered 1 to 5.

This questionnaire has been validated by Soleimani (1994) for the first time. Its stability calculated by the Cronbach's Alpha is 0.95. Motamedin (2003) calculated its credibility by the FAD questionnaire and found the correlation coefficient to be 0.65 and according to him the stability if this questionnaire calculated by Cronbach's Alpha is 0.57. In this study its Cronbach's Alpha is 0.80.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS): Diener and colleagues (1985) scaled life satisfaction for different age groups. This scale had five articles and each article has seven options. Each option is numbered between 1 (completely disagree) and 7 (completely agree). Diener and his colleagues (1985) found the stability to be 0.82 calculated by re-testing and 0.87 calculated by Cronbach's Alpha. Schimmack and Colleagues (2002) calculated the stability of the life quality scale using Cronbach's Alpha. The results are 0.90, 0.82, 0.72, 0.76 and 0.61 for USA, Germany, Japan, Mexico and China respectively. Esmaili (2008) found its credibility to be 0.66 by reviewing its correlation with the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire. He also found its stability to be 0.80 using Cronbach's Alpha. In this study, Cronbach's Alpha is 0.88.

Attribution Style Questionnaire (ASQ): This questionnaire is a self-reporting scale which is created and edited by Paterson, Semmel, Baeyer, Abramson, Metalsky, and Seligman (1982). It is translated into Persian, edited and validated by Shahni-Yeylagh and colleagues (2003). For validating this scale Peterson et al. (1982) calculated its correlation coefficient in different studies and the values they obtained were between 0.19 and 0.41. They also calculated the stability coefficient and the values they found were between $\alpha = 0.44$ and $\alpha = 0.69$ (Quoted from Shahni-Yeylaghi and co-workers, 2003). Shahni-Yeylaghi et al., (2003) calculated the stability coefficient of this questionnaire using Cronbach's Alpha, Spearman-Brown and Gutman and the values they found were 0.75, 0.67 and 0.67 respectively. This shows that this questionnaire has a rather good stability. In this study the stability coefficient using Cronbach's Alpha is 0.77.

Cooper-Smith Self-esteem Inventory: This questionnaire was made in 1967 by Cooper-Smith after revising Rogers and Daymond scale (1953). This scale has 58 articles and subjects answer the questionnaire themselves using pencil and paper. In this test, 8 Articles (6, 13, 20, 27, 34, 41, 48, and 55) are lie detectors. The other 50 Articles consist of 4 subscales which are self-esteem, social self-esteem (peers), familial self-esteem (parents), and educational self-esteem (schools). Shekarkan and Nisi (1994) found the validity of this test to be 0.69. They calculated it using the correlation coefficient of this questionnaire and the students' GPA which is meaningful in $p = 0.001$. Also, the validity of this questionnaire was found to be 0.92 using the re-examination method. In the present study, the value of Cronbach's Alpha is 0.79.

Religiosity Assessment Scale: In this study the self-reporting religiosity scale by Arian (1998) was used to assess religious attitude in subjects. This scale consists of 20 questions. Each question can be answered on a scale of 1 (very little) to 5 (very much). Arian (1998) found the reliability of the test on Allame University students to be 0.92 using Cronbach's Alpha. Shahni-Yeylagh et al. (2004) calculated its Validity using its correlation coefficient with a self-made questionnaire. The value they found was 0.56 which is meaningful in $p = 0.01$. In this study Cronbach's Alpha is found to be 0.84.

3. Results

Table 1. Shows the descriptive indicators, predicting variables and the criterion variables

Variables	Standard deviation	Mean	Number
Optimism	1.33	57.84	200
Self-esteem	16.08	30.71	200
Religiosity	13.62	54.34	200
Marital Satisfaction	1.24	52.40	200
Life Satisfaction	11.40	21.40	200

In Table 1 the Mean and Standard Deviation of Optimism (57.84 and 1.33), Self-esteem (30.71 and 16.08), Religiosity (54.34 and 13.62), Marital Satisfaction (52.40 and 1.24) and Life Satisfaction (21.40 and 11.40) are shown.

Table 2. Simple correlation coefficient of optimism, self-esteem and religiosity with marital and life satisfaction in married students

Predicting Variables	Marital Satisfaction	Life Satisfaction
Optimism	0.88	0.56
Self-esteem	0.74	0.41
Religiosity	0.86	0.51

According to Table 2, all Predicting Variables (Optimism, Self-esteem and Religiosity) are positively correlated with the Criterial Variables (Marital and Life Satisfaction). The values are between 0.41 and 0.88. All are in the level of $p < 0.001$.

Study Hypothesis: Optimism, Self-esteem and Religiosity have a relationship with Marital and life Satisfaction in Married students.

Significance of the Full Model for Canonical Correlation Analysis:

First, the significance of the Full Model of Canonical Correlation was analyzed. The results of this analysis which are shown in Table3 are found using multi-variable variance analysis.

Table 3. Level of significance

Test Name	Value	F	Error df	Hypothesis df	Level of Significance
Pillai's Trace Test	0.835	46.88	392	6	0.001
Wilks' Lamda Test	0.172	91.61	390	6	0.001
Hotelling's Test	0.760	53.92	388	6	0.001
Roy's Greatest Root Test	0.826				

According to Table 3, Wilks' Lambda shows that there is a meaningful relationship between the two sets of variables (Predicting and Criterial). Due to the significance of the Full Model, the hypothesis of this study is confirmed. Due to the significance of the multi-variable analysis, the variables of this study have at least one meaningful relationship. Therefore, according to the model obtained in this study, 83% of the variance of the Criterial Variables is explained by the Predicting Variables.

Extraction of Conventional Functions and Evaluation of General Proportion:

The next step in Canonical Correlation Analysis is the extraction of one or more conventional functions. So in the next step the significance of these functions are analyzed.

Table 4. Characteristics of the functions from canonical correlation analysis

Number of Function	Canonical Correlation	Squared Canonical Correlation	Cumulative Percentage	Percentage	Eigen value
1	0.90	0.82	99.79	99.97	4.75
2	0.09	0.009	100	0.20	0.009

In Table 4, it is shown that the Squared Canonical Correlation of the functions (R^2C) are 0.90 and 0.09. Therefore, only the first function which explains 82% of the variance and has sufficient significance is interpreted. The second function is not interpreted. In Table5, the analysis of dimension reduction of the dual functions in this study is shown.

Table 5. The results of the analysis of dimension reduction for standard function

Number	Wilks' Lambda	Error df	Hypothesis df	F	Level of Significance
1-2	0.172	390	6	91.61	0.001
2-2	0.99	196	2	0.93	0.394

According to Table5, the cumulative effect of functions 1 and 2 (Full Model) is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$, $\lambda = 0.172$, $F = 91.61$). But the cumulative effect of function 2 alone is not significant ($p < 0.05$, $\lambda = 0.99$, $F = 0.93$). In other words, when functions 1 and 2 are analyzed together, the amount of significance of common variance between the two variables is explained but when only the second function is used, it is not significant enough to explain the common variance of the two sets of variables.

In Table 6, to determine the most common predicting and criterial variables, raw canonical coefficients, structural coefficients and standardized canonical coefficients in the first function (second function is not explained because of lack of significance) are explained.

Table 6. Standardized coefficients, squared standardized coefficients, structural coefficients and squared coefficients in the first function

Variable	Standardized Coefficients	Squared Standardized Coefficients	Structural Coefficients	Squared Structural Coefficients
Marital Satisfaction	0.94	0.88	-0.99	0.98
Life Satisfaction	0.09	0.008	-0.60	0.36
Optimism	-0.29	0.08	-0.66	0.44
Self-esteem	-0.15	0.02	-0.49	0.24
Religiosity	0.77	0.59	-0.95	0.59

In Table 6, Standardized Coefficients, Structural Coefficients and Squared Structural Coefficients are shown. Canonical Standardized Coefficients can be regarded as Standardized Regression Coefficients. For example, in the case of Optimism, a one unit increase in Standard Deviation of Optimism causes the Standard Deviation of the Canonical Variable in the second set to increase by 0.29 if the rest of the variables are kept constant. Squared Standardized Coefficients indicate that 88% of variance in Marital Satisfaction is explained by the Standardized Canonical Coefficients. The Religiosity variable is interpreted by the linear combination of Predicting Variables. Correlation between Religiosity and Canonical Variable of the Criterial Variables is found to be 0.77. In addition, correlation between the rest of the Predicting Variables (Optimism and Self-esteem) and the linear combination of Criterial Variables are 0.29 and 0.15 respectively. As mentioned earlier, Squared Canonical Coefficients indicate that Religiosity explains 59% of the variance in Canonical Variable of the Criterial Variables.

It is shown from the results of Table6 that in the first function, all Predicting Variables' Structural Coefficients are higher than 0.3, therefore, they are significant in predicting and explaining the linear combination (Canonical Variable) of their own set. In fact, Structural Coefficients are indicators of correlation between any variable and the Canonical Variable of its own set. Based on the results presented in Table6, from the Linear Criterial Variables in the first function, Marital Satisfaction and from the Predicting Variables, Religiosity, Optimism and Self-esteem, in order, have a higher contribution. Squared Structural Coefficients indicate that 98% of the variance in Canonical Criterial Variable is determined by Marital Satisfaction. Also, Religiosity, Optimism and Self-esteem determine 59%, 44% and 24% of the variance in Canonical Predicting Variable.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

It can be concluded from this study that there is a significant relationship between the Predicting Variables (Optimism, Religiosity and Self-esteem) and the Criterial Variables (Marital Satisfaction and Life satisfaction). The amount of Canonical Correlation (0.90) is an indication of a significant relationship between the two sets of variables. In other words, this correlation means that Marital and Life Satisfaction are very much influenced by Optimism, Religiosity and Self-esteem. No other research has studied the combination of the Predicting

Variables' effects on the Criterial Variables. Most of the other works in this field studied only the effect of one of the Predicting Variables on Marital and Life Satisfaction separately.

The above findings can be explained in this way: Nowadays positive psychology is centered on studying the effects of positive factors on having a better life. Optimism in particular is considered a positive behavioral characteristic that can have a key role in facing problems and failures in life. An optimist person minimizes the stress caused by problems by concentrating on the positive aspects, evaluating circumstances in a positive manner and imagining a bright future. This optimism and hopefulness is a guarantee for good behavior among family members and can minimize anger, sadness and discouragement in couples. Optimism and good behavior in addition to being religious can bring a love of God in a person. People with deep religious beliefs and confidence in their hearts can show patience and behave rationally when dealing with problems. A rational approach to problem solving can also be seen in people with high self-esteem. People who believe in their own strengths and think of themselves as people who can control situations effectively, face problems in a more positive and productive way. These characteristics (Optimism, Religiosity and Self-esteem) strengthen hopefulness, positive expectation of the future and productive problem solving approaches in people. They deal with the stress of marital and family life more efficiently and by applying effective strategies in their lives they will increase their marital and life satisfaction.

Another result of this study is that from the Predicting Variables, Religiosity has the highest role in explaining the Criterial Variables. This result is consistent with the findings of Khanzadeh and Niazi (2011), Onsy and Omer (2014), Hanler (2005), Mahoni (2005), Khodayarifard et al. (2013), Zuling et al. (2006), Asghari and Ghasemi (2014) and Heydari (2003), Attari et al. (2005).

The above findings can be stated as follows: Religion provides general guidance to people and if they are acted on, they will lead to the strengthening of marital bonds. This guidance consists of laws regarding sexual relationships, gender roles and sacrifice to resolve conflicts (Mahoni, 2005). One of the reasons that religion can influence couples' views is that religious people tend to see a spiritual quality in their marriage. It seems that if couples deeply believe in the spirituality of their marriage, they fear that constant quarreling can drive them away from God. Therefore, they try hard to protect their marriage (Lotfabadi, 2005). Religious attitudes and practices enable the person to control their anger and they help the person to take responsibility for their actions during conflicts. In terms of interpersonal skills, religious practices create an environment in which the person diverts his attention to God during the moment of anger. This creates support for the couple to help them avoid conflicts. A relationship with God has an interactive and compensational role in relation to marital life. Therefore, religious attitudes in couples act as a facilitator and creator of understanding and resolution of conflict in the couples' relationships.

Also, the results indicate that from the Criterial Variables, Marital Satisfaction is more influenced by the Predicting Variables (Optimism, Religiosity and Self-esteem). It can be pointed out that influencing factors of life satisfaction are very complex. That is because life satisfaction is influenced by many factors. Also, because this study focuses on married people, their life satisfaction is under the influence of their marital satisfaction. Life satisfaction is one of the most important reasons of marital satisfaction. Studies show that improvement of life satisfaction has a positive effect on marital satisfaction (Shanavas & Ventakammal, 2014). Life satisfaction is effective in decreasing communication distress. In fact, the foundations of marriage should be established in a way that follows life satisfaction and desirable performance in family members. Success in marital life is achieved in light of life satisfaction. Life satisfaction leads to peace, spiritual safety, getting rid of the feeling of emptiness and loneliness, liveliness, positivity, hope, and social support. In this way, the psychological capacity and increased ability to cope with stress and problems, improve marital satisfaction. Lastly, according to the religious culture of the country, spreading religious values as well as increased life satisfaction in families is recommended in order to increase marital satisfaction.

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