



PSYCHOSOCIAL PREDICTORS OF MARITAL SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

There is no denying the fact that the family still remains the key to mankind's richest and most meaningful living. A family is a by-product of a marriage in which two individuals from different environment start living together. Successful marriages are ones that reflect couple's ability to see imperfect people in flawless ways. The family is not only the cradle of our future society but it is also the hub of social life for most people. Home and family are at the center of ambition and self-respect for ordinary men and women. The family provides the supreme comfort and support for persons of all ages. The successful rearing of a family provides the main sense of achievement for most people. Family joys and family griefs are the most keenly felt joys and griefs for most men and women. Marriage can contribute to one's well-being and life satisfaction in various ways: it can fulfil one's need for affiliation, communication and connectedness, provide support, safety, pooled resources and shared household investments,

enable sexual and emotional intimacy, and it can also help in managing daily tasks. Marital dissatisfaction affect people of all ages, races and cultural backgrounds and often leads to divorce. Divorce can have negative implications that last for years. Social workers and other allied professionals providing premarital and marital counselling work to ameliorate marital discord and improve marital satisfaction. But, is it enough to be married or in a relationship to profit from it? The aim of the study was to analyse the Marital/Relationship Satisfaction and its association with other well-being indicators. Additionally, differences in well-being between participants who were married or in a relationship and single participants, and gender differences were tested. The sample consisted of 1087 adult internet users from Croatia. General well-being, satisfaction with specific life domains, marital/relationship satisfaction and demographic variables were assessed. MRS proved to be a reliable single factor instrument which correlated moderately with all well-being indices, but highest with satisfaction with love life and family relations. Men and women did not differ regarding MRS. Participants who were married or in a relationship showed higher levels of well-being.

KEYWORDS: Well-Being, Marriage/Relationship Satisfaction Scale, Marital/Relationship Satisfaction Domains.

INTRODUCTION

A family is a by-product of a marriage in which two individuals from different environment start living together. Successful marriages are ones that reflect couple's ability to see imperfect people in flawless ways. Intimate partners commonly engage in an array of perceptive processes that sanction them to see each other and their relationships in an optimistic way and sustain their obligations to one another.

Marital Relationship

Marriage is considered as an important event in the life of an individual. To enter into marriage is one of the characteristics of early adulthood. Marriage is the second phase of the interlocking family system that consists of courtship, marriage, and the family. Understanding marital relationship is also very timely given the changes the institution of marriage has been witnessing over the last several decades. Forces of modernization and globalization are reshaping the nature and structure of marriage across the globe, giving rise to notion of 'companionate marriage', which is a marriage characterized by high degree of Intimacy, affection and empathy,

allowing for high quality and stable relationship.

Marital Satisfaction

Marital satisfaction is defined as "a spouse's conceptualisation of the level of quality in the marital relationship on the basis of his or her subjective feelings of happiness, satisfaction, and pleasure when considering all aspects of marriage".[1] see marital satisfaction as a combination of one's evaluation of a marriage and a reflection of marital happiness and functioning. Research on marital satisfaction flourished at the end of 20th century and continues to attract attention from marital, developmental and family scholars across the world, but most of the research was conducted in the United States. Studying marital satisfaction is important for individual, family and societal well-being, in order to reduce divorce rates and promote strong and stable marriages as a foundation of prosperous society. Not surprisingly, it was found that married people are more satisfied with their lives in general compared to those widowed, divorced or single argue that marital satisfaction affects mental and physical health, mood, social integration and

subjective well-being throughout the life span.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature review is an analysis of relevant publications that help set the context for and define the research topic. The review is always oriented towards narrowing the field to provide a research problem that can guide operational research. One role of review is to exclude those parts of the literature that are not relevant to the approach that the investigator will follow, to give logic to the exclusion of other approaches. Referencing to the reviews give legitimacy to the investigator's decision to follow one approach and not others. The literature review is a funnel that narrows down the topic to a research problem that the investigator can study in the available time and within available resources [2]

Gender Differences in Marital Satisfaction

Findings regarding gender differences in marital satisfaction are not conclusive. While some research reported lower marital satisfaction in women (e.g.[1]), other found no differences between men and women (e.g. [4]. The results of meta-analysis conducted by Jackson, Miller, Oka, and Henry (2014) indicated small gender differences in marital satisfaction, indicating that wives were 7% less likely to be satisfied with their marital relationship when compared with husbands. However, even this small difference was mainly the consequence of clinical samples included in the analysis. [6] explored trends in marital satisfaction by gender and race from 1973 to 2006 and reported highest levels of marital satisfaction among white husbands. Gender differences in marital satisfaction are usually explained by male dominance in marriage, characterised by unequal control of family finances, higher risk for interpersonal violence, and double

standards in regard to sexual behaviour. [10] found that gender differences in marital satisfaction differ across cultures due to traditional sex roles, while [25] found that gender differences in marital satisfaction may be attributed to culture related variables, such as sexegalitarianism.

Subjective Well-Being

[12] argues that subjective well-being (SWB) refers to people's evaluations of their lives, both affective and cognitive. Affective well-being comprises many positive and few negative emotions, while cognitive well-being refers to evaluation of life in general or life domains. [12] distinguished between separable components of SWB: overall life satisfaction (global evaluation of one's life), satisfaction with important life domains (e.g. marital satisfaction), positive affect (experiencing positive emotions), and low levels of negative affect (experiencing few negative emotions). In general, the correlation between subjective estimations of happiness and life circumstances such as income, health, age is rather low. However, it is well established that social interactions are important for one's well-being, and satisfaction with social life, including family and friends, often contributes to well-being more than other factors

RESEARCH GAP AND PROBLEM FORMULATION

Many instruments were developed to measure marriage and/ or relationship quality or satisfaction with relationship. Some of them were constructed to measure specific domains of the relation, for example conflict, with primarily diagnostic purposes [31], while others were designed to measure general satisfaction with a relationship/ marriage. Although marital satisfaction was studied from different perspectives, and a lot of effort has been put into analysing its relationship with

personality, value systems and marital dynamics, most authors tend to assess negative outcomes, such as conflicts and depression. Those who explored positive psychological outcomes mostly employed general indicators such as overall life satisfaction. In this research, we focused on positive outcomes (satisfaction) and we wanted to capture both global well-being measures and satisfaction with various life domains and their association to satisfaction with marriage/relationship

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine gender differences in marital/relationship satisfaction
- To examine the differences between participants who were married or in a relationship and single participants in well-being indicators.

METHODS

Procedure

The data for this study were collected as a part of the Croatian longitudinal study on well-being (CRO-WELL project). The research was conducted via on-line application, which comprised of a comprehensive battery of questionnaires. All adults were able to participate in the survey using the link provided at the research web site. Anonymity was secured by the system of tokens given to every participant before starting the survey. At the beginning of the survey, participants were informed that their participation is voluntary, that they can quit at any point without explanation, and that the data would be used for scientific purposes only.

Measures

Life satisfaction:- Overall life satisfaction (i.e. global cognitive judgment of satisfaction with one's life) was measured by a single-item: "All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole?" which is prevalently employed

in similar studies (e.g. World Values Survey, 2007). Participants rated their overall life satisfaction using an 11-point scale, from 0 "not satisfied at all" to 10 "extremely satisfied". We chose a single item scale in this research in line with [8] one of the leading authorities in well-being research, recommendation, who argued that "if researchers are interested only in an overall life satisfaction score, there seems little benefit in asking respondents multiple questions; it seems that a single question can yield reliable and valid data".

Happiness:- A single-item of happiness: "In general, how happy do you usually feel?" was used to measure the affective component of subjective well-being (adapted from Fordyce, 1988). Participants rated their happiness using an 11-point scale, from 0 "not happy at all" to 10 "extremely happy". The same rationale as in the life satisfaction scale was applied for using the single item happiness scale for the purpose of this research.

Personal Well-being Index:- To assess satisfaction with various life domains an adapted Personal Well-being Index [9] was used. However, in this study we were interested in satisfaction with specific life domains. For the purpose of this research the Marital/Relationship Satisfaction Scale (MRS) was developed. Our intention was to construct an instrument that would capture satisfaction with various domains of an intimate relationship. Following the rationale of the Personal Well-Being Index [9]– the well-being measure that contains items assessing satisfaction with various life domains, we opt to construct a similar instrument covering the main sources of (dis)satisfaction in a marriage/relationship. Therefore we needed to isolate the most important aspects of marriage/ relationship that contribute to overall marriage/relationship satisfaction, while keeping the scale simple and short enough to be easy to apply and

interpret. The first step was to study the items of marital/relationship scales in order to make a list of concepts. In this procedure we used the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale, Quality of Marriage Index, Stevens Relationship Questionnaire, The Couples Satisfaction Index, Relationship Rating Form, Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976), Marital Adjustment Test. Overall assessment questions such as "How good is your relationship compared to most?" or "How often do you wish you hadn't gotten into this relationship?" were excluded from the analysis since we focused on specific themes to generate relationship domains. Content analysis resulted in 83 different themes. In the third step we organised focus group discussions in three groups in order to (1) check correspondence between themes from the questionnaires and groups, (2) check if new themes would emerge, and (3) to organise themes into logical categories. First, a preliminary discussion was organised with students, and the rest comprised participants aged 25 to 55, of both sexes. About half of the participants were married. Groups of 5-7 people first discussed "what is important for satisfaction with marriage or relationship". Participants mentioned almost all the themes previously found in scales, and a few new topics emerged in discussion, amongst which attitude towards children was the most recognisable, and stood out as a separate theme.

All the participants agreed that children are a very important source of marital/relationship satisfaction for all who have them. Discussions revealed that mutual understanding and support is by far the most important issue, followed by communication matters, and respect for partner's attitudes and values. Participants pointed out that "when people support each other and feel safe in the relationship, everything else can be agreed" or that "it is perfectly ok that partners have different opinions as far as they respect each other's values.". Grouping of the concepts

followed the same pattern in all the groups, except for one group that merged the second and third theme. While one can argue that attitudes towards family, friends, recreation, religion, politics etc. should be treated as independent categories, we opt to stick to more general concepts, which would allow broader comprehension. We believe that if a person is not satisfied with his/ her partner's attitude towards family, this should reflect on his/her assessment of "mutual respect of partner's attitude and values". Finally, we added one item to assess the general satisfaction with relationship/marriage and one item to assess caring for and relationship to the children which should be applied only if the couple has children.

Ultimately, the MRS scale consists of nine items, one general and eight specifics, related to various domains of a marriage/relationship: communication between partners, mutual respect of partners' attitudes and values, joint activities, understanding and support between partners, distribution of duties and responsibilities, intimacy, and attitude towards money and material goods. Since the ninth item dealt with children: "In your relationship, how satisfied are you regarding care and relationship with the children?", it was limited to those who had children. Participants were instructed to indicate their level of satisfaction with each specific domain using an 11-point scale from 0 "completely unsatisfied", to 10 "completely satisfied". Since it applied only to those participants who were married or in a relationship, an elimination question was asked prior to the MRS scale: "Are you currently married or in a relationship?".

Socio-demographic variables: - Participant's age, gender, educational level, personal income and employment status were obtained.

Participants

The survey was conducted among 1087 participants, out of which 191 were male (17.6%). The average age was

37.2 (SD = 11.72), ranging from 18 to 78 years. The proportion of older participants was small, only 3.2% were older than 60, and only 0.9% were over 65. The education level of our participants was rather high: 28.4% had secondary or lower education, 53.9% had a university or higher degree. This information suggests that the sample was biased, probably due to the online administration of the survey, and favoured young, educated women. The financial status was slightly above the Croatian average: most participants (37.1%) had a personal monthly income between 5.000 and 9.000 HRK (equivalent to 650 to 1200 EUR), where the average salary in Croatia, according to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2017), was about 6.000 HRK (800 euro). 73.6% of the participants were

employed, 14.3% were studying, 7.5% were unemployed, and 3.5% were retired, while the remaining 1% were farmers and housewives. Overall, most participants were married or in a relationship (73% of all participants).

Statistical Analysis

To examine the metrical characteristics of the MRS scale, we conducted reliability analysis and confirmatory factor analysis. The descriptive statistics of variables as well as the Pearson correlation analyses were performed for a better understanding of the relationships of the examined variables. To test the differences between participants who were married or in a relationship and single participants, we conducted t- tests for independent samples and χ^2 tests

RESULTS

TABLE 1. Gender differences in marital/relationship satisfaction. The mean scores and associated standard deviations for MRS scores by gender are presented in Table.

	Gender		Total
	Women	Men	
MRS M (SD)	7.4 (2.25)	7.5 (2.25)	7.5 (2.19)

Men and women did not differ in ratings of marital/relationship satisfaction ($t(782) = 0.48, p = 0.63$).

Relationship Status and Well-Being

Men and women did not differ regarding relationship status ($\chi^2 = 0.39, p > 0.05$) as 71.2% of men, and 73.4% of women were married or in a relationship. Furthermore, we tested the differences in well-being (life satisfaction, happiness, adapted PWI scales measuring satisfaction with specific life domains) between participants who were married or in a relationship and single participants.

Comparison of those married/in a relationship and single participants revealed that participants who were married or in a relationship were happier and more satisfied with their lives. They were also more satisfied with their love life, relationship with family members, physical appearance and achievements in life. Although there was a general trend of higher satisfaction of those who were married or in a relationship in all life domains, for the rest of the satisfaction ratings of specific life domains these

differences did not reach a level of significance.

CONCLUSION

In summary, in this research we constructed and validated a new measure of marital/relationship satisfaction that can be applied to both married couples or those in a romantic relationship. This brief questionnaire was developed, following the rationale of Personal Well-Being Index, to examine satisfaction with various domains of romantic relationship or marriage. The instrument proved to be unidimensional with high internal consistency, and the highest external correlations with satisfaction with love life and satisfaction with family relations. This study contributes to the literature by providing a new robust instrument to measure marital/relationship satisfaction, and empirical analysis of the association between marital/relationship satisfaction, general well-being and satisfaction with various life domains.

Although the present study offers an interesting analysis of marital/relationship satisfaction and personal well-being cross-sectional, it has some limitations that need to be clarified. Most importantly, although the number of participants in our research was quite large, the sample was biased by online procedure. Therefore, the sample predominantly consisted of women and younger people. Besides the sample structure, one of the weaknesses of the research was the fact that we did not examine the duration of the relationship or marriage. This variable can be important when examining satisfaction and we strongly suggest that future researchers include it. Furthermore, since we did not distinguish between married participants and those in a relationship, this could affect the results. However, with growing rates of divorces and separations, and increasing number of cohabitations and other types of relationships, in recent years marriage has rarely been considered as a

lifetime relationship, and therefore once firm boundaries between marriage and other relationships are getting softer and more permeable. We also opt to apply MRS to all participants who were either married or in any other type of romantic relationship and to analyse possible gender differences. Future research design should try to include more senior citizens in the research, as well as males, those less educated, and from rural areas, which could give a better insight into the emerging difference

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