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## Marital Satisfaction and Related Factors among Married Women

Mahnaz Nouri<sup>1</sup>, Mohadeseh Hosseini Kebria<sup>2</sup>, Frouzan Ahmadianfar<sup>2</sup>, Ahmad Khosravi<sup>3</sup>, Mohammad Amiri<sup>4</sup>\*

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor of Gynecology, Department of Medical Sciences, Shahrood Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shahrood, Iran.
<sup>2</sup> General Practitioner, Department of Medical Sciences, Shahrood Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shahrood, Iran.

<sup>3</sup> Assistant Professor of Epidemiology, Center for Health Related Social and Behavioral Sciences Research, Shahroud University of Medical Sciences, Shahroud, Iran.

<sup>4</sup> Associate Professor of Health Services Management, Department of Public Health, School of Public Health, Shahroud University of Medical Sciences. Shahroud, Iran.

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#### Abstract

**Background:** Marital satisfaction is one of the factors affecting life which influences the permanence and durability of the married life. This study aimed at assessing marital satisfaction and some of its associated factors.

**Methods:** In this cross-sectional study, 500 married women who referred to health care centers and obstetrics and gynecology clinics in 2017 were evaluated using the Enrich Marital Satisfaction Scale. The collected data were analyzed using Chi-square and one-way analysis of variance.

**Results:** The mean score of marital satisfaction was  $118.33\pm22.06$ . Based on the marital satisfaction score, 6 (1.2%) of the participants had low marital satisfaction; 132 (26.4%) had moderate marital satisfaction; 281 (56.2%) had a high marital satisfaction and 81 (16.2%) had very high marital satisfaction. Significant relationships were observed between marital satisfaction and age (P.V=0.005), length of marriage (P.V=0.001), age of spouse (P.V=0.003), number of children (P.V=0.003), age at the first marriage (0.024), woman's education and husband's education (P.V=0.001), income (P.V=0.001), pregnancy experience (P.V=0.001) and childbirth experience (P.V=0.001). However, there was no significant relationship between marital satisfaction and job, husband's job and place of residence (P.V=0.005).

**Conclusions:** Since marital satisfaction was found to be associated with age, education, age of the spouse, length of the marriage, number of children, income, pregnancy experience and childbirth experience, the establishment of marital counseling in health care centers and providing premarital counseling for the couples can help them improve their marital satisfaction.

**Keywords:** Marital satisfaction, Ideal distortion, Conflict resolution, Communication, Sexual satisfaction, Married women.

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# Introduction

The marital relationship is described as the most important and most fundamental human relationship.<sup>1</sup> Marital satisfaction is a situation in which the husband and wife often feel happy and are satisfied with each other and with their marriage. It has also been said that marital satisfaction is the objective feeling of pleasure, satisfaction and joy experienced by a husband or wife when they consider all aspects of their marriage.<sup>2-5</sup> Others define marital satisfaction as the correlation between the status quo and the situation the couples expect, which reflects the amount of happiness and stability of the marital relationship and the durability of the marital life.<sup>6.7</sup> The individual's satisfaction with the marital life is considered as an indication of his or her satisfaction with the family and satisfaction with the family is interpreted as satisfaction with life and its outcomes; this satisfaction in turn which facilitates the growth, excellence and mundane and spiritual progress of society.<sup>8</sup> Satisfactory marital relationships can improve people's competence, adaptability and compatibility and such individuals often have a higher life expectancy and better general health and job performance, suffer less from depression and psychological problems and have more adaptable children with better educational conditions.<sup>9-11</sup> The quality of marital relationships is so intermingled with the whole personality of the individual that it is impossible to consider it as an independent phenomenon, and it is influenced by various psychological and social factors.<sup>12</sup>

In some studies, factors such as age, age of marriage, length of marriage, number of children, education, financial issues, occupation, sexual satisfaction, personality traits and ability to understand the spouse, communication skills, leisure time, commitment and religious beliefs have been considered as factors which can be related to marital satisfaction.<sup>13-20</sup> Moreover, marital problems are associated with the risk of heightened mental disorders such as anxiety disorders, sexual deviations in men and women, depression in women and alcohol abuse in men.<sup>21,22</sup> The results of some studies conducted in Iran show a relative and moderate level of marital satisfaction<sup>15,16,25,26</sup> and still some others indicate that there is a low level of marital satisfaction among the couples who participated in those studies.<sup>27</sup>

Considering the importance of assessing the relationship between psychosocial factors and marital satisfaction and no previous study in Shahroud, this study was conducted with the aim of estimating the marital satisfaction and some of its psychosocial associated factors.

## **Materials and Methods**

This cross-sectional study was conducted on 500 married women who had referred to health care centers and obstetrics and gynecology clinics in Shahroud (northeast of Iran) in 2017. After explaining the objectives, an oral informed consent was obtained from all subjects. The sample was obtained from 11 health care centers and 4 obstetrics & gynecology clinics. All participants were referring to these centers during the time interval (June-August 2017) was selected through convenient sampling. For illiterate and low-literate individuals (9 and 50 persons respectively (11.8%)), the questionnaire was completed through interviews but literate participants completed the

11 International Journal of Health Studies 2018;4(4)

questionnaire themselves. Interviews were conducted by two senior well trained medical students.

To measure marital satisfaction, the valid Persian version of Enrich and Elson couple scales<sup>28</sup> was used. The Persian version of this questionnaire was validated by Asoodeh and et al. and finally the last Persian version of this questionnaire was approved by Elson.<sup>29</sup> The internal consistency of Persian version of Enrich couple scales in terms of subscales including marital satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution and ideal distortion were 0.86, 0.80, 0.84 and 0.83 respectively using alpha Cronbach's coefficient.29

Enrich couple Scales: This questionnaire contains 35 items on a five-point Likert scale which ranges from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree," and is scored from 1 to 5, respectively, except for items 3-5-6-7-10-13-14-18-19-21-22-23-26-27-28-29-32-33-34 which are recoded as reverse items. In other words, in these items, "Strongly Agree" receives a score of 1, and "Strongly Disagree" receives a score of 5. This scale has four sub-scales and therefore four separate scores are calculated and reported for each subscale and the raw scores for every sub-scale and overally, are also converted into percentages. Items 1- 5- 9- 13- 17- 21- 24- 27- 30- 35 measure marital satisfaction; items 2- 6- 10- 14- 18- 22- 25- 28- 31- 34 measure communication; items 3-7-11-15-19-23-26-29-32-33 measure conflict resolution and items 4-8-12-16-20 are used to measure the ideal distortion. The percentage of overall scores less than 35% was defined as low, 36-60 percent as moderate, and 61-80% as high and over 80% as very high.<sup>16</sup>

Marital Satisfaction sub-scale: The sub-scale measures the satisfaction and compliance of individuals with 10 aspects of marital issues including personality issues, communication, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, sexual relationship, children and parenting, family and friends, equalitarian roles, and religious orientation. A high score on this sub-scale indicates high marital satisfaction.

Communication sub-scale: This sub-scale measures emotions, attitudes and beliefs of the person about the extent and manner of marital relations. A high score on this scale shows partners are aware of the level and type of the communication in their relationship and a low score indicates a lack of satisfaction with the relationship.

Conflict Resolution sub-scale: This sub-scale measures attitudes, feelings and beliefs of a partner in creating or resolving conflicts and assesses the strategies partners use to end arguments. A high score on this scale shows that the person has realistic attitudes about the conflicts in marital relationships and a low score indicates dissatisfaction with the conflict resolution strategy.

Ideal distortion sub-scale: this sub-scale measures partners' tendency to answer questions in a socially desirable manner. A high score indicates a non-realistic relationship about marital relationship.

Obtaining oral consents from the participants and ensuring their voluntary participation in the study were the most important ethical considerations of this research. In addition, the necessary permissions were obtained from the Ethics Committee of Islamic Azad University, Shahroud Branch with the code of IR.Iau.Shahroud.Rec.1396.4.

The collected data were analyzed using Chi-square and one-way analysis of variance. The significance level in all tests was at 0.05.

## **Results**

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The participants in this study were 500 married women who were assessed through using the marital satisfaction scale. The results of the study showed that the mean age of participants was 32.8 years (SD=±8.7) and the length of the marriage was 11.5 years (SD=±9.1). Also, first marriage age was 21.69±4.81 years and husband's age was 37.35±9.55 vears.

The results of Enrich couple scales showed that 6(1.2%) of the participants had low marital satisfaction; 132 (26.4%) had moderate marital satisfaction; 281 (56.2%) had high satisfaction and 81 (16.2%) had very high marital satisfaction. The overall mean score of marital satisfaction was 118.33±22.06. Table 1 displays the mean score of four subscales of this questionnaire including marital satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution and idealistic distortion.

Table 1. The mean ±SD of marital satisfaction subscale's in married women							
Variables	Mean±SD	Minimum	Maximum				
Total marital satisfaction	118.33±22.06	53	167				
Marital satisfaction	36.24±7.12	12	50				
Communication	33.58±7.94	11	50				
Conflict Resolution	30.42±5.95	12	46				
Idealistic Distortion	18.09±4.17	5	25				

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Results of one-way ANOVA to test the association between marital satisfaction and mean age, length of marriage, number of children and age at the first marriage showed a significant relationship between marital satisfaction with age (P.V=0.005), length of marriage (P.V=0.001), age of the spouse (P.V=0.003), the number of children (P.V=0.003) and the age at the first marriage (P.V=0.024), (table 2).

There was a significant relationship between marital satisfaction and the level of education and spouse's education so that women whose husbands had university education showed higher marital satisfaction (table 3).

The results of this study showed that there was a significant relationship between income level and marital satisfaction so that people with high income level had higher marital satisfaction. Moreover, there was a significant relationship between pregnancy experience and experience of delivery with marital satisfaction, However, the chi-square test showed no significant relationship between marital satisfaction and job, husband's job and place of residence ( $P \ge 0.005$ ), (table 3).

Table 2. The relationship between demographic variables with marital satisfaction								
variables		Marital satisfa	ction categories		F	D		
Variables	Low (N=6)	Average (N=132)	High (N=281)	Very high (N=81)		r		
Age	38.67±3.98	34.19±8.60	32.75±8.53	30.30±8.87	4.40	0.005		
Spouse's age	43±6.10	39.27±9.18	37.11±9.49	34.65±9.86	4.79	0.003		
Duration of marriage (year)	14.33±6.25	13.58±9.47	10.49±8.73	8.62±8.92	6.15	0.001		
First marriage age (year)	24.33±3.67	20.68±4.35	21.98±4.94	22.16±4.96	3.17	0.024		
Number of children	1.83±1.70	1.62±1.10	1.37±1.05	1.07±1.12	4.72	0.003		

International Journal of Health Studies 2018;4(4)

Variables	Marital satisfaction: percent (N)				χ2	р
variables	Low (N=6)	Average (N=132)	High (N=281)	Very high (N=81)	λ <sup>2</sup>	Р
Education						
<ul> <li>High school diploma and below</li> </ul>	6 (1.9)	96 (31.1)	172 (55.7)	35 (11.3)	22.28	0.001
<ul> <li>Higher education</li> </ul>	0 (0)	36 (18.8)	109 (57.1)	46 (24.1)	22.20	0.001
Spouse's education						
<ul> <li>High school diploma and below</li> </ul>	6 (1.8)	102 (30.4)	186 (55.4)	42 (12.5)	17.79	0.001
<ul> <li>Higher education</li> </ul>	0 (0)	30 (18.3)	95 (57.9)	39 (23.8)	17.77	
Income (per month)						
– Less than 300 \$	5 (1.6)	92 (30)	175 (57)	35 (11.4)	16.45	0.001
<ul> <li>Equal and more than 300\$</li> </ul>	1 (0.5)	40 (20.7)	106 (54.9)	46 (23.8)	10.45	
Job						
<ul> <li>Unemployed</li> </ul>	6 (1.5)	105 (25.9)	230 (56.7)	65 (16)	1.75	0.625
<ul> <li>Employed</li> </ul>	0 (0)	27 (28.7)	51 (54.3)	16 (17)	1.75	
Spouse's job						
<ul> <li>Unemployed</li> </ul>	0 (0)	7 (36.8)	8 (42.1)	4 (21.1)	2.04	0.565
– Employed	6 (1.2)	125 (26)	273 (56.8)	77 (16)	2.04	
Place of residence						
– City	6 (1.4)	114 (25.7)	251 (56.7)	72 (16.3)	1 50	0.664
– Village	0 (0)	18 (31.6)	30 (52.6)	9 (15.8)	1.58	
Pregnancy experience						
– Yes	5 (1.2)	122 (29.3)	231 (55.5)	58 (13.9)	16.03	0.001
– No	1 (1.2)	10 (11.9)	50 (59.5)	23 (27.4)	10.03	
Delivery experience						
– Yes	5 (1.3)	112 (29.6)	212 (56.1)	49 (13)	16.34	0.001
- No	1 (0.8)	20 (16.4)	69 (56.6)	32 (26.2)	10.34	
Sexual satisfaction						
– Low	1 (4.5)	18 (81.8)	3 (13.6)	0 (0)		
– Average	4 (2.1)	72 (38.1)	107 (56.6)	6 (3.2)	103.81	0.001
– High	1 (0.3)	42 (14.5)	171 (59.2)	75 (26)		

### Discussion

The findings of this study showed that the majority of the participants (72.4%) had a high marital satisfaction, which is consistent with some other studies in Iran which have shown a high level of marital satisfaction.<sup>15,17,25,26</sup> However, this finding is not in line with the results of some other studies which reported a moderate level of marital satisfaction in the samples under study.<sup>2,13,18,23,24,27</sup>

There was a significant relationship between marital satisfaction and age, so that with an increase in age, marital satisfaction decreased. This finding is consistent with the results of some studies<sup>13,14,23,30,31</sup> but inconsistent with some other studies which found no relationship between age and marital satisfaction.<sup>2,15,18,24,32</sup> The reason for this finding might be the fact that as the age rises, the number of sexual relationships declines and this can affect marital satisfaction. Also, there is a similar pattern between marital satisfaction and husband's age. Age differences can be an important factor in understanding the different aspects of sexual marital relationships between couples. However, the age and age difference with the spouse are culture-bound factors. Therefore, the effect of age on marital satisfaction does not emerge in the same way in different societies.

There was also a significant relationship between marital satisfaction and length of the marriage, which is consistent with the results of other Iranian studies. However, it does not correspond to the results of some other studies.<sup>15,24,30,32</sup> It may be concluded that with the increase in the length of the marriage, family life becomes psychologically and emotionally more stable, and this emotional dependence holds the partners satisfied with their marital relationship.

There was a significant relationship between the number of children and marital satisfaction and those who had fewer children showed higher marital satisfaction. Askarian-Omran and colleagues<sup>13</sup> in a study entitled "effective factors on marital satisfaction in nurses" and Twenge et al. obtained similar results in their studies.<sup>34</sup> However, the findings of Masumi et al.<sup>2</sup> and Darooneh et al.<sup>15</sup> do not tally with the results of this study. The interpretation of this finding needs adjustment for age of couples.

Furthermore, a significant relationship was observed between higher education and marital satisfaction, which is consistent with the results of some studies.<sup>14,18,33,35</sup> Amiri et al. in their study reported no relationship between education and marital satisfaction.<sup>26</sup> Some other studies also reported no satisfaction relationship between marital and education.<sup>13,15,17,23,24,30,32</sup> In fact, high level of education is associated with increased emotional, cognitive and rational skills and this helps women in their encounter with life problems and increases their marital satisfaction.

In our study, women whose husbands had college education had higher marital satisfaction. About this relation there is a controversy, so that some studies reported similar results<sup>15,33</sup> and some others reported opposite results.<sup>17,26</sup>

Another finding of the study was that there was a significant relationship between economic status and marital satisfaction, so that people with an income of \$ 300 and more had higher levels of marital satisfaction, which is in line with the results of some studies.<sup>13,14,16,23,26</sup> Kim et al.<sup>36</sup> in their studies referred to the positive impact of economic status on marital satisfaction which is consistent with the recent results. Some studies, however, showed no relationship between the

> 15 | International Journal of Health Studies 2018;4(4)

economic situation and marital satisfaction.<sup>2,24,32</sup> Perhaps improving the household's economic status can reduce the family's mental concerns and hence improve marital satisfaction.

In this study those without experience of pregnancy and without experience of delivery had higher marital satisfaction, which is not consistent with the results of other studies.<sup>2,16,26</sup> There was no significant relationship between marital satisfaction and occupation, which is consistent with the results of some studies.<sup>17,37</sup> Some other studies indicate that there is a relationship between job and marital satisfaction, which is not consistent with the recent results.<sup>13,15,23,24,26</sup>

There was no significant relationship between place of residence and marital satisfaction, which is not consistent with the results of Amiri and et.al.<sup>26</sup>

Limitations: one of our study limitations is differences in filling the questionnaires, in illiterate and low-literate persons we used an interview that this can lead response bias for sensitive questions regarding cross cultural impacts. Other limitation of this study is non-random sampling procedure. The authors commended to conduct large sample research in this area.

Given the relationship between marital satisfactions with age, education, spouse's age, length of marriage, number of children, income of the household, the experience of pregnancy and the experience of delivery, the establishment of marital counseling units in health care centers and providing premarital counseling for the couples on their sexual issues can help them improve their marital satisfaction.

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#### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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International Journal of Health Studies 2018;4(4) | 14

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