



Investigating The Relationship Between Attachment Styles and Personality Traits and Marital Satisfaction Among Married Students

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study is to review the relationship between attachment styles and personality traits and marital satisfaction among married students of Estahban's Payam-e Noor University. This is a descriptive – correlational research. The statistical population of this research has been comprised of all of male and female students who were married in the year 2014-2015. The research sample includes 35 male and 35 female married student who were selected using random sampling method. The tools which have been used in this study are attachment style, personality traits and marital satisfaction questionnaires. The findings of these questionnaires were analyzed through inferential statistics based on the type of variables. The research findings showed that there is a positive relationship between attachment styles and marital satisfaction. There is also a positive and significant relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction. Personality trait has been best able to significantly predict the marital satisfaction variable.

Keywords: Attachment Style, Personality Traits, Marital Satisfaction

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INTRODUCTION

Family is one of the important social institutions. The older families get and the more they flourish in a society, the clearer the significance of the relationship between family members, especially father and mother as the bases of the relationship, will be. Among the effective factors, marital satisfaction is one of the most important effective factors on the function of families. Every soul wants to enjoy his or her marital life and to feel satisfied. Marital satisfaction is an objective feeling of happiness, contentment and joy experienced by spouses. When individuals take into consideration all of the aspects of their marriage, satisfaction is an attitudinal variable and is therefore considered to be an individual specification in man and woman. According to the previously mentioned definition, marital satisfaction is in fact a positive and enjoyable attitude that spouses have towards various dimensions of their marriage.

Marital satisfaction is one of the most important and most significant factors when it comes to the continuity of a healthy and happy life. Researchers believe that attachment style of a couple is a key factor in the strength and stability of this relationship because attachment provides a framework that can be used for having a better and more accurate understanding of marriage and ways for encountering and solving conflicts of couples.

One of the main purposes of the many studies on the relationship between couples has been the prediction of marital satisfaction through specification of factors that affect the quality of interaction between couples. According to these researches, personality factors such as openness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, having illogical interactional beliefs, the need to control, emotional skills and relative

violence in one of the spouses and demographic variables such as age, academic level, earnings and attachment styles have a relationship with marital satisfaction.

Bowlby's theory is based on two basic principles: 1- an accepted and available caregiving in order to provide a safe haven for the child; 2-the relationship must be based on an internal bond (or lack of it) which acts as a mental pattern. Friendships and love relationships are based on this pattern.

Bowlby (1969) strongly believed that an attachment that is formed in childhood remains effective in adulthood as well. For instance, he refers to distant adulthood relationships with no depth or closeness. Secure attachments of children direct their emotional qualification and these directions mostly stand out in interpersonal relationships. Since romantic and love relationships, such as marriage, are some of the most stable and durable kinds of interpersonal relationships, attachment security in childhood is quite significant. Numerous studies have shown that there is a relationship between individual differences in the self-reported attachment styles and quality and stability of couples' relationships.

It can be argued that marital satisfaction is the result of the sum of happiness with marriage, satisfaction with the sexual aspect of a relationship and emotional satisfaction. There are numerous factors that influence the marital satisfaction of couples. There are many studies in this regard; each of which has reviewed the impact of a specific aspect of individual and social features on the quality of marriage. Among these factors, personal traits are important factors that considerably affect couples' relationships. Researchers believe that there is a general agreement that personality traits play key roles in positive or negative outcomes of a marriage. By referring to previous studies, Donlan et al. point out that the factor that affects marital satisfaction more than others is personality trait.

Personality is an indication of those individual traits that show the fixed behavioral pattern of a person. Although there are numerous personality traits and numerous models for reviewing them, but one of the most important and influential models for reviewing personality traits in the past decade has been a five-factor model. Most of the studies in the field of personality have been focused on this model. Costa and McCrae have used factor analysis methods and came to the conclusion that there are five dimensions to personality traits that must be taken into consideration. Neuroticism – an individual's tendency to experience tension and anxiety (N), a sympathy-seeking manner, hostility, impulsivity, depression, and low self-esteem.

Research hypotheses

There is a relationship between attachment styles and marital satisfaction.

There is a relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction.

Attachment styles and personality traits predict marital satisfaction.

Conceptual definition of marital satisfaction

Marital satisfaction is a state of mind in which man and woman are completely happy and satisfied with their marriage and the fact that they are together. Winch et al. (1974) believe that marital satisfaction is the compliance between the current situation and the expected one. According to this definition, marital satisfaction is felt when the current situation of a marriage complies with the situation that is expected by the spouses.

In the present study, what is meant by marital satisfaction is the score obtained by the couples in ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (with 47 questions).

Conceptual definition of personality traits

The basic concept of personality is a social image based on the role a person plays in a society. In fact, every person presents a personality to the society and based on this image the society evaluates and judges a person. In broad general sense, personality is the sum of the unique and relatively stable internal and external aspects of the manner of a person which affect the behavior of a person in various situations.

The disagreement among psychologists about the nature of personality have led to many disagreements about the word personality. In this article, we try to take a look at the existing definitions.

In the present study, what is meant by personality is the score obtained by the couples in Neo-PI-R Personality Trait Questionnaire.

Conceptual definition of attachment style

Berk (2001) defines attachment as follows: attachment is a deep emotional bond between us and special people in our lives in such a way that when we interact with them we feel joyful and delighted and feel at peace around them when we are stressed.

In the present study, what is meant by attachment style is the score obtained by the couples in Collins and Reed's Attachment Style Questionnaire.

Attachment style

Attachment is a deep emotional bond between us and special people in our lives in such a way that when we interact with them we feel joyful and delighted and feel at peace around them when we are stressed. Newborns become attached to those who fulfill their physical needs and evoke their feelings in the early years of their lives. If you take a look at children of this age, you will see how they try to attract the attention of their parents and put their fingers on them and save all of their answers for them.

For example, when their mother comes in their rooms, the child smiles. According to the opinions of Bowlby, the main outcome of the interaction between the mother and the child is an attachment that creates mental security. The system of attachment is an adjustment system and it is assumed that this system exists on the inside of a person and aims to adjust behaviors which makes that person get closer to others and to make contact with them and to rely on them. Of course this system is focused on creating a sense of security in the mind of the dependent and attached person.

Berman and Sperling (1994) defines adult attachment as follows: "adult attachment is a person's sustainable tendency to make efforts in order to get closer to a certain person or to maintain a close relationship they already have with a certain person who is able to bring them mental, physical and psychological health.

The testees hadn't experienced any of these. The childhood and adulthood attachment pattern of the testees were most probably similar. Although the dissimilarity between these two patterns might be because of the limitations of validity and reliability of the measurement tools, but it seems that childhood or post-childhood experiences play a key role in adulthood attachment security or insecurity.

Bowlby believed that attachment has four distinct characteristics:

Proximity-Maintenance– the tendency to be close to those whom we are attached to.

Safe haven – returning to the attachment figure in the face of fear or threat.

Secure base – the attachment figure acts as base of security from which the child can explore the surrounding environment.

Separation distress – the distressed felt when the attachment figure is absent.

Attachment through the life course

It is important to take note that the attachment styles that are formed in childhood are not necessarily similar to those that are formed in adulthood. The long time distance between childhood and adulthood and the experiences that are gained in this time interval play crucial roles in the formation of adulthood attachment styles. The thing that is described as ambivalent or avoidant attachment in childhood might be a secure attachment in adulthood and vice versa. In addition, the behaviors and manners of an individual also play a key role in attachment. However, researches which have been conducted in this field have shown that the attachment patterns that are formed in childhood have a significant impact on the relationships of the next stages of life. Hazen and Shior (1987) have found different opinions regarding human relationships with different attachment styles among adults. Adults with secure attachment tend to believe that emotional love is durable and stable. In contrast, those with ambivalent attachment have fallen in love multiple times and those with avoidant attachment believe that love is rare and temporary.

Attachment characteristics

Children with **secure attachment** don't feel sad when they are separated from their caregiver or sitter. In the face of fear, they turn to their parents or caregivers for comfort. These children embrace any kind of contact on the part of a parent and show a positive reaction.

Children with **ambivalent attachment** are often quite wary of strangers. When their parents or caregiver departs, they are highly distressed and they are still ambivalent when they return. In some cases, the child might resist their caregiver – either their parents or sitters – or show anger or helplessness.

Children with **avoidant attachment** avoid or ignore their caregivers. This avoidance is often shown after a period of

absence. These children might not reject or turn away from their parents, but they will neither try to attract their attention nor will they seek comfort from their relationship with them. They don't prefer their parents to a total stranger.

Children with **disorganized/disoriented attachment** show signs of shortage of clear attachment-induced behaviors. Their actions and reactions towards caregivers are often integrated behaviors including avoidance and resistance. These children seem confused and bewildered, sometime even at the presence of their caregivers.

Personality traits

According to this model, personality has five main dimensions: neuroticism (N) (or from another aspect, emotional endurance), extraversion (or activism) (E), openness to experience (or culture or open-mindedness) (O), agreeableness (A) and conscientiousness (C). Out of these five factors, two factors are relevant to personality traits with an interpersonal nature which are extraversion and agreeableness. Conscientiousness is basically goal-oriented behavioral traits and community-friendly impulse control. Neuroticism is an emotional endurance against a spectrum of negative emotions such as sadness, nervous tension, irritability and so on. Openness relates to width, depth and complexity of intellectual and mental dimensions of someone's mind as well as their experiences.

Gordon Allport believes that the main personality traits are traits that dominate one's entire life to the extent that that person is known because of these traits. In fact, when you hear the name of that person, you think of these traits. To have a better understanding of this issue, think of phrases such as Freudian, Machiavelli, Don Juan, Christ-like. In Allport's mind, these basic traits are rare and formed throughout the course of one's life.

Marital satisfaction

Marital satisfaction is a state of mind in which man and woman are completely happy and satisfied with their marriage and the fact that they are together. One of the most significant definitions of marital satisfaction has been given by Hawkins which is as follows: Marital satisfaction is an objective feeling of happiness, contentment and joy experienced by spouses whenever they take all of the dimensions of their marriage into consideration (29). Marital satisfaction is the outcome of compliance of spouses in various dimensions of their marriage which guarantees the strength of the foundation of their family. Marital satisfaction is an objective feeling of happiness, contentment and joy experienced by spouses.

According to the rational emotive theory of Ellis, couple distress is not directly related to the actions of one of the spouses or difficult failures of life; but it is mostly because of the beliefs these couples have about such actions or failures. Ellis argues that irrational thinking has features such as exaggeration, misplaced and unreasonable flexibility and especially absolutism which is together with communicative disorder and neuroticism in most cases. Therefore, irrational beliefs lead to personal disorders and leads to baseless marital dissatisfactions.

In the structural theory, Minochin believes that a family becomes defected if the rules in that family are not observed. When the borders are too strict or permeable, the function of the family as a system will be disturbed. If the hierarchy of a family is not observed and parents are not the real decision makers in the house, older children don't have more responsibility than younger ones, there will be distress. Sometimes alignments within a family are destructive and lead to triangulation. The power is not clear in a turbulent family.

Sohrabi Esmrood, Rasooli (2008) conducted a research called "review of the relationship between attachment style and

extramarital sexual relations among women who had been arrested. The results obtained from this research showed that there is a relationship between the insecure attachment style and extramarital relations. In addition, the results showed that women with insecure attachment styles, especially insecure avoidant style, have more extramarital relations. Moreover, it was specified that there were more extramarital relations among women with lower levels of education.

Khoshkharam and Golzari (2011) conducted a research called "the effectiveness of hope therapy on the increase of the level of marital satisfaction and variations of insecure attachment style in married university students". Their findings indicated that teaching the hope therapy approach in an experimental group significantly increased the level of hope and marital satisfaction in married university students with insecure attachment style in comparison to the control group but has not changed the attachment style of those with insecure attachment style to secure.

Stanley, Amato, Johnson and Markman (2006) conducted a study called "pre-marriage education, quality of marriage and marital stability. The results obtained from their study showed that those who participated in pre-marriage educations had significantly higher levels of marital satisfaction and commitment and lower levels of conflict and also the rate of divorce in the experimental group decreased in comparison to the control group. These effects were stronger in participants of different races and with various levels of academic education and this indicates that participating in pre-marriage educational programs could be useful for a wide range of people.

Stefan et al. (2006) conducted a study on a sample which was comprised of 74 French/Canadian couples. The findings of their research showed that the relationship between marital satisfaction and attribution is sustainable across different cultures.

Marilyn and Kent (2005), in their study on a sample comprised of 312 newly-weds, came to the results that the relationships between the negative attachment style and marital satisfaction for couples were not significantly different.

The **statistical population** of this research is comprised of married students of Payam-e Noor University of Estahban city and the research sample includes 70 married university students (35 men and 35 women).

Research tools

Collins and Reed's attachment styles questionnaire (1990)

This questionnaire includes a self-evaluation of relationship-creating skills and a self-description about the method of formation of close attachments. It has 18 items and a 5-degree Likert scale has been used for answering each question.

In Iran, Pakdaman (2001) calculated the Cronbach's alpha and measured a reliability of 0.84 for the anxiety subscale (A), a reliability of 0.28 for the attachment subscale and a reliability of 0.52 for the subscale of closeness (C).

NEO-PI-R personality traits questionnaire

This questionnaire has been used and evaluated in most cultures and has been recognized as a common cross-cultural personality test. the reliability coefficient of this test has been calculated to be between 0.51 and 0.82 for five factors in men and women (Garoo, 2001).

ENRICH marital satisfaction Scale

The main form of this questionnaire has 47 questions. We have used this form in our research. This questionnaire has 9 subscales.

The ENRICH marital satisfaction scale has been designed and made by Olson, Druckman and Forensic (1987 and 1987). This

scale has been used in numerous studies as a valid research tool for measuring the level of marital satisfaction. The 47-question form of this scale has been designed by Soleymanian (1994) and a reliability coefficient of 0.95 has been reported for it using the Cronbach's alpha method.

Inferential findings

Hypothesis: there is a relationship between attachment styles and marital attachment. In order to test this hypothesis, the Pearson correlation coefficient has been used. The table below displays the results obtained from this analysis.

Table 1 – calculation of the Pearson correlation coefficient for reviewing attachment styles and marital satisfaction

| Variable | Mean | Standard deviation | r | Sig (significance level) |
|----------------------|------|--------------------|-------|--------------------------|
| Attachment styles | 2.16 | 25.14 | 0.349 | 0.00 |
| Marital satisfaction | 1.26 | 14.95 | | |

Given the table above, the significance level is 0.00 and $r=0.349$; thus, we conclude that there is a positive and significant relationship between two variables attachment styles and marital satisfaction.

Hypothesis: there is a relationship between personality traits and marital attachment. In order to test this hypothesis, the Pearson correlation coefficient has been used. The table below displays the results obtained from this analysis.

Table 2 – calculation of the Pearson correlation coefficient for reviewing personality traits and marital satisfaction

| Variable | Mean | Standard deviation | r | Sig (significance level) |
|----------------------|-------|--------------------|-------|--------------------------|
| Personality traits | 64.95 | 8.25 | 0.341 | 0.00 |
| Marital satisfaction | 1.26 | 14.95 | | |

Given table 2, the significance level is 0.00 and $r=0.341$; thus, we conclude that there is a positive and significant relationship between two variables personality traits and marital satisfaction.

Hypothesis: Attachment styles and personality traits predict marital satisfaction.

In order to review the extent to which attachment styles and personality traits predict marital satisfaction, simultaneous multiple regression analysis has been used.

Table 3 – simultaneous regression for reviewing the power of attachment styles and personality attachments in predicting marital satisfaction

| Variable | R | R ² | f | p | B | Se | B | t | P< |
|--------------------|------|----------------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| Personality traits | 0.35 | 0.127 | 4.87 | 0.01 | 0.128 | 0.141 | 0.215 | 0.907 | 0.36 |
| Attachment styles | | | | | 0.277 | 0.429 | 0.153 | 0.645 | 0.52 |

In order to review the power of research variables in predicting marital satisfaction, the statistical technique of regression has been used. According to the obtained results, the correlation between attachment styles and personality traits has been equal to 0.356 and $R^2=0.127$. Personality traits have the most power when it comes to significantly predicting marital satisfaction.

Discussion and conclusion

In the study conducted by Simpson, called “the effects of attachment styles on marital understanding”, the effects of secure, anxious and avoidant attachment styles on marital understanding have been reviewed. Simpson has used the longitudinal research method in order to study 144 couples. Ultimately, it was specified that the secure attachment style is related to higher levels of respect, commitment and understanding in comparison to the avoidant or anxious attachment styles. In the follow-up, which was done 6 months after the study, it was made clear that the level of emotional

distress in people with secure attachment style has been lower than those with anxious or avoidant attachment styles.

The studies conducted by Mary Mane on attachment were focused on adulthood attachments. Her efforts attracted the attention of psychotherapists and psychologists. It is clear that married university students with secure attachment styles had higher levels of marital satisfaction and on the contrary, the level of marital satisfaction in students with ambivalent and avoidant insecure attachment styles was significantly lower than those with secure attachment styles. In other words, theoretically, researchers confirmed and recommended Cobek and Hazen's hypothesis which indicated that the relationship between attachment style and satisfaction with relationship might, to some extent, be resulted from methods of interaction in groups with different attachment styles; in such a way that interactional patterns might act as the intermediate variable in the creation of a relationship between attachment and satisfaction with relationship. However, the authors argue that their findings have not supported this hypothesis in practice; but they also point out that at least in the early years of

marriage, attachment and relationship has independent effects on the marital satisfaction of couples. Given that people with insecure avoidant attachment style are unable to share their feelings or thoughts with others, it can be said that their relationships with others are not stable. In contrast, people with high self-esteem and secure attachment style have certain beliefs and views in life which are fixed and are manifested in interpersonal relationships and make these relationships more stable. In analyzing this relationship, it can be said that people with avoidant and disoriented attachment styles both have the advantage of emotion-oriented coping methods which means that their feelings have more power over them than their logic and reason and they make decisions based on their emotional reaction. On the other hand, people with avoidant attachment style run away from facing unresolved emotional issues and problems and close relationships with others. Such features can also be seen in people with high emotional separation. By considering the cultural variables, about the positive relationship between the avoidant attachment style and interaction with others, it can be stated that because of the Iranian pluralist culture, people seek their identity in groups and know themselves and make themselves known to others by joining groups of people. People with secure attachment style have characteristics such as self-confidence, trust in others, positive perception and social support, exploratory behavior, passivity, tendency to forgive and inhibition of negative emotions. These characteristics make the relationships stronger and increase marital satisfaction. People with avoidant attachment style are extremely elusive when it comes to close relationships and as soon as they feel that their relationships are getting closer, they unconsciously avoid the relationship which reduces the interactions between the couples and decreases the level of marital satisfaction.

Costa and McCrae (1989) have used factor analysis methods and came to the conclusion that there are five dimensions to personality traits that must be taken into consideration. Neuroticism – an individual's tendency to experience tension and anxiety (N), a sympathy-seeking manner, hostility, impulsivity, depression, and low self-esteem. Extraversion is a person's tendency to be more positive, brave, energetic and close. Openness to experience is an individual's tendency to be more curious, love art, artistry, flexibility and prudence. Harmony is the tendency of an individual to forgive, be kind, compassionate, to empathy, sympathy, altruism and to trust others. Being responsible is an individual's tendency to be more disciplined, efficient, reliable and dependable, self-regulation, achievement-oriented, rational and calm. In the studies associated with recognition of factors that affect the quality of a marriage, two views have been mentioned which are the personal view and the interpersonal view. From a personal view, personal traits are factors that affect how a marriage functions; whereas, from the interpersonal view, spouses' interaction with each other impact their marital action. Many researchers base their beliefs on an integrated view and believe that both the interpersonal interactions and the personality traits affect the quality of the relationship between spouses.

The third hypothesis says that attachment styles and personality traits predict marital satisfaction. According to the results presented in table 5-4, it becomes clear that personality trait has been best able to significantly predict the marital satisfaction variable. The findings obtained from this section are in compliance with the findings of the researches conducted by Dibaji Forooshani *et al.* (2009).

A healthy individual has unique personality traits. A healthy person has a balanced, happy and stress-free personality. One of the factors that impact marital satisfaction is personality trait. Personality traits relates to all of the functions of human beings. Kavir believes that there are significant interpersonal

differences between individuals and these differences can be predicted and justified logically through interpersonal differences in personalities. Personality, as an effective factor, directly impacts on the interactional process of couples. Personality of an individual calls for certain and different types of reactions on the part of their partner and it naturally affects marital satisfaction and the level of their compliance.

The results of the present study have shown that there is a positive and significant relationship between attachment styles and marital satisfaction. In addition, there is a positive relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction. In addition, marital satisfaction has the power to predict marital satisfaction.

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