

Comparison of Maladaptive Schemas and Perceived Psychological Needs in Two Groups of Close to Divorce and Satisfied with Marital Life Women

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Abstract

Background and aim: Investigation of psychological factors contributing to dissatisfaction with marital life and divorce and comparing the same factors among individuals satisfied with marital life is a very important domain in the pathology of divorce; Hence, the present research was conducted by the aim of comparing maladaptive schemas and perceived psychological needs in two groups of women, namely, close to divorce and satisfied with marital life women. **Method:** The present research was conducted by a causal-comparative method. The study population included all married women referring to family courts of East-Tehran in 2019 and all married women residing in East-Tehran, among which 200 women were selected by available sampling method. The participants completed the research tools. **Findings:** Results of the current research suggested that close to divorce and satisfied with marital life women are different in their maladaptive schemas and perceived psychological needs ($P > 0.01$); maladaptive schemas in all domains were higher close to divorce women compared to satisfied with marital life women. Also, in perceived psychological needs, the group of close to divorce women had lower perceived competence and relatedness compared with women satisfied with marital life, but there was no significant difference in perceived autonomy between both groups ($P > 0.05$). **Conclusion:** According to the findings, it appears that investigating early maladaptive schemas and perceived psychological needs is necessary for pre-marriage counseling sessions. Also, using schema-therapy and other approaches related to perceived psychological needs by psychologists and counselors to address such problems in clients can lead to desirable results.

Keywords: Perceived Psychological Needs, Early Maladaptive Schemas, Divorce, Marital Life

INTRODUCTION

Marital satisfaction is an important domain in a marital relationship that can be experienced by spouses in their relationships [1]. Marital satisfaction is an emotional-cognitive and mental appraisal held by an individual about his/her marital relationship [2]. Grief, in defining adjustment and marital satisfaction, states that adaptive couples are those who have a high agreement with one another, are satisfied with the type and level of their relationships and the quality of their leisure time, and manage their time and financial issues well [3]. One of the main objectives of the research on relationships between couples is to determine the factors that affect the quality of couple interactions [4]. Theoretical and empirical progress has led to a deeper understanding of cognitive factors effective on marital relationships [5]. Various cognitive factors are effective on marital dissatisfaction and incompatibility, including maladaptive schemas and perceived psychological needs. Schemas are some types of cognitions which are significant in marital relationships [6]. Schemas are created by early experiences of the individual or the nature of the emotional relationship between the individual and his/her parents in childhood [7]. That is, the individual has been consistently faced with traumatic experiences throughout childhood and adolescence and the

effects of these experiences have accumulated in his/her development, the result of which is the formation of schemas and various minor/chronic problems [8]. Young believed that maladaptive behaviors are created in response to schemas that, after being provoked, lead to severe negative emotions such as loss, shame, fear, or anger [5]. Early maladaptive schemas are rooted in educational heritages formed in different dimensions of the individual's personality. Meanwhile, couples proceed to form a family with their established schemas and attachment styles [9]. 18 early maladaptive schemas have been identified and proposed in five domains [10], which possess the following characteristics:

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How to cite this article: Reza Shahla, Morvarid Aleyasin. Comparison of Maladaptive Schemas and Perceived Psychological Needs in Two Groups of Close to Divorce and Satisfied with Marital Life Women. Arch Pharma Pract 2020;11(S1):93-8.

they “are deep and pervasive patterns or themes”, “are made with memories, cognitions and somatic feelings”, “are formed in childhood”, “are consistent over life”, “are about self and related to others”, and “are severely dysfunctional”^[11]. Research shows that couples, in addition to early schemas which are created in childhood, obtain new schemas in their current marital relationships, and if the needs of their early schemas are not met or their early schemas are not consistent with their current schemas, this may lead to incompatibility among couples and finally to divorce^[12]. In Iran, research indicates that there are reverse relationships between early maladaptive schemas with marital satisfaction^[13], with marital intimacy^[14], and also, early maladaptive schemas have been suggested as predictive of divorce^[15].

Another related and effective factor in marital relationships is psychological needs. Psychological needs are rooted in the depth of human existence and are, therefore, intrinsic in every individual. Three important psychological needs include autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy is the individual’s need for having a sense of choice and self-initiation in performing tasks and actions^[16]. Competence refers to the need to be effective in interactions with the environment and shows the tendency to use talents and skills and pursuing challenges and tasks consistent with the individual’s abilities and mastering over them^[17]. And, finally, relatedness is the need to feeling confident while relating with others and the need to be accepted as an individual deserving love and respect of others^[18]. Recently, researchers have been interested in an investigation of the efficiency of the basic psychological needs model in a career^[19], education^[20], and health^[21] domains. Also, one research indicated that basic psychological needs are reversely associated with depression symptoms^[22]. Overall, results of researches suggest that satisfaction of basic psychological needs leads to increased mental health; and if these psychological needs are thwarted, the individual’s mental health would decline^[23, 24]. According to research findings, it appears that basic psychological needs can be considered among the factors contributing to satisfaction with life^[25]. No research has been conducted on perceived psychological needs among women who are close to divorce and satisfied with marital life. Also, most researches conducted on schemas and marital satisfaction have investigated schemas in couples, while no research has directly compared schemas in two groups of women, namely, close to divorce and satisfied with marital life. However, a comparative approach provides a better understanding of investigating such a subject. In this approach, insight is a deep awareness of structures (schemas) that interfere as cognitive representations in explaining and interpreting interpersonal situations. Therefore, the present research was conducted by the aim of comparing maladaptive schemas and perceived psychological needs in two groups of women, that is, close to divorce and satisfied with marital life women.

METHODS

The present research was conducted by a causal-comparative method and the population included all the married women referring to family courts of East-Tehran for divorce in 2019 and all the women residing in East of Tehran, among which 200 individuals were selected by available sampling method. After obtaining the required licenses from university and referring to family courts and different regions of East of Tehran, the researcher delivered the Index of Marital Satisfaction by Walter W. Hudson (1992), the Young Schema Questionnaire - Short Form (1998), and the Basic Psychological Needs Scale of Deci and Ryan (2000) to the sample subjects; all the procedures were conducted by meeting moral considerations and completing the informed consent forms by the subjects. The subjects were allowed to ask the researcher for more explanation if they faced any problem while completing the questionnaires, and they were assured that their information would be kept confidential.

The Walter W. Hudson’s Index of Marital Satisfaction is a 26-item tool that has been developed for measuring the severity or range of problems of husband or wife in the marital relationship. This index has two thresholds; one for scores less than 30 which shows important clinical problems in marital relationships, and one for scores higher than 30 which indicates significant clinical problems in this domain. The developers of the index of Marital Satisfaction reported that the index’s Cronbach alpha coefficient is 0.96 which shows a high internal consistency^[26]. The mean alpha coefficient was reported to be 0.95 in Iran which suggests an excellent internal consistency and low standard error^[27]. In the present research, the validity coefficient by retest method was 0.91, and the internal consistency was obtained to be 0.90 through Cronbach alpha.

The Young Schema Questionnaire-Short Form is a 75-item tool which has been developed based on the results of a factor analysis on the long-form. This questionnaire assesses 15 early maladaptive schemas. Five questions have been considered for each schema. Results of^[28] suggested that the Cronbach alpha for this questionnaire equals 0.64 to 0.87. The standardization of this questionnaire has been conducted in Iran and the internal consistency through Cronbach alpha was 0.97 for the female population and 0.98 for the male population^[29]. In the present research, the reliability of these dimensions by the internal consistency method and by Cronbach alpha equaled 0.93.

Another questionnaire used in the present research was the Basic Psychological Needs Scale of Deci and Ryan^[25]. This scale assesses sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness with other individuals. This scale consists of 21 items which are rated by a 7-point Likert scale (from totally agree = 7 to totally disagree = 1). The developers of the scale investigated the reliability and validity values of this scale and reported that its reliability, through Cronbach alpha method, for autonomy, competence, and relatedness and the whole scale were respectively 0.80, 0.63, 0.89, and 0.81, and

the validity of this scale through factor analysis was estimated to be 0.61 to 0.92 ^[29].

The above-mentioned tools were delivered to 200 subjects of the sample; After collecting the completed questionnaires and for having equality in the sample size in all groups of women, namely, close to divorce and satisfied with marital life women and for the sake of meeting inclusion criteria, 148 questionnaires were evaluated and analyzed. For explaining the data, descriptive statistics methods such as mean and standard deviation were used, and for answering the research hypotheses, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used for comparing schemas and perceived

psychological needs in two groups of women, that is, close to divorce and satisfied with marital life women.

FINDINGS

After collecting the completed questionnaires and examining their credibility, 148 questionnaires were qualified for the analysis; 74 questionnaires for women satisfied with marital life, and 74 questionnaires for women close to divorce. The average age of these women was 30 to 40 with an age range of 20-60 years. About 30.9% of the women had bachelor's degree, 45.6% had passed 1 to 7 years of marital life, and 33.6% (approximately 50 women) had no children.

Table 1: descriptive indexes of the studied variables in the research

Variables	Groups	Number	Mean	SD	Tilt	Strain
Autonomy	Satisfied	74	35.6	5.3	0.36	0.14
	close to divorce	74	31.14	3.9		
	Total	148	33.13	5.4		
Competence	Satisfied	74	29.62	4.9	0.08	0.013
	close to divorce	74	27.36	4.8		
	Total	148	27.83	5.5		
Relatedness	Satisfied	74	42.28	6.2	0.28	- 0.31
	close to divorce	74	37.80	6.2		
	Total	148	39.65	6.4		
Schemas of detachment and rejection	Satisfied	74	39.52	12.2	1.20	1.3
	close to divorce	74	51.22	17.9		
	Total	148	49.61	19.4		
Schemas of self-direction and malfunction	Satisfied	74	30.30	10.1	1.4	1.38
	close to divorce	74	35.1	11.9		
	Total	148	36.64	11.6		
Schemas of interfered limitations	Satisfied	74	20.44	9.4	.34	0.88
	close to divorce	74	25.40	10.7		
	Total	148	25.50	11.4		
Schemas of other-directedness	Satisfied	74	22.74	10.7	.25	- 0.60
	close to divorce	74	27.36	10.8		
	Total	148	28.47	11.6		
Schemas of over-alertness	Satisfied	74	21.70	10.2	.41	- 0.77
	close to divorce	74	25.96	10.9		
	Total	148	26.69	12		
Total maladaptive schemas	Satisfied	74	134.70	42.8	.76	0.413
	close to divorce	74	165.04	51.30		
	Total	148	169.91	59.8		

With a typical look, it would be clear that the mean of psychological needs which include autonomy, competence, and relatedness, is lower among close to divorce women than women satisfied with marital life. Also, mean scores of 5 domains of schemas and the total score of maladaptive schemas are higher among women close to divorce in comparison with satisfied women. To gain more certainty, the

normality of the main variable was also tested by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, and results showed that the distribution of the scores in maladaptive schemas has no significant difference with a normal distribution ($p > 0.05$) and the normality assumption is established. Furthermore, the homogeneity of the variances in the schemas variable with Levin test suggested that all the significant levels of both

groups in the Levin test are greater than 0.05 which shows the homogeneity of variances in both groups ($p > 0.05$).

Table 2: Results of the ANOVA test for investigating inter-group effects

Variables	Source of changes	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Sum of squares	F test	Significance level	Effect size
	Autonomy	514.19	2	257.10	9.49	0.001	0.12
	Competence	261.9	2	130.98	4.60	0.02	0.06
	Relatedness	547.77	2	273.87	7.16	0.001	0.09
	Schemas of detachment and rejection	5779.83	2	2889.91	11.31	0.001	0.13
	self-direction and malfunction	4975.82	2	2487.91	13.03	0.001	0.15
	Schemas of interfered limitations	2636.86	2	1316.93	11.48	0.001	0.14
	Schemas of other-directedness	4089.85	2	2044.93	18.63	0.001	0.20
	Schemas of over-alertness	2943.17	2	1471.59	11.69	0.001	0.14
	Total maladaptive schemas	111304.04	2	55667.52	19.42	0.001	0.21

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Results of the present research showed that close to divorce and satisfied with marital life women are different in their perception of psychological needs and maladaptive schemas. In a way, the group of close to divorce women have lower perceived competence and relatedness than satisfied women, but there was no significant difference in perceived autonomy between close to divorce and satisfied with marital life women. Maladaptive schemas, also, were higher in close to divorce women than satisfied with marital life women.

The mean differences show that the basic needs of close to divorce women have been met less than satisfied with marital life women. Findings of the present research in the variable of psychological needs were consistent with the results of [30, 31]. In explaining this finding, it can be said that the situation in which we go through (marital relationship) can activate and satisfy the needs in an efficient way, or it can ignore and frustrate these needs. If the individual lives in an environment in which there is a critical spouse, the need for competence would not be satisfied in their wife/husband. For instance, if one of the partners has the schema of strict criteria, punishment, and entitlement, the other partner would be exposed to over-criticism. This problem would lead to dissatisfaction with the need for competence and can be followed by conflicts and separation. Also, in the dimension of autonomy, it can be said that the expectation of intimacy with spouse and autonomy in separation from parents are known as other predictive factors of marriage. The need for independence after separation from a spouse is also predictive of divorce. Therefore, these findings indicate the importance of early psychological needs in the tendency to choose a spouse and also our expectations and attitudes toward marriage and divorce.

Also, the findings of the present research are consistent with [32-35]. For explaining the findings, all the dimensions of schemas should be examined. Detachment and rejection schemas in close to divorce women were higher than satisfied women. In explaining this finding, it can be said that those individuals whose schemas are in this domain wouldn't be able to establish secure and satisfactory attachments with others. Such individuals believe that their need for stability, security, affection, love, and belonging wouldn't be met. Their family of origin has been usually instable (detachment/instability), full of misconduct (distrust/misconduct), cold and unaffectionate (emotional deprivation), full of rejection (defect/shame), or isolated (social isolation/alienation). Many of them have had a traumatic childhood and in adulthood, they tend to move from one self-harming relationship to another in a rash and unconsidered way or they avoid establishing close interpersonal relationships at all [36]. Also, in another explanation for this finding, it can be said that a spouse with maladaptive schemas in the domain of detachment and rejection, is always thinking about the very possibility that s/he might abandon her/his life partner, and this would be one predictive reason for divorce. In the present research, it is observed that the highest difference in schemas in both groups is in the domain of detachment and rejection. Schemas of self-directedness and malfunction were higher in close to divorce women than satisfied women. In explaining this finding, it can be said that those individuals whose schemas belong to this domain have some expectations from themselves and their environment which hinders their ability to discriminate themselves from the parental figure and achieving independent function. Parents of these individuals have done everything for them and have been so supportive of them, but their presence beside them as children has been unstable. Over- and under-indulgence in supporting the child leads to problems in the domain of self-directedness [37].

Also, schemas of the domain of other-directedness in close to divorce women were higher than satisfied women. The explanation of these findings can be that individuals with schemas in this domain seek to satisfy the needs of others instead of their own needs. They do this to obtain affirmation and acceptance, continuing their emotional relationship, or avoiding vengeance. In social relationships, these individuals tend to affirm the responses of others more than their own needs and they are often unaware of their anger and tendencies. These characteristics appear in marital relationships and play a destructive role in marital life. They are always struggling with this feeling that their needs are not satisfied and this issue can sometimes lead to resentment [38]. Schemas of the domain of over-alertness or inhibition in close to divorce women are higher than satisfied women. For explaining this finding, it can be said that individuals whose schemas belong to this domain tend to repress their spontaneous impulsions. They often try to be able to act according to their inflexible and internalized rules. The childhood of these patients has been full of violence, repression, and strictness, and excessive abstinence and self-devotion have dominated spontaneity and pleasure. These individuals have not been encouraged to play and have fun, and instead, they have learned to be alert toward negative life events and consider life as exhaustive [38]. Undoubtedly, transferring these characteristics to adulthood and marriage would exert significant effects on dissatisfaction from marital life.

Limitations and recommendations

Simultaneous application of three questionnaires for married women might have negatively affected their responses due to lack of time, boredom and tiredness caused by the condition. Since the present research has been conducted on close to divorce married women in East of Tehran, therefore, generalizing these findings to women of other cities and other geographical regions should be done with caution. The present research has been conducted on married and close to divorce women and it is recommended that further research would be conducted on married and close to divorce men, as well. Researchers should conduct qualitative research on this subject; that is, they would use other means of gathering data such as interviews with married and close to divorce women.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors oblige themselves to thank all the participants of this research. Also, no conflict of interest exists between the authors.

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