DOES DURATION OF THE MARRIAGE AFFECT THE MARITAL ADJUSTMENT OF POSTGRADUATE IRANIAN STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA?

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Abstract:
The aim of this study was to investigate the relationships between duration of marriage and marital adjustment in a sample of married postgraduate Iranian students in Malaysia. As the popularity of studying in Malaysia among Iranian students at postgraduate level .is increasing, more studies are needed among this population. An online self-administered questionnaire conducted to assess the studied variables. Data collected from 220 married students who were selected randomly to participate in the study through their email addresses. The respondents were questioned about their demographic information and completed Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (LWMAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959). Data analysis provided information about frequencies, percentages, mean scores and Pearson's correlation. The results disclosed that there was no correlation between length of marriage and marital adjustment. It indicates that marital adjustment remained fairly stable over time.

Keywords: marital adjustment; duration of marriage; married; Iranian; students

Introduction

There is no doubt about the importance of family and marriage and their influences on society. It has also been emphasized that family and marital relationships are still among the most talked-about topics in the world today (Ritvo & Glick, 2002, p. 171). Marriage is defined as "the term commonly used to refer to a formally-written, verbal, or tradition long-term agreement between a man and a woman for the production of children, food and other commodities in a domestic context" (Becker, 1981, p. 27).Bali, Dhingra, and Baru (2010) state that to maximize satisfaction in couple relationship, they can modify behavior patterns and interactions in a process known as marital adjustment. Marital adjustment as Martin (2007) asserts, it means the quality of the marital relationship itself.

Marriage in Iran has been regulated always by religious and cultural codes (Tashakkori & Thompson, 1988). There have been a lot of changes in Iranian families over the past two centuries that are reflected in daily life and psychologists, counselors, historians, and educational professionals as well as sociologists have focused on these changes (Azad-armaki, 2007; Ghoroghi, Hassan, Baba, Kalantarkousheh, 2012). Markman, Stanley and Blumberg (2010) believe that during the post-World-War-II period, marriages in western society have changed from virtually nothing-negotiable relationships into almost everything-negotiable ones. This fashion has been more salient during the 2000s while there has been a drop in marriage rate and a rise in the expectations for love-based, happy marriages (Markman, et al., 2010). Iranian society is not excluded from these changes. In Iran, socio- demographic changes, such as the delayed first marriage, lower fertility rates, demanding for higher education level, as well as rising divorce rates, all indicate changes in the nature of the social fabric and the status of women within the family (Moghadam, 2002).

Similarly, Azad-armaki (2007) believes that the most important changes within the Iranian family are decrease of the marriage rate, increased age of marriage, and more participation of women in society. He further states that the increasing level of education, multimedia influences, importance of love-based relations and changes in model of mate selection from traditional and family arranged marriages to marriages of choice are the other changes in families (Azad-armaki, 2007). Additionally, a research by Bahari et al. (2010) showed that main reasons for divorce are married couples communication problems, addiction, family members interference, and mental disorder of one or both members of the marriage.

The facts reveal that the increasing migration trend of Iranians into Malaysia, especially those living in Malaysia along with their families, is being considered as an important issue (Ghoroghi, Hassan, Baba, 2012). In spite of this, just a few studies have been carried out on the

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issues of Iranian families living in Malaysia (Akhtari-Zavare & Ghanbari-baghestan, 2010; Kalantarkousheh & Hassan, 2010).

Influential Factors in Marital Adjustment

Marriage shapes the lives of most adults, regardless of whether the agreement to be together is formal or informal or do not marry by choice or circumstance (Bailey, 2003). In a marriage, marital satisfaction refers to the level of satisfaction or happiness derived from the union (Locke & Wallace, 1959). The level of marital satisfaction determines the survival of any marriage and as such there have been studies and investigations on the factors that affect marital satisfaction since the 1990s (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000). According to Snyder and Lopez (2005), marital bliss contributes to enhanced well-being and a happy marriage experiences less stress, anxiety or depression. It is therefore understandable why there has been much focus on investigating the key factors that lead to happy marriages.

Undoubtedly, one of the most important decisions an individual makes in his/her life is choosing a marital partner. It has been studied for several decades. One of the most frequently studied dependent variable in marriage and family relationship is marital adjustment and it should be considered as a developmental process and not just a statistic life event (Martin, 2007). Patrick, Sells, Giordano, and Tollerud (2007) believe that several studies have claimed to find a U-shaped pattern for marital quality over the marital life. Adjustment tends to be high during the initial stages of marriage and then declines approximately during lifespan and rises in the later years. The marital relationship does not exist in a vacuum but is directly affected by the emotional, physical, and psychological issues.

Duration of Marriage and Adjustment

Marital duration is time elapsed since the day of marriage, used as the life course measure (Jalovaara, 2002).Marriage length, sometimes referred to as marital longevity, has been identified in literature as a potential influence on marital satisfaction. Peleg (2008) argued that marriage longevity is very important since family duration is showed to be one of the most significant variables pertaining to family satisfaction. Some research shows that the length of marriage is positively associated with marital satisfaction (Bookwala, Sobin, & Zdaniuk, 2005; Hatch & Bulcroft, 2004; Kulik, 2004). Research has shown that marital satisfaction is lower in long-term marriages than in those of short duration (Jansen, Troost, Molenberghs, Vermulst, & Gerris, 2006). Hinchliff and Gott (2004) showed that long marriage duration improved sexual intimacy among some older couples since they were able to know each other better, knew about each other's likes and dislikes more and had a closer relationship as a couple. In contrast, Sandberg, Miller, and Harper, (2002) believe that depression has been found to negatively affect older marriages. Some researches consider marital adjustment as a fluctuated phenomenon during life time. For example, Umberson, at.el (2005) approached marital quality from a life course perspective, presenting it as a developmental trajectory that over time has ups and downs. They concluded that marital quality tends to decline over time, and is impacted more by age than marital duration.

The findings of several cross-sectional studies show that marital happiness is high in the early pre-parental years, decreases during middle parental period, and increases again during later post-parental period of married life (Peleg, 2008). Jalovaara (2002) believes that for some theoretical reasons we can expect divorces to decline naturally as partners get older and their married lives last longer. He also argues that divorce should have a higher cost for couples who have lived together for a long period of time since the tangible and intangible marriage-related investments made by couples during these years can act as barriers to separation (Jalovaara, 2002). There are also studies that addressed the obstacle to marital dissolution such as older age, longer marital duration, the belief that marriage is a life-time commitment, and presence of children (Heaton & Albrecht, 1991; Lauer, Lauer, & Kerr, 1990). Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2002) report that married couples are divorcing earlier than ever before with 38 % of couples divorcing within four years and 50 % within seven years.

Clarifying the relationship between marital characteristics and marital processes with marital satisfaction in a sample of 201 respondents in a study conducted by Rosen-Grandon,

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Myers, and Hattie (2004), it was found that gender and length of marriage contributed significantly to marital satisfaction. Conclusions drawn from the study of Ebenuwa-Okoh (2008) in Nigeria about examining the effective factors of predicting marital adjustment among married persons, showed that gender, duration of marriage, and personality types were neither correlates nor predicators of marital adjustment.

In a research on 201 married students in Alzahra University in Iran by Darvizeh and Kahaki (2008), the result showed that there are significant positive relationships between well-being and marital adjustment. In a recent study in Iran by Ghiasi, Moeini, and Rousta, (2010) on 353 randomly-sampled female divorce seekers in family courts, they concluded that the tendency to divorce has negative relationship with number of children and duration of marriage. The authors did not explain the random sampling procedure in detail, therefore the generalisability of the results of the study is in question. A similar study by Bahari et al. (2010) indicates most of the divorce cases referred to the family crisis intervention centers in Iran were in the early years of marriage. The highest rate of divorce appeals was by women between the ages of 28 and 31 and for men it was from 24 to 27 years.

Iranians in Malaysia

Migration happens when an individual or a group of people move across political boundaries of a geographic unit to another for temporary or permanent settlement out of their hometown (Kothari, 2002). This phenomenon has increased during recent decades because of globalization, and Iran is not an exception in this phenomenon (Alaedini & Emami, 2005). After Islamic revolution in Iran, during the years 1978 to 1981, following political and social changes, cultural reform and closing universities, a lot of critical people, experts, scientists and students left the country (Shahabadi & Puran, 2009). During the past two decades, migration from Iran to other countries has unprecedentedly been considered by many Iranians (Shalileh, 2010).

Iranian Ministry of Culture and Higher Education reports that currently there are approximately 50,000 Iranian students studying abroad ("Education System", 2011). Recently Malaysia has become more popular among Iranian students at postgraduate level (Mehrnews, 2011). Higher education is provided by either public or private universities in Malaysia supervised by the Ministry of Education (Arokiasamy, 2011). The country is striving to turn into an "Education Hub", so it employs strategies and policies to attract more and more international students to study in a Malaysian university with international standards (Arokiasamy, 2011).

Methodology
Respondents and Procedure

The respondents of the present study were selected from married postgraduate Iranian students studying in Universiti Putra Malaysia. They were chosen randomly to participate in the study based on their email addresses. The target population of the study included all postgraduate married Iranian students that enrolled in the governmental universities.The target university of this Study was Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education has classified this university in the group of governmental university (MOHE, 2011).

According to the Iranian Students Association Malaysia, this university has 1,760 students enrolled in master and PhD programs, it showed that this university has the highest number of Iranian postgraduate students (ISAM, 2011). The minimum sample size regarding G*Power is 172, for Bartlett, Kotrlik, and Higgin (2001), it is 100. Thus in this study, there were 220 subjects to ensure the reliability. The School of Graduate Studies of UPM (SGS) provided the researcher with the list of Iranians who meet the eligibility criteria.

In this study, there was an overall population of 600 married postgraduate Iranian students. This study used simple random sampling to select 300 random digits because of non-responded, non-completed probability consideration of respondents. The study data were obtained by administering the survey instruments to the respondents through the online survey. The total number of respondents reached 220. The website could provide the raw data from the online survey instruments in which the survey was administered and imported into a computer spreadsheet for analysis. The selected sample of 220 married students included 117 females and 107 males aged from 25 to 61.

Instrument

A demographic questionnaire and the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (LWMAT) were used for data collection purposes in the current study. The Farsi translation of the LWMAT was used to make it feasible for administration to respondents. The translated version has been frequently used by different researchers in Iran (e.g. Bahari, Fatehizade, Ahmadi, Moulavi, & Bharami, 2010).

The Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (LWMAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959)

This test was developed to measure the marital satisfaction among married couples. Locke and Wallace (1959) composed a 15-item marital adjustment scale, they used selected, non-duplicated and statistically significant items from a variety of previously developed measures with high item discrimination. It is used as a benchmark standard to assess the degree of adjustment in marriage since it has got a widespread use (Sperry, 2004). The LWMAT has a total of 15 questions that include different ranking scales. The main scale of the LWMAT is a 6-point Likert-type scale that has a minimum score of 1, representing "Always Disagree," and a maximum score of 6, representing "Always Agree". The remaining questions that are based on the LWMAT are multiple choice type. Some examples of these questions are, "Did you ever wish you had not married? (a) frequently (b) occasionally (c) rarely (d) never, " and "Did you ever confide in your mate: (a) almost never (b) rarely (c) in most things (d) in everything".

The validity of the LWMAT was shown by Krokoff (1989) had the predictive validation. The validation result showed significant correlations between the scores of husbands and wives. Using Cronbach's alpha scores, the reliability of the LWMAT instrument was represented with internal consistency/reliability coefficients. The original study done by Locke and Wallace (1959) showed that the reliability of the LWMAT was equal to .90 (Sanai, 2009). In the current study, reliability for LWMAT was α = .819.

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Data Analysis

The data obtained in the study was analyzed through descriptive statistics with the aim of summing up the data and reporting percentages and frequencies. Furthermore, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to estimate the relationship between independent variable (duration of marriage), and dependent variable (marital adjustment).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

As shown in Table 1, Participants within the age range of 25-35 formed 54.1% whereas 40.9% were between 36-45 years of age. The doctoral students (58.2%) formed the majority of the respondents while 41.8 % were doing their master's degree. In terms of marriage duration, respondents who were within 1-17th year of their marital life formed 86.8% of overall populations, and only 13.2% of them were living with their spouses between 17-34 years. With regard to the number of children, 42.3% of the respondents have no children, 34.5% of them have one child, 18.7% have two children while only 4.5 % have three children.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Demographics Variables, for the Total Sample and by Gender

		Percent for All (n=220)	Percent For Males (n=107)	Percent For Females (n=113)
Age	25-35	54.1	52.3	55.8
	36-45	40.9	42.1	39.8
	46-60	4.5	5.6	3.5
	61 and more	.5	0	.9
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Level of Education	Master	41.8	28.0	54.9
	Doctoral	58.2	72.0	45.1
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
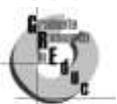
Duration of Marriage	1-17	86.8	87.9	85.8
	17-34	13.2	12.1	14.2
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of Children	1	34.5	29.9	38.9
	2	18.7	25.2	12.4
	3	4.5	4.7	4.4
	None	42.3	40.2	44.2
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: n = 220

Correlation

Pearson correlation was applied to examine the relationship of duration of marriage with marital adjustment. According to Pearson r, there is not a significant correlation between duration of marriage and marital adjustment ($r = 0.096$, $n = 220$, $p > .05$). Results did not show any significant relationship between duration of marriage and marital adjustment.

Discussion and Recommendations

The quality of a marriage is affected by multiple factors, both internal and external to the family. The impact of duration of on a marriage is one such prominent factor. The results of the study were in line with few findings from the previous studies, at the same time contradicted some others. This finding was in tune with that of Ebenuwa-Okoh (2008) who examined the effective factors of prediction marital adjustment among married persons. The results showed that duration of marriage was not correlated to marital adjustment. Finding of the study disagrees with the earlier finding of comparable research that indicated that duration of marriage is positively associated with marital satisfaction (e.g., Bali, et al., 2010; Bookwala, et al., 2005; Darvizeh & Kahaki, 2008). Future research will need to assess both members of a couple rather than assessing each married person individually. The results need to be obtained from different samples of non-academic and business setting in different socioeconomic subgroups living in Iran to be able to generalize.

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