

EFFECT OF ATTACHMENT STYLES ON MARITAL SATISFACTION

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Abstract

Attaining satisfaction and happiness is the usual expectation in married life. However, the surfacing of discord and dissonance in marriage is also inevitable. The disturbances and disputes in married life initiate psycho-social vibrations in the cognitive, conative, and behavioural repertoire of married persons. The emerging struggles cripple togetherness and healthy behaviour of married people. Existing evidence has identified several psycho-social factors contributing to both marital satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Attachment theory provides an appropriate framework to understand the relational aspect of marital satisfaction. Researchers came out with four styles of attachment namely secure, preoccupied, dismissive, and fearful that helps to unearth the undercurrents of interpersonal relationships. They have proven that attachment styles have considerable and consistent influence on marital satisfaction. Particularly, secure attachment style systematically enhances marital satisfaction more than the other styles of attachment. Inquisitiveness of the researcher to verify the same on Indian population prompted this study.

Bharathiar University Marital Satisfaction Scale (BUMSS) developed by Chellan and Raj (2014) and the Attachment Styles Questionnaire (ASQ) developed by Van Oudenhoven, Hofstra and Bakker (2003) were used to collect relevant data for this study (N=1330). The collected data were subjected to One-way Analysis of Variance, Pearson Correlation analysis, and a Linear Multiple Regression analysis in order to identify the effect of attachment styles on marital satisfaction of the married individuals. Results confirmed the hypotheses, that, the attachment styles influenced the marital satisfaction; there were relationships between the attachment styles and marital satisfaction, and attachment styles contributed for marital satisfaction of the married individuals.

Keywords: Marital Satisfaction, Secure Attachment Style, Preoccupied Attachment Style, Dismissive Attachment Style, and Fearful Attachment Style.

Introduction

Human behaviours stem from a combination of concrete bio-psycho-social features. Among them the quality of the relationship experienced and expressed between a child and the caregiver significantly determines the bond of affection that is established between them (Bowlby, 1982). This enduring bond emits a range of attachment styles that account for individual differences in shaping and sustaining cordial and continuing relationships. Marriage, being the most common lifestyle on earth, is enshrined and enriched by cherished relationships. Researchers in the field of marital relations have ascertained and authenticated the prominent role of attachment styles. Taking a lead from their contributions, the present study specifically traces the effect of attachment styles on the marital satisfaction of the married individuals.

Marital Satisfaction

Marriage being a desirable lifestyle for most people (Haseley, 2006), researches in this field have gaining momentum recently. A comprehensive definition expressed by Olson and DeFrain (2006) states that marriage is the emotional and legal commitment of two people to share emotional and physical intimacy, various tasks, and economic resources. Hence, people tend to be both healthier and happier when they are married (Orbuch, & Eyster, 1997; Gottman, 1994a). So, what causes people to remain in and find meaning in marriage, is that of satisfaction. Moreover, marital satisfaction is the most frequently studied aspect of marriage and family relationships (Heyman, Sayers, & Bellack, 1994; Spanier, 1976).

The concept of marital satisfaction is a subjective experience of one's own personal happiness and contentment in the marital relationship (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1997). Researchers have interchangeably used the terms marital adjustment, marital satisfaction, and marital happiness to refer to marital quality (Haseley, 2006). Under this background marital satisfaction is conceived as a multi-dimensional construct, rather than a spouse's subjective rating of their level of satisfaction within a marriage. Marital Satisfaction includes intrapersonal qualities such as, love, commitment, and sexual satisfaction. Further, it includes interpersonal qualities such as, communication, self-disclosure, spousal support, gender roles, couple sharing and equity. Added to that, environmental factors relating to employment, finances, illness, and a couple's support network, are also allied to marital satisfaction (Sokolski & Hendrick, 1999).

Significance of Marital Satisfaction

Whether marital satisfaction is conceptualized as an evaluation of the marriage where positive features are present and negative features are relatively absent (Nair, 2012; Bradbury, et al., 2000) or viewed as an attitude towards a partner (Bradbury, et al., 2000), certain factors appear to remain common to happy couples. They often engage in joint activities together, maintain a sense of humour, are involved in affectionate touching, are less critical of each other, have minimal hostility, and engage in fewer arguments (Taylor, Peplau & Sears, 1997). In fact, marital satisfaction has become not only a benchmark to assess the accomplishment and stability of a marriage, but also finding the way to personal happiness, feeling content, realizing meaning in life, and achieving a state of personal wellbeing (Nair, 2006).

Though a number of psycho-social factors have been identified as contributing to marital satisfaction, like an undercurrent to all these, attachment styles flow as a vital factor in maintaining marital satisfaction (Davila, Bradbury, & Fincham, 1998). Moreover, researchers suggest that the Attachment theory can explain both the challenges and attainment of marital satisfaction in an era when the discipline of marriage and family therapy is moving in an evidence-based direction (Sprenkle, 2002), with clinical research becoming an important part of the discipline (Hollist, & Miller, 2005).

Attachment Styles

Attachment theory, in fact, is a derivation of psychoanalysis that gives emphasis to the early affinity between mother and child (Bowlby, 1982). Bowlby (1982) and Mary Ainsworth (1985), have delineated attachment as an affectional bond that one person establishes with another. This bond primarily initiates in infancy and is sustained until the end of the life of an individual. In early childhood the bond instinctively forms based on the experience with a mother or a caregiver. As a result the child identifies with that person as its attachment figure. When children start exploring the environment freely and when they experience a sudden threat or danger, their attachment system instantly activates and elicits behaviour that invites attention from their mother or caregiver. Ultimately, it is to maintain proximity with their caregiver. If the attachment figure is not available or is not responsive, individuals experience a sense of anxiety (Bowlby, 1969, 1982). The imprinting and the impression regarding oneself and others emerge at this juncture and remain as strong beliefs. Attachment theorists have hypothesized these beliefs (or mental models) as mental representations of experience-based knowledge about the self and the attachment figure (Bylsma, et al., 1997; Bretherton, 1985; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; Bowlby, 1973). And this remains the same even the behaviour changes due to various reasons (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970).

As everyone moves through one's lifespan, he or she forms new attachment relationships with friends and partners. Typically applied to early childhood relationships, Hazen and Shaver (1987) used attachment to describe adult romantic relationships. These relationships serve the same function for adults as for children.

Attachment theoreticians gradually evolved attachment styles to explain attachment behaviour of individuals. Initially, three styles of attachment, secure, ambivalent and avoidant styles have been brought out by Ainsworth (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Subsequently, it has been applied to adults' behaviour by introducing four styles of attachment, such as, secure, preoccupied, dismissive, and fearful styles (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). The four prototypic attachment styles are defined in terms of the intersection of two underlying dimensions -- the positive or negative model of the self and positive or negative model of hypothetical others (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Thus, secure individuals perceive both themselves and others positively. Preoccupied individuals perceive themselves negatively but others positively. Dismissive individuals perceive themselves positively but others negatively. Fearful individuals, however, perceive both themselves and others negatively. The four styles and their relations to the underlying dimensions are illustrated in Figure 1 (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994, p.431). Researchers have validated the four-category model (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998), and growing empirical support has advocated adoption of this model of adult attachment (Johnson, 1996).

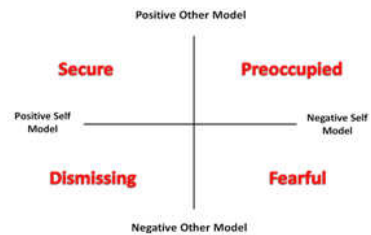


Figure 1 the Four-Category Model of Attachment Styles (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994, p.431)

Effect of Attachment Styles on Marital Satisfaction

In fact, the mental models which individuals form, intrude on all relationships (Baldwin & Meunier, 1999; Baldwin, Keelan, Fehr, Enns, & Koh-Rangarajoo, 1996; Baldwin, 1992, 1997). Particularly, Attachment styles initiate the formation and maintenance of marital relationships and marital satisfaction (Timm & Keiley, 2011). Since the mental models *function automatically and are self-perpetuating, they are the mechanisms through which the continuity of a secure or insecure attachment style is thought to be maintained over time--even in one's experience of satisfaction or dissatisfaction in married life* (Bylsma, et al., & Sumer, 1997; Rothbard & Shaver, 1994; Bowlby, 1973, 1982). *It has been revealed that marital satisfaction is higher for securely attached spouses* (Simpson, 1990). On the other hand, insecure attachment styles infringe marital satisfaction (Jacob, 1999).

Need for the Study

Marriage, the perpetual social institution, begets happiness, contentment, continuity, companionship, sense, and satisfaction in one's life. Surprisingly, the recent trends in the mushrooming of separation and marital discord issues call for a firm response both by the state and academia. The deliberate effort would pave the way that spouses at risk for stable, unhappy marriages can be identified early and might benefit from interventions that would result in deeper commitment and fulfilment in married life. Attachment theory evolved by Bowlby (1988) seems to provide an appropriate and adequate framework for understanding the dynamics of relationships in general and married relationships in particular. Hence this study was planned to explore the possible effect of attachment styles on Marital Satisfaction.

Research Questions

- Whether attachment styles influence the marital satisfaction of the married individuals?
- Whether there exist relationships between attachment styles and marital satisfaction?
- Whether the extent of influence of attachment styles on marital satisfaction are similar or not?

Research Methods

Hypotheses

In order to find solutions to the research questions based on the objective of this study, the following hypotheses were generated.

H.1. There will be a significant difference among Attachment Styles on Marital Satisfaction of married individuals.

H.1.1. The mean score of the Secure Attachment Style will be significantly higher than the means of other insecure Attachment Styles on Marital Satisfaction.

H.2. There will be a significant relationship between Attachment Styles and Marital Satisfaction of married individuals.

H.3. Attachment Styles can predict Marital Satisfaction.

Research design

An empirical survey research design (Drew & Hardman, 1943) was used to verify the effect of Attachment Styles on Marital Satisfaction of married individuals.

Instruments Chosen

Bharathiar University Marital Satisfaction Scale (BU-MSS: Chellan & Raj 2014)

Bharathiar University Marital Satisfaction Scale (BU-MSS) was a self structured questionnaire constructed to measure married individuals' subjective experience of their married life as part of PhD level research. It had 38 items with eight factors such as Closeness, Absence of Despondency, Presence of Children, Extent of Freedom, Decision Making, Sexual Relationship, Quality Time together and Spirituality. The total score was summation of scores obtained on individual items. The scale provided two types of scores 1) total scale score and 2) scores on the eight factors of the scale. The range for the total score was 38-190. Higher the score indicated higher marital satisfaction. The scale had high internal consistency ($r = 0.94$). The present research used the total scale score as the measure of marital satisfaction.

Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ; Van Oudenhoven, Hofstra and Bakker, 2003)

The Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ) was developed by Van Oudenhoven and Schrier (2001) and has been modified in 2003 by Van Oudenhoven, Hofstra and Bakker. This scale is based on the theoretical model of Griffin and Bartholomew's Relationship Style Questionnaire (RSQ, 1994). The ASQ thus consists of 4 sub-scales or 4 different attachment patterns, viz. Secure, Preoccupied, Dismissive, and Fearful. The greatest strength of ASQ over RSQ is that its internal consistency is much higher than RSQ. The internal consistencies (Cronbach's alpha) of the subscales by the original author of the ASQ are 0.75 for secure attachment style, 0.80 for preoccupied attachment style, 0.62 for the dismissive attachment style, and 0.79 for the fearful attachment style and its loading is also high (> 0.45) for the corresponding factors. The construct validity of the ASQ is also satisfactory. Thus, ASQ is an adequate tool to measure human attachment pattern.

Sample Selection

The population under study was married individuals. Kerlinger (1986) established that a sample of 600 to 700 individuals or families could give a remarkably accurate portrait of a community, its values, attitudes, and beliefs. However, in this study the investigator could collect data from a sample of 1330 married individuals using purposive sampling technique (Singh, 2011; Agarwal, 1988; Garret & Woodworth, 1969) from among the married individuals residing at Kanyakumari District in Tamil Nadu state.

The Inclusion Criteria

The following inclusive criteria were systematically pursued in identifying the sample for this study.

- 1) The subject must be married.
- 2) The subject must be volunteering to participate in the study.
- 3) The subject must not be experiencing any significant life event in the last six months.
- 4) The subject must not be having dependency on drugs or alcohol.

Demographic variables studied in this study revealed that the age of the sample ranged from 21 to 78 years (Mean age = 39.93, SD = 10.118). The sample consisted of 39.9 percent male and 60.1 percent female, among them 45.4 percent were qualified up to 12th grade, 29.7 percent of them between 12th grade to undergraduate and 24.9 percent were qualified post graduate and above. The types of marriage in the sample were the following: 81.3 percent arranged marriages, 6.5 percent married for love, and 12.3 percent married of choice (love and arranged marriage). While 62.4 percent were living in nuclear family system 37.6 percent of the sample reported living in a joint family system.

Results and Discussion

The primary objective of the study was to find out the effect of attachment styles on marital satisfaction.

Prevalence of Attachment Styles and Marital Satisfaction

Descriptive statistics showed that 60.23 percent of the subjects had secure attachment as the predominant style. The second large number of subjects (20.98%) had fearful attachment style. Dismissive attachment style held the third place as 9.92 percent of subjects come under this category. The least number of people of 8.87 percent were having preoccupied attachment style.

Effect of Attachment Styles on Marital Satisfaction

Table 1 Test of Homogeneity of Variance: Dependent Variable Marital Satisfaction

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
2.271	3	1326	.079

Table 2 Summary of ANOVA on Marital Satisfaction

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	41879.838	3	13959.946	32.888	.000
Within Groups	562839.733	1326	424.464		
Total	604719.571	1329			

The Table 2 shows the result of One-way Analysis of Variance on the difference among Attachment Styles on Marital Satisfaction. The calculated F ratio relating to the mean difference of the four

Attachment Styles on Marital Satisfaction was significant $F(3, 1326) = 32.888, p < .05$. The mean score on marital satisfaction was significantly higher for secure attachment style ($M = 152.43, SD = 20.17$) than other insecure attachment styles namely dismissive ($M = 148.14, SD = 20.07$), preoccupied ($M = 139.94, SD = 22.01$) and fearful ($M = 139.84, SD = 21.45$). Hence, the H.1 is accepted.

Table 3 the summary of the Duncan Post Hoc Test Among the Means for Four Groups of Attachment Styles on Marital Satisfaction

Post Hoc Test	Attachment Style	N	Subset		
			1	2	3
Duncan	Fearful	279	139.84		
	Preoccupied	118	139.94		
	Dismissive	132		148.14	
	Secure	801			152.43

The summary of the Duncan Post Hoc test presented in Table 3 showed that only the mean of the secure attachment style had the highest level of marital satisfaction (M = 152.43) and was significantly different from the means of the other three insecure attachment styles. This significant group difference proved the influence of attachment styles on the level of marital satisfaction of the subjects. Thus, the hypothesis H.1.1 was sustained.

Analysis on the Relationship between the Variables

Since there was significant difference among four attachment styles with regard to the level of marital satisfaction it was further explored the kind of relationship existed between the Attachment Styles and Marital Satisfaction.

Table 4 The summary of the Correlation between Four Attachment Styles and Marital Satisfaction

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1 Marital Satisfaction	1	.276**	-.263**	-.187**	-.207**
2 Secure		1	.070*	-.263**	-.123**
3 Preoccupied			1	.068*	.427**
4 Dismissive				1	.361**
5 Fearful					1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The summary of the correlation between four Attachment Styles and Marital Satisfaction presented in Table 4 indicated that Secure attachment style positively correlated with Marital Satisfaction at a significant level (r = .28, p < .01). On the other hand, the preoccupied insecure attachment style (r = -.26, p < .01), dismissive insecure attachment style (r = -.19, p < .01) and fearful insecure attachment style (r = -.21, p < .01) negatively correlated at a significant level with Marital Satisfaction. Thus the hypothesis H.2 was supported.

Table 5 The summary of the Linear Multiple Regression Analysis for the Scores of Four Attachment Styles on Marital Satisfaction

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	147.292	5.132		28.701	.000
	Secure	10.103	.988	.268	10.222	.000
	Preoccupied	-9.421	1.007	-.263	-9.354	.000
	Dismissive	-2.301	.720	-.089	-3.196	.001
	Fearful	-.909	.934	-.029	-.973	.331

The summary of the Linear Multiple Regression Analysis presented in Table 5 revealed that the Attachment Styles (secure, preoccupied, dismissive and fearful) accounted for 16.6 percent of variance in

Marital Satisfaction. The model summary indicated that the model was significant and acceptable F(4,1325) = 65.78, p < .01. Thus the hypothesis H.3 was supported.

Discussion

The findings of the study have revealed that there is a strong and systematic effect of attachment styles on marital satisfaction among married individuals. Specifically, the secure attachment style has shown a higher level of marital satisfaction whereas insecure attachment styles have demonstrated lower levels of marital satisfaction. Since secure attachment style initiates comforts, care, support, positive feelings, creative abilities, resilience, assertiveness, and many other reassuring qualities in life, the married individuals with secure attachment style imbibe the above qualities and come out with high satisfaction in their married life (Iboro & Akpan, 2011; Sadeghi, et al., 2011; Banse, 2004; Forness, 2003; Maclean, 2002; Hibbard, 2001; Rivera, 1999; Fuller & Fincham, 1995). In fact, the securely attached individuals express enhanced dyadic consensus, dyadic satisfaction, affectional expression, dyadic cohesion, and positive affect than individuals with various insecure styles of attachment (Malone, 1995; Fuller & Fincham, 1995). Married individuals with secure attachment style have positive perspective of self and important others, richer relationships, higher self-efficacy, and more intimacy with their spouses (Sadeghi, et al., 2011).

Again, secure individuals tend to rate their partner as more friendly (Meyer, Pilkonis, & Beevers, 2004) and express care-giving and care-seeking behaviours towards each other. Subsequently, married people with secure attachment style express their response behaviours as accepting and acknowledge the care and support offered from the partner. As a result, the experience of marital satisfaction among couples improves. Accordingly, it becomes evident that adult attachment has a direct effect on marital satisfaction (Timm & Keiley, 2011).

Further investigation has unfolded the strong relationship between attachment styles and marital satisfaction. Specifically, the secure attachment style of the married individuals has shown positive relationship with marital satisfaction in line with other studies (Duncan, 2007; Raga-ei, Nay-yeri, & Sedaghati, 2007; Fuller, & Fincham, 1995).

The model employed in this investigation, which includes four attachment styles of married persons, could explain sizable amount of variation in their level of marital satisfaction. Married individuals with secure attachment style have positively envisaged marital satisfaction indicating that if secure attachment style increases by one unit marital satisfaction would increase by tenfold. Conversely, married individuals with preoccupied attachment style have negatively predicted marital satisfaction indicating that if there is an increase in preoccupied style by one unit the marital satisfaction would reduce by nine fold; married individuals with dismissive attachment style would reduce by two fold; and married individuals with fearful attachment style is not even negatively predicting marital satisfaction. It is evident that secure attachment style aptly and adequately facilitate marital satisfaction and insecure attachment styles diminish and even curtail marital satisfaction. In fact, Marital satisfaction could be predicted by the individual's own attachment, the partner's attachment, and the interaction between them (Banse, 2004).

The flip side of the coin is that insecure attachment styles (dismissing, preoccupied, and fearful) seem to induce more attachment issues with their significant other than secure attachment style. Specifically, insecure attachment styles deteriorate the quality of marital relationship (Malone, 1995).

The discussions, thus far presented, emphasise the significance of a secure attachment style on marital satisfaction and reinforces the detrimental effect of an insecure attachment style on marital satisfaction. Hence, improving and inculcating secure attachment style is imminent and imperative in human life in general and marital life in particular.

Implications

- The higher proportion of married individuals having the secure attachment style implies that the virtue of marriage provides an apt condition for married people to sustain the secure attachment style in a country like India where marriage is believed to be the divine plan.

- Since the attachment styles decide the future of adult relationships, parents should provide a safe haven and a secure base to their children in order to acquire secure adult relationships.
- Nurturing of skills related to marital relationship has to be the priority of young people prior to their marriage.
- An attachment based intervention program has to be initiated to help married people to become aware of their attachment style orientation in order to improve their secure attachment style.

Limitations

- The sample for this study has been obtained through purposive sampling technique. Moreover, the sample has been collected only from the Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu, India. So, caution needs to be kept in generalizing the result to the whole population.
- The age of the sample ranged from 21 to 78 years. Though the study reveals the common characteristics of the heterogeneous sample, a homogeneous age group might provide more accuracy in specific areas of married life.

In spite of all the limitations, it can be concluded that the findings of this study add new ideas and views to the existing literature on Attachment Styles and Marital Satisfaction.

Conclusion

It may be concluded with confidence that Attachment Styles do have an effect on Marital Satisfaction. Childhood experiences play a vital role in forming a certain Attachment Style which even continues to influence the relationships one makes in adulthood. Marriage, being the most desired life style of the adult, experiences the effect of Attachment Styles in interpersonal relationships. Secure people enjoy more Marital Satisfaction than people with insecure Attachment Styles.

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