

DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS AND MARITAL SATISFACTION AMONG IRANIAN MARRIED STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Marriage is a special relationship between two people which its quality plays an important role in one's life. Marital satisfaction is a personal feeling about and strongly related to health and happiness of marriage. This study aims to examine the relationships between demographic factors and marital satisfaction. Subjects for this study were 387 Iranian married students. The instrument used was ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale to measure marital satisfaction. Results indicated that age, length of marriage, arranged marriage and educational level have significant relationship with marital satisfaction, however, length of stay in Malaysia, income and gender do not have any significant relationship with marital satisfaction. This study recommends that marriage counseling, with an emphasis on promoting awareness in marital happiness and satisfaction, would be helpful in addressing marital conflicts among international married students.

Key words: Demographic factors, Marital satisfaction, Married students, Iran

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is defined as a prevalent and influential social foundation in a given society. Marital relationship is a structure in every society and considered as one of the most important assets in relationships among humans. It builds a foundation for establishing family relationships aiming to expand the family by producing the future generation. A healthy marriage would make series of constructive influences and changes in the adults' physical and emotional health (Dwyer, 2005; Jain, 2014). Marriage is a special relationship between two people which its quality plays a significant role in one's life time. A high quality marital relationship can affect the physical and psychological well-being of the couple (Botlani, Ahmadi, Bahrami, Shahsiah&Mohebbi, 2010). The quality of marriage can be characterized by happiness, pleasure, affection, intimacy, tenderness, love, strong communication, commitment and marital satisfaction and is associated with the level of these characteristics (Amidu, Owiredu, Gyasi-Sarpong, Woode&Quaye, 2011).

Marital satisfaction is also about emotional understanding and support, independency, problem solving and conflict resolution. If couples cannot work out these elements in their relationship, the quality of their marriage will deteriorate and creates other problematic issues such as extra-marital affairs, marital conflict, sexual dissatisfaction, poor communication, anxiety and depression (Greeff& De Bruyne, 2000; Amidu, Owiredu, Gyasi-Sarpong, Woode & Quaye, 2011).

United Nation reported in 2005, there are 200 million immigrants overseas (Judith et al., 2011). In recent decade, Malaysia is one of the major host countries for many immigrants and the majority of immigrants are international students. There are nearly 90,000 international students registered in Malaysian universities (Yusliza and Chelliah 2010). A large number of these international students are Iranians. According to the Iranian Embassy

in Malaysia, about 14000 Iranian students were studying in Malaysia in 2011 and approximately half of these students are living with their families (Madanian&Mansor, 2011).

It has been found that marital satisfaction is associated with demographic variables such as age at marriage, gender, length of marriage, income and educational level. The age of a person at the time of their marriage has been found to be one of the most predictors of divorce. When people are married at younger age, they more likely face with marital conflicts, mainly in the area of disloyalty and jealousy (Smart, 2008; Amato & Rogers, 1997). Previous studies have reported a significant relationship between length of marriage as another factor that can positively affect marital satisfaction (Brako 2012; Bookwala, Sobin&Zdaniuk, 2005; Rosen-Grandon, Myers & Hattie, 2004). Hinchliff and Gott (2004) have done a study on long term marriage in UK. Their study showed that, intimacy among married couples improved as the time of marriage grow further because they had a better chance in getting to know each other which contributes positively to marital satisfaction.

It has been suggested that demographic characteristics as well as socioeconomic factors, such as education and income, could also affect on marital satisfaction. Chen (2012), studied the relationship between education and divorce among Taiwanese women, showed that women tend to divorce more when they have higher education. Alder (2010) also studied in similar line on relationship between educational level and marital satisfaction and found that women with high educational level have less happy marriages.

To address above problem statement, research questions were presented as following:

1. Are there significant relationships between social demographic factors (age, gender, level of education, length of stay in Malaysia, economic situation, arranged marriage or not, marriage length) and marital satisfaction?
2. Is there significant difference in marital satisfaction between male and female respondents?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The total samples consisted of 387 respondents; males (200) and females (187) aged between 25 to 56 years from public Malaysian universities. Samples were collected from three universities in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor through random sampling. Most male and female respondents were 30 to 40 years old (49% and 60.4% respectively). The mean age of male respondent (38 years old and standard deviation of 7.14) were higher compared to females (33 years old and standard deviation of 5.17). More than half of males (60.5%) and females (61.5%) were married at the age between 25 to 30 years old. Findings indicate that length of marriage for less than half of males (31.5%) was between 5 to 10 years and length of marriage for more than one third of females (34.8%) was below 5 years. Regarding to respondents education level, the results indicated that majority of males (72.5%) are studying in PhD level while half of females (51.3%) are studying in master level. Since some respondents were working in Iran prior to coming to Malaysia, it is important to consider whether or not their income from their jobs in Iran continued. As to their income it is considered overall sum including other resources. In Malaysian ringgit, the average family monthly income in Malaysia is 9000.00 Malaysian Ringgit. Also it is fair to consider that the average income for Iranian men is more than Iranian women in Malaysia. Some of respondents continue to receive their income from Iran while studying in Malaysia for the

reason that they could not find job and some other secured an income in Malaysia. For couples whose incomes continued, the type of continuation is full or partial. In sum, the findings showed that men's age were higher than women and length of marriage for males was more than females. In addition, men had higher education and average income compared to women in Malaysia.

Instruments

Marital satisfaction was evaluated by PREPARE/ENRICH couple satisfaction scale. The couple satisfaction scale contains 10 items: Idealistic distortion, communication, leisure activities, financial management, relationship roles, conflict resolution, family and friends and spiritual beliefs, affection and sexuality, partner style and habits (Olson, Larsan, Olson, 2009). All the questions are based on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Total scores can be calculated by reverse coding items (2, 4, 5, 6, 8) and then the sum of all items defines the total score. A very high score determines satisfaction and a very low score indicates dissatisfaction of the marital relationship. According to Olson, Larson & Olson (2009), 85-100 is very high, 65-80 is high score, 40-60 is moderate, 25-35 is low, 0-15 is very low. Furthermore, Olson, Larsan and Olson (2009) stated that PREPARE/ENRICH couple satisfaction scale had good internal reliability coefficient (alpha) 0.60-0.89.

A set of questionnaire was used to get information on the demographic information of the participants. Information on demographic variables was gathered in the demographic questionnaire section. The variables studied were age, gender, income, type of marriage (arranged or love), length of stay in Malaysia, length of marriage.

Data Analysis

Data for this study were analyzed by descriptive statistics for the demographic characteristics. T-test analyses were used to examine the differences of gender on marital satisfaction. Smart-PLS were used for the dependent variables in the model (Vinzi, Chin, Henseler, & Wang, 2010).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the current study, descriptive analysis indicated that the mean age of the participants was 35.63, with a Standard Deviation of 6.72. The minimum age recorded for the respondents in this study was 25 years, while the maximum age was 56. The youngest age at marriage was 22 years old and oldest age at marriage was 38 years old. In terms of gender, 51.6% (200) of the respondents are males and 48.4% (187) are females. There were more males as compared to females studying in Malaysian public universities. The youngest age for male was 25 years old and oldest age was 56 years old. Moreover, the youngest age for female was 25 years old and oldest age was 52 years old. In addition, 39% (149) of respondents are studying in master and 61.5% (238) are studying in PhD level, and 74.9% (290) of respondents are married by personal choice and 25.1% (97) of respondents are arranged marriage (*see table. 1 and table. 2*).

Table.1. Background of Iranian Male (N=200)

	<i>n (%)</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
<i>Age in years</i>	200(100)				
20-30	22(11)	38	7.14	25	56
30-40	98(49)				
>40	80(40)				

<i>Age at marriage</i>	200(100)				
20-25	29(14.5)	27	3.07	20	40
25-30	121(60.5)				
>30	50(25)				
<i>Length of marriage (in years)</i>	200(100)				
<5	40(20)	13.64	44.92	1	639
5-10	54(27)				
10-15	63(31.5)				
> 15	43(21.5)				
<i>Current Education Level</i>	200(100)				
Individual education					
Master student	55(27.5)				
PhD student	145(72.5)				
<i>Spouse's Education</i>		1.72	0.46	0	2
Diploma	15(8)				
Associate degree	1(0.5)				
Bachelor	42(21)				
Master	86(43)				
PhD	56(27.5)				
<i>Income</i>					
Individual income (RM) (monthly)	200(100)	3858.04	3056	750	40000

Table 2. Background of Iranian Female (N=187)

	<i>n (%)</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
<i>Age in years</i>	187(100)				
20-30	52(27.8)	33	5.17	25	52
30-40	113(60.4)				
>40	22(11.8)				
<i>Age at marriage</i>	187(100)				
20-25	58(31)	25	2.69	18	36
25-30	115(61.5)				
>30	14(7.5)				
<i>Length of marriage (in years)</i>	187(100)				
<5	65(34.8)	10.79	46.59	1	641
5-10	62(33.2)				
10-15	45(24.1)				
> 15	15(8)				
<i>Current Education Level</i>	187(100)				
Individual education		1.481	0.511	0.00	2.00
Master student	96(51.3)				
PhD student	91(48.7)				

<i>Spouse's Education</i>		0(0)			
	Diploma	1(0.5)			
	Associate degree	44(23.5)			
	Bachelor	73(39)			
	Master	69(36.9)			
	PhD				
<i>Income</i>				500.00	
	Individual income (RM) (monthly)	187(100)	2684.39	2286.82	15000.00

Result of Assessment of Coefficient of Determination (R²)

(R²) measures the relationship of latent variables variances against total variance and determines the prediction power of the model. Smart-PLS provided the (R²) for the dependent variables in the model (Vinzi, Chin, Henseler, & Wang, 2010). The overall model explains 75.57% of marital satisfaction without presence of moderating variable, shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Direct Effects of Social Demographic Variables on Marital Satisfaction

<i>Path</i>	<i>Path Coefficient</i>	<i>t-value</i>	<i>Percentile 95% confidence intervals</i>	
			<i>Lower Bound</i>	<i>Upper Bound</i>
Marital Satisfaction				
(R ² = 75.57%, Q ² = 0.383)				
← Age	-0.18	-2.29*	-0.06	-0.00
← Arranged Marriage	0.14	2.43*	0.11	0.59
← Education	0.10	1.67*	-0.03	0.45
← Marriage Length	-0.12	-2.34*	-0.00	0.03
← Length of Stay in Malaysia	0.08	1.41	-0.03	0.11
← Income	0.05	1.10	-2.75	0.00
← Gender	-0.03	-0.58	-0.28	0.16

*, **, and *** indicate statistical significance at the 0.05, 0.01, and 0.001 levels respectively. ns indicates not significant at 95% confidence level. t(0.05, 1999) = 1.960, t(0.01, 1999) = 2.576, t(0.001, 1999) = 3.291.

Findings from the Hypotheses Testing

In this section, the results of the hypothesis testing are reported in details. This section discusses the results of this study relative to the findings from other similar studies. Each research objective and/or hypothesis is examined separately. Bootstrapping is making no distributional assumptions of variables and allows the researcher to examine the research hypotheses. Bootstrapping also helps to evaluate confidence intervals and standard errors

found in the given model. In examining moderation effect, bootstrapping method has high statistical power and accuracy (Hayes, 2009; MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004).

H_{A1}. Respondent who is older has higher marital satisfaction.

The hypothesis is supported by the data presented in Table 3. Finding showed that there is significant negative relationship between age and marital satisfaction (standardized estimate = -0.18, *t*-value = -2.29). Therefore, hypothesis H_{A1} is supported. It indicates that respondent who is older had lower marital satisfaction. In contrast, marriage at an early age is highly related to poor marital satisfaction. When people are married at younger age, they are more likely to face with marital conflicts, mainly in the area of disloyalty and jealousy (Smart, 2008; Amato & Rogers, 1997). The significant correlation indicates that age is a strong predictor of marital satisfaction as past research has indicated (Alder, 2010). In similar study done by Madjzooob (2000), pointed out that there is the possibility that cultural identification becomes stronger with age, and the acculturation is easier at younger ages. In contrast study done by Ziaee, Jannati, Mobasheri, Taghavi, Abdollahi, Modanloo, Behnampour (2014) who identified that there is no significant association between age and marital satisfaction among Iranian couples.

H_{A2}. There is a significant positive relationship between current education level and marital satisfaction.

The results are presented in Table 3 and showed that lower endpoint of a two-sided bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the standardized total (direct) effect of education on marital satisfaction is -0.03 while the upper endpoint of a two-sided bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the standardized total effect of education level on marital satisfaction is 0.45. These results stated that the standardized total effect is 95% likely to range from -0.03 to 0.45 and the *t*-value is 1.67.

The findings of the current study indicated that there is almost positive significant relationship between current education of respondent and marital satisfaction at 95% confidence level (standardized estimate = 0.10, *t*-value = 1.67). Therefore, hypothesis H_{A2} is supported. For the relationship between education level and marital satisfaction, statistically significant results were found. Education level does appear to be correlated with marital satisfaction. In similar study by Tucker and O'Grady (2001) pointed out that couples with similar educational levels would be more satisfied, rather than finding from existing couples. The result of another study is in line with current study and found that education positively influence of the divorce rate (Mahmoudian&Khodamoradi, 2006). In contrast, Alder (2010) researched about relationship between educational level and marital satisfaction and found that there is no significant relationship between educational level and marital satisfaction. On the other hand, another study researched on education level and marital conflict and found that educated women experienced more marital conflict which leads to marital dissatisfaction (Zainah, Nasir, RuzySuliza, Noraini, 2012).

H_{A3}. There is a significant positive relationship between the length of stay in Malaysia and marital satisfaction.

Finding for H_{A3} is shown in Table 3 in below. The findings declared that lower endpoint of a two-sided bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the standardized total (direct) effect of length of staying on marital satisfaction is -0.03 while the upper endpoint of a two-sided bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the standardized total effect of length of staying on marital satisfaction is 0.11. The results also declared that the relationship between length of stay in Malaysia and marital satisfaction is in not significantly related (standardized

estimate = 0.08, t -value = 1.41). Hence, according to this result H_{A3} is not supported. No other research carried out in this field has found or declared any relationship between duration of stay and marital satisfaction among immigrants. Moreover, in study by Kisselev (2005) pointed out, over time, people participated more activities, and these activities increased the longer they lived in new country and they experienced more happiness and less conflict.

H_{A4} . Income has a significant positive relationship with marital satisfaction of respondents.

H_{A4} in Table 3 showed that lower endpoint of a two-sided bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the standardized total effect of income on marital satisfaction is -2.75 while the upper endpoint of a two-sided bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the standardized total effect of income on marital satisfaction is 0.00. Checking the standardized total effect revealed that the estimated total effect of income on marital satisfaction is 0.05. These results stated that the standardized total effect at 95% and t -value is 1.10. The result showed that there is no significant effect on marital satisfaction at 95% confidence level (standardized estimate = 0.05, t -value = 1.10) and hypothesis H_{A4} is not supported. In similar, study done by Mirfardi, Edalati and Redzuan (2010) there were no significant association between family income and marital satisfaction. In contrast, results of study by Zainah, et., al. (2012) identified that there was a significant relationship between income and marital satisfaction. In terms of the influence of income on marital satisfaction, high income individuals were more satisfied than those of the low income. The findings by Pimentel (2000) and Trudel, (2002) mentioned income as one of the demographic variable that can affect on marital satisfaction.

H_{A5} . Respondent who has been arranged marriage has higher marital satisfaction.

Table 3 indicates that lower endpoint of a two-sided bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the standardized total effect of arranged marriage on marital satisfaction is 0.11 while the upper endpoint of a two-sided bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the standardized total effect of arranged marriage on marital satisfaction is 0.59. Additionally, checking the standardized total effect revealed that the estimated total effect of arranged marriage on marital satisfaction is 0.14.

These results indicate that the standardized total effect is 95% likely to range from 0.11 to 0.59 and t -value is 2.43. The result showed that there is not significant effect on marital satisfaction at 95% confidence level (standardized estimate = 0.14, t -value = 2.43). The hypothesis H_{A5} is supported. It indicates that, respondent who had arranged marriage had high marital satisfaction. The results of the current study contradict with Erci and Ergin (2005) that revealed, kind of marriage has significant relationship with marital satisfaction, it indicated that women who have dated men prior to marriage more satisfied compare to women who have arranged marriage by family.

H_{A6} . Respondent who has been married longer has higher marital satisfaction.

As shown in Table 3 in below, the lower endpoint of a two-sided bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the standardized total (direct) effect of length of marriage on marital satisfaction is -0.00 while the upper endpoint of a two-sided bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the standardized total effect of length of marriage on marital satisfaction is 0.03. Additionally, checking the standardized total effect revealed that the estimated total effect of marriage length on marital satisfaction is -0.12. These results indicate that the standardized total effect is 95% likely to range from -0.00 to 0.03 and the estimated effect is -0.12. Furthermore, the result showed that t -value is -2.34. This shows that there is significantly negative relationship between marriage length and marital satisfaction. Marriage

length (standardized estimate = -0.12, $t = -2.34$) have significantly negative relationship with marital satisfaction at 95% confidence level, thus the hypothesis H_{A6} is supported. Quite the different of the current study, another study found that the longer duration of marriage, the more satisfaction. When individual who is satisfied with marital relationship that means has good relationship with his/or her partner and married couples with ten years and above in their length of marriage may have passed the stage of adaptation and experienced less marital issues (Rohany&Sakdiah, 2010). Similarly, long marriage duration improved intimacy among couples and had relationship with marital satisfaction (Hinchliff&Gott, 2004). In contrast, pointed out in the study done by Ziaee, Jannati, Mobasheri, Taghavi, Abdollahi, Modanloo, Behnampour (2014) there is no significant relationship between length of marriage and marital satisfaction among couples. Moreover, Mirfardi, Edalati and Redzuan (2010) declared that there is no significant association between length of marriage and marital satisfaction. Another research on married students in Malaysia found that there is no correlation between marriage length and marital relationship (Ghoroghi, Hassan & Baba, 2012).

H_{A7} . Male respondents have higher marital satisfaction.

Finding in Table 3 showed that the lower endpoint of a two-sided bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the standardized total (direct) effect of gender on marital satisfaction is -0.28 while the upper endpoint of a two-sided bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the standardized total effect of gender on marital satisfaction is 0.16.

Additionally, checking the standardized total effect revealed that the estimated total effect of gender on marital satisfaction is -0.03. These results indicate that the standardized total effect is 95% most likely to range from -0.28 to 0.16 and the estimated effect is -0.03. Furthermore, the result showed that t -value is -0.58. This shows that the effect of gender on marital satisfaction is not significantly different from zero at the 0.05 level. Thus, the hypothesis on the relationship between gender and marital satisfaction is not supported at 95% confidence level (standardized estimate = -0.03, t -value = -0.58). Similarly, another studies declared that there were no gender differences on marital satisfaction of husbands and wives in the marital relationship (Jackson, Miller, Henry, 2014; Kurdek, 2005). There are differences among men and women in marital satisfaction, men achieve more psychosocial benefits than the women whereas women receive mental and physical health benefits when they are in happy marital relationship and satisfied with their marriage (Faulkner, Davey, & Davey, 2005).

In another study done by Banafsheian (2003) reported, Iranian men are more acculturated than their women and the men are also more independent; as a result, Iranian women tend to become more depressed than Iranian men due to migration and problem with adjustments to the new culture.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION AND LIMITATION

There are some limitations to this study that are going to be addressed as follows. The sample used in this study represents a unique group in an emerging immigrant section of the country. Moreover, given participants' educational levels, geographic location, and language use (i.e., that they were all predominantly Farsi speaking), the findings of this study are certainly not generalizable to all immigrants.

Another limitation of this study is a survey research and that the data were collected in the form of self-report online survey and as with any survey participating to gather data, participants may have not correctly reported about themselves and therefore not provide accurate information. Moreover, the data are completely correlational and cross-sectional,

and also neither direction nor causation can be inferred from the results. In addition, limitation of this study also relates to how the data was gathered, while the sample was only gathered from one spouse (wife or husband). Therefore, validity and reliability of the instruments is unknown for Iranian population since these instruments have not been used for similar group.

This research was conducted only among Iranian married students who are relocated to Malaysia therefore result of this study can only be generalized to Iranian couples. Moreover, Out of many universities in Malaysia this study was conducted only in Public universities and in this case, it will cause another limitation.

Measurement of marital satisfaction, although claimed to be multidimensional, may not have covered all area of marital relationship, for example; affection, intimacy, sexual relationship. According to the large number of variables and insufficient amount of information available on the topic, this research was exploratory rather than experimental. The sample size in this study, although sufficient for the proposed research, was not large enough to explore all variables.

Future research with large samples would provide more information on marital satisfaction for this population. Additionally, the sample used in this study was very demographically specific and results of the investigation cannot be generalized to other immigrant population. This research found some cultural differences with Malaysian sample in the relationship between independent variables and marital satisfaction. These findings suggested cultural explanation that could be investigated further. Finally, there are other areas in the marital relationship that may explain better about marital satisfaction, for example; intimacy, commitment, sexual relationship and so on.

This study focused on Iranian married students in Malaysia sample (n=387) where the research was designed to collect data to test the relationship among demographic background and marital satisfaction. The findings also show that age, type of marriage (arranged or love), education, marriage length, length of staying in Malaysia, and gender did not have any significant effect on marital satisfaction. It is important to note that the culture and geographic differences may have effected on the findings of study. These findings could be only generalized to the sample of this study. The result of this study must be added more empirical evidences to the body of knowledge that will inform practice and help policy makers in relation to marital satisfaction among Iranian married students who are living in Malaysia.

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