

Submissive Behaviors and Marital Satisfaction Relation and the Mediator Role of Perceived Marital Problem Solving

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The first aim of this research is to study the influence of submissive behaviors on marital satisfaction and to study the significant role of problem solving skills in the relationship between submissive behaviors and marital satisfaction. In this research, 92 couples, having at least one university student child, have participated. The sampling method was the multistage sampling. In the first part, reliability and validity of research tools were examined and in the second part, the correlations between variables were computed and the hypotheses of the study were tested using stepwise regression analysis. According to the conclusions of the study, the higher is the level of submissive behaviors, the lower the level of problem solving skills, and consequently this causes a decreased marital satisfaction. Limitations of the research and possible applications of the research findings in psychotherapy practices were discussed.

Keyword: submissive behavior, marital satisfaction, problem-solving abilities

Marriage is one of the most important human beings' living methods, but the important thing is the quality of this experience and the quality of individuals' lives in a direct contact. Marital pleasure and satisfaction can't be defined easily but the variables that cause marital satisfaction have been frequently studied. In the model presented by Lewis and Spanier (1979), personal and social backgrounds, satisfaction from lifestyle and the rewards gained through marriage were mentioned as the factors that influence the satisfaction of marriage among couples. Aida and Falbo (1991) mentioned marital equity. Lye and Bilbarz (1993) mentioned

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traditionalism. Blum and Mehriban (1999) pointed to good temperament and adaptability. Roizblat, Kaslow, Rivera, Fuchs, Conejero and Zacharias (2001) pointed to trust, love and loyalty. Goodman (1999) mentioned honesty and avoidance of hostile control Kamo (1993) considered cultural factors, earnings, and age. Imamoglu and Yasak (1997) mentioned socio-economic factors, earnings, and relations with extended family. Anthony (1993); Dudley and Kosinski (1990); Shehan, Bock and Lee (1990); Wilson and Filsinger (1997); Giblin (1997) mentioned religiousness. Ellison, Bartkowski and Anderson (1999) proved that attending religious ceremonies decreases violence in family. Beside the cultural factors, characteristics of the spouses are also important satisfaction variables. Botwin, Buss and Schakelford (1997) found that people like to choose spouses similar to them. In addition, if personality characteristics like perception rate and emotional stability are lower than expected, satisfaction decreases and sexual pleasure and satisfaction is not possible.

Factors that disturb mental balance can also cause dissatisfaction. Factors such as depression and despair are considered as the main factors (Sweatmen, 1999; Shek, 1999; Nathawat, Mahtur and Ash, 1993).

Another factor that is supposed to influence marital satisfaction is submissive behavior and obedience. In this regard, there are not enough studies yet, but Blum and Mehriban (1999) showed that the individuals who cannot provide harmony and conformity, show submissive behaviors. Their depression level is higher and therefore they have less confidence and pleasure. Allan and Gilbert (1997) findings support this idea, according to them; different aspects of submission and obedience especially passive retreat behavior are effective factors that cause several psychological problems, especially depression.

When analyzing and differentiating effective dissatisfaction factors, we encounter another factor called problem solving or problem solving strategy. It's far from reality if we suppose that there will be no arguments during the marriage. Hence, selecting and using problem-solving strategies correctly can develop a creative connection and positive results. Fletcher, Thomas and Durrant (1999) discovered that couples having a qualitative understanding of marriage, freely and frankly say their negative emotions

and thoughts to their spouses. Fincham (1999) found that positive behaviors and actions especially in women could increase satisfaction and decrease conflicts in family. Chiu (1998) has emphasized that quarrels in the family cause dissatisfaction in spouses. Ifeld (1980) proved that individuals' attitude toward marriage problems influences marital stress more than behavioral patterns in family, personality characteristics, social stress sources and social and population characteristics.

The main purpose of this research is to study the role of submissive behaviors and obedience in confidence and marital satisfaction, and to study the significant role of problem solving skills in family relations.

Hypotheses

Perceived problem solving skills in marriage plays an intermediate role between submissive behaviors and marital satisfaction, that is, the relationship between submissive behavior and decreased satisfaction can be denied or is expected to get diminished just after we control the influences of problem solving skills. Therefore:

- A) There is a negative relationship between submissive behavior and family problem-solving ability.
- B) There is a positive relationship between problem-solving ability and marital satisfaction.

Procedure

Statistical population, Samples and Research Execution Method

Statistical population was students' parents from Tehran, Shahid Beheshti and Allame Tabatbayee Universities. Multistage sampling did sample selection. At first, we prepared a list of research-qualified students, and then selected the sample from it. According to the research strategy, samples were supposed to have legal marriage, at least 1 child studying at the university and live with each other. To determine the sample size, we used Krejcie and Morgan's (1970). Table and selected 357 Ss out of an estimated 5000 population.

This investigation is a correlation type and the data were analyzed by the use of correlation and multiple regression analyses.

Method

Participants were asked to fill in the forms received in envelopes, alone, and then put them in their place and close the envelopes with no identity information. About 65% of questionnaires were returned. After preliminary studies, it took 4 months to collect the data. Of all envelopes, 92 were delivered to the researcher and the data were extracted from their answers.

The average age of participants was 50, the mean numbers of children was 2 and the marriage duration was 26 years. Of this number, 56% were university graduates, 64% were metropolitans and 64% had got married on their own decision and the rest in traditional ways.

Dyadic adjustment scale (DAS). DAS is composed 32 items and developed by Spanier (1976) to measure the quality of marriage. This scale consists of sub-scales like Dyadic consensus, Dyadic satisfaction, influential expression, and Dyadic cohesion. Senai (2000) adapted this scale to be used in Persian. In the present study, the internal consistency of the scale is 0.92 and the correlation coefficient with the Wallace's (2001) Dyadic adjustment scale is 0.82 ($p < 0.005$).

In the Preliminary studies of this research, internal consistency of alpha was 0.88. The results of the scale validity are presented in the *Findings section*.

Marital problem-solving scale (MPSS): This scale was innovated by Baugh, Avery and sheets-Haworth (1982) and is composed of 9 items. Researchers reported the internal consistency of this scale to be 0.95, and the test-retest reliability coefficient to be 0.86. The correlation coefficient with DAS was 0.61 ($p < 0.001$). In the original form, the scale was a nine-point one, but after its translation into Persian, it became a 5-point scale in order to make it easier. In the Preliminary study, an internal consistency coefficient of 0.88 obtained. Some of the scale items are as follows:

- Comparing to other families, how much do you trust your own problem-solving skills?
- When you are discussing life problems, to what extent does your spouse understand your feelings?
- To what extent are you satisfied with the decision-making process in your family?

The validity of this scale is presented in the section of research findings.

Submissive behavior scales (SBS). SBS is developed and advanced by Gilbert, and Allan (1994), it's a 5-point scale and is composed of 16 items. In the original form, the alpha reliability coefficient was 0.89. This scale was translated into Persian by Mahdavian (1997), its alpha coefficient is 0.74 and its test-retest reliability coefficient, is 0.65.

Findings

In this research at first, the psychometric characteristics of scales considered and the correlation coefficients among the variables studied. To examine the expected conclusions of the research a stepwise regression analysis was performed.

Factor structure and reliability level of Dyadic adjustment scale (DAS)

Although DAS is a Likert scale, but because of varying spaces among the answers, a factor analysis was not performed. When Spanier (1976) developed this scale, he computed the reliability for each of the 4 different factors separately. For the total scale, the alpha coefficient was 0.94 and the correlation coefficients were between 0.28 and 0.94. For the sub-scale of Dyadic adjustment, the coefficient of alpha was 0.90, for the sub-scale of Dyadic satisfaction, the same coefficient was 0.86, for the sub-scale of affectionate expression, it was 0.62 and for the sub-scale of Dyadic intimacy, it was 0.76. The reliability coefficients of the factors of this scale are compatible with the original scale, however in this research only the total scale was used.

Factor structure and validity coefficient of marital problem-solving skills (MPSS)

To observe the factor structure of this scale, factor analysis was performed. In the original research, all the items were gathered under one factor. The alpha coefficient of the scale was 0.91, and the correlation coefficients were between 0.63 and 0.73. Findings of the scale validity are in accord with the preliminary study findings.

Factor structure and validity of submissive behaviors scale (SBS)

To observe the factor structure of this scale, factor analysis was performed and 3 factors with Eigen values bigger than 1 were obtained. These factors describe 48% of the total variance. The Alpha coefficient of the first factor was 0.76, the second one was 0.78 and the third one was 0.41. However, the coefficient of alpha for the total scale was 0.81. The total scale was used, in this research.

The correlation coefficients between the variables

As you can see in Table 1, according to our expectation, there’s a powerful and significant relationship between marital satisfaction and problem-solving skills ($p < 0.001$, $r = 0.77$). The relationship between confidence or satisfaction and submissive behaviors is ($p < 0.001$, $r = 0.22$) and the relationship between submissive behaviors and problem-solving is skills ($p < 0.001$, $r = -0.20$) negative and significant.

Table 1
Correlation coefficients between the variables

Variables	Education	Duration of Marriage	Marriage Form	SBS	DAS	MPSS
Education	1					
Marriage Form	.235**	1.000				
Duration of Marriage	-.092	-.129	1.000			
SAS	-.116	-.314**	.142	1.000		
DAS	.100	.026	.075	-.215**	1.000	
MPSS	.085	.040	.139	-.204**	.773**	1.000
Participants	184	184	184	177	184	184

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

SBS: Submissive Behavior Scale

DAS: Dyadic Consensus Scale

MPSS: Marital Problem-Solving Scale

Findings about the relationship between submissive behavior and marital satisfaction and the critical and vital role of problem solving

To test the role of problem solving as a mediator between submissive acts and satisfaction, the influence of marital satisfaction examined as a

variable, which is independent of other dependent variables like marriage duration, marriage manner, education level and religiosity.

The obtained results showed that there is a meaningful reverse relation between submissive acts and satisfaction ($p < 0.05$, $b = -0.28$).

In addition, we observed a meaningful relation between submissive acts and problem solving ($p < 0.05$, $b = -0.25$). In this manner, the relation between satisfaction and problem solving was tested which makes enough sense. ($p < 0.05$, $B = 0.83$). The findings reveal that increases in submissive acts accompany decreases in problem solving ability and in turn decreases in satisfaction.

Discussion

In this research, it recognized that submissive behaviors have negative correlations with marital satisfaction, but this role becomes insignificant when couples' problem-solving skills are controlled. These findings support the main hypothesis of this research, which designates problem-solving skills as an intermediate variable in the relationship between submissive behaviors and satisfaction. When we consider the influences and the interactions of this relationship, we observe that submissive behaviors lead the individual to conclude that problems are insoluble. This causes dissatisfaction and the individual tries not to solve the problem and evades it, using sentences like, "I must bow", "I must not say NO", "If I say no, things get worse", and this is one of the factors decreasing satisfaction.

Proportional to this idea, problem solving was related to satisfaction, as expected. These findings match former research results. Problem-solving skills increase common decisions and for the same reason increase couples' communication skills. Thus, interactive behaviors become positive and the intimacy between husband and wife increases and the problem-solving skills develop. According to Scanzoni (1995), on the other hand, decision-making process performs a significant role in increasing positive feelings of the couples toward themselves and their spouses.

Negative relationships between submissive behaviors, perception skills and problem solving worries us since submissive behaviors might develop

negative feelings. In other words, when one of the spouses shows submissive behavior, negative feelings, like wrath, develop in the other. Allan and Gilbert's (1997) findings emphasize this claim. According to these research findings, submissive behaviors have positive correlations with signs of neurosis like passive aggression. Especially, passive withdrawal, as a type of submissive behavior, has a relation to the individuals' mental problems. Gilbert, Allan, Brough, Melley and Miles (1991) discovered the significant relationship and the positive correlation of submissive behaviors with feelings of defeatedness, general signs of stress, anxiety, and depression. Sahin and Durak (1994) observed positive relationships between submissive behaviors and depression and sociotherapy, and a negative correlation of submissive behavior with autonomy. O'Connor, Berry and Gilbert (2002) concluded that depressed individuals feel guilty more than others do and they have great fear of negative evaluations by others and therefore show submissive behavior. In Hunler's (2002) studies the positive correlation between submissive behavior and despair was confirmed.

McCreary and Rhodes (2001) found that aggressive and refusal behaviors are not bipolar behaviors but bidirectional behaviors. Despite the fact that aggressive behavior is especially for men and refusal behavior for women, both of them tend to show aggressive behaviors. In this research, no relationship found between sex and submissive behaviors.

The sensible strength of these research studies is that instead of using individuals, couples are used. If we consider these research foibles, in spite of giving relatively exact information about the participants, criteria used in this research were, to some extent, problematic in generalizing the findings. The marital problem-solving scale has been translated into Persian for the first time, but this scale handed high alpha reliability.

The main aim of this research was to study the different variables together and within a single theory. In former research studies, submissive behaviors, problem-solving skills and satisfaction have been studied as separate variables and were not studied together within a theoretical model and problem solving was not examined as an intermediate factor. On the other hand, when we were formulating the research framework, we

considered Iran's relatively fast social developments and influences of these developments on establishing family values as an effective social factor.

Although this research showed negative influences of submissive behaviors on marital problem-solving abilities and marital confidence, psychotherapists facing such problems must at first evaluate couples in their own social dependence framework and arrange their therapeutic plan accordingly. In order to make couples ready to apply changes, in the first step we recommend the psychotherapist to try to increase couples knowledge in this field using repeated and cycling characteristic of most problems.

As it was mentioned before, sampling criteria of this research allows a detailed analysis but the obtained information belongs to educated social groups who live in big cities and have an average earning. In order to extend the drawn framework of this research, we recommend researchers to aim at social groups from a lower socio-economic and welfare level who live in smaller cities.

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