



## Predicting Marital Satisfaction by Attachment Styles and Gender in Married People

Zoleykha Raeisipoor

Hormozgan University, Bandar Abbas, Iran

\* Corresponding author's Email: sebna.raeisipoor@yahoo.com

**ABSTRACT:** This study examined the relationship between adult attachment style and marital satisfaction in a convenience sample of married men and women in Bandar Abbas in Iran. The research design was a descriptive correlation, and the study sample included 480 married people (240 men and 240 women) with at least 6 months from the time they were living together. Employing the Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR) scales, and The ENRICH Marital Satisfaction scale (EMS), the current study yielded statistically significant results and supported all of the research hypotheses. There were negative relationships found between the attachment dimensions of anxiety and avoidance and marital satisfaction. Overall results suggest attachment avoidance as the strongest predictor of marital satisfaction.

**Keywords:** Attachment Styles, Attachment Anxiety, Attachment Avoidance, Married People.

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

### INTRODUCTION

Marital satisfaction was defined by Hendrick et al. (1997) as "a subjective experiencing of one's own personal happiness and contentment in the marital relationship. It provides a universal assessment of the current state of a marital relationship. Studies of marital satisfaction have resulted in the identification of a multitude of factors that contribute to a satisfactory marital union. These factors include feeling of love, trust, respect and fidelity, social support, and commitment, equity of tasks, gender roles, and sexual interaction. Numerous studies have also been conducted to investigate marital satisfaction in relation to communication and interpersonal processes.

Attachment theory has become an organizing framework for the understanding of relationships and marriages Hazan et al. (1987) were the first to recommend that the major concepts and assumptions proposed and developed by Bowlby (1988) and other attachment theorists could be readily applied to romantic relationships. First, Hazan et al. (2004) suggested that the three attachment styles, or patterns of relating, introduced by Ainsworth (1978), *secure*, *anxious/ ambivalent*, and *avoidant* could be assessed in adults. Bartholomew et al. (1991) utilized the two dimensions of a working model, and expanded Hazan and Shaver (1987) three-category model of adult attachment to allow for a clearer explanation of the two types of avoidant attachment styles: *secure*(self-positive, other-positive), *preoccupied* (self-negative, other-positive), *dismissing* (self-positive, other-negative), and *fearful* (self-negative, other-negative). Bartholomew's attachment model proposes that various combinations of two types of internal working models, model of self and

model of others, characterize each of the four attachment styles.

It is too emphasized on investigating and understanding relationship satisfaction, which may serve as an outcome of interpersonal processes. Marital satisfaction has been found to vary according to individual attachment style. Numerous researchers have given evidence for the findings of Hazan et al. (1987) influential study which identified many relational benefits associated with secure attachment. In general, most research regarding attachment and marital satisfaction supports the theoretical expectation that secure attachment is associated with higher levels of marital satisfaction than insecure attachment. For example, Fuller et al. (1995) reported that secure attachment was significantly related to higher marital satisfaction for wives in a sample of 53 middle-class couples married an average of 8.4 years. Crowell et al. (2001) conducted a longitudinal study investigating the association between attachment and relationship satisfaction among 150 couples when they were engaged and again at their five year wedding anniversary. Results indicated that for both couple members secure attachment was related to relationship satisfaction, as well as satisfaction with partner behaviors just prior to their wedding.

Every society/culture has a set of norms that distinguishes the female from their male counterparts. Gender has to do with the perception of maleness or femaleness as related to our membership in a given society. Gender differences in the benefits of marriage also play a role in marital satisfaction and divorce. The literature seems to indicate mixed views on the differences in marital satisfaction between the genders. Females have reported lower marital

satisfaction in various studies [22]. Other research seems to indicate that husbands are more satisfied than their wives [23]. Some suggested that differences over these issues may be related to differing religious views of gender roles.

Gender differences have been found to affect the relationship between attachment style and marital satisfaction. For example, anxiety in women has been shown to inversely relate with satisfaction reported by male partners. Similarly, avoidant males were associated with lower reports of satisfaction in female partners. Kobak et al. (1991) found that husbands' relationship security was challenged by wives' negativity during a problem solving session. The security of wives, on the other hand, appeared to be related to husbands' responsiveness during self-disclosure. Due to these consistent results, Banske (2004) recommended that researchers identify the ways in which the social construction of gender may attribute to the differences in attachment style on relationship satisfaction. The present study focuses on this individual difference variable (attachment style) that has been shown to associate so much with marital satisfaction. This study will therefore attempt to address these problems and answer the following question:

1. Will there be a significant relationship between participant's attachment dimension and marital satisfaction?
2. Will there be a significant relationship between male attachment dimension and marital satisfaction?
3. Will there be a significant relationship between female attachment dimension and marital satisfaction?

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The plan of this study has an applied goal and a descriptive methodology. Sample size of this study includes married men and women in Bandar-Abbas Harbor between January and June, 2012. Whereas there is not the possibility for random sampling, 480 participants (240 men and 240 women) were selected by means of available sampling method and by referring to public places such as parks and promenades.

### Measures

1) **Demographic Questionnaire.** Demographic data about subjects were obtained through completion of a questionnaire. Participants were requested to provide the following information: gender, age, marital status (including length of marriages, number of marriages, number of children and if other than first marriage, number of stepchildren), and level of education.

## 2) Experiences in Close Relationships

**Questionnaire (ECRQ):** In answer to concerns about the number of attachment measures, Brennan et al. (1998) developed a measure that combined typically assessed components of adult attachment on two dimensions, anxiety and avoidance. The 36-item measure calculates a cut-off score, 72, for the two scales, anxiety and avoidance, to determine attachment security. Questions are answered using a 7 point Likert-type scale (1 = disagree strongly, 4 = neutral/mixed, 7 = agree strongly). The reported reliability was 0.91 for the avoidance subscale and 0.94 for the anxiety subscale (Cranach's alpha). Moreover, convergent validity has been established through the correlation of the ECRQ with other similar measures [29]. Test-retest correlations between the Dependent, Close, and Anxiety Scales were reported to be 0.71, 0.62, and 0.58 respectively [28]. The reliability for the current study was .866 for male avoidance, 0.708 for male anxiety, 0.642 for female avoidance, and .714 for female anxiety. Also, we found the internal consistency to be 0.69 and split-half reliability coefficient as 0.63.

3) **ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale:** The ENRICH Marital Satisfaction scale (EMS), according to Fowers et al. (1993), yields a valid and reliable measure of marital quality or satisfaction, and it consisted of 10 items rated on a five-point Likert scale that included 10 domains of marital quality (i.e. communication, conflict resolution, roles, financial concerns, leisure time, sexual relationship, parenting, family and friends, and religion) with one question per domain.

The content validity of the EMS is expressed by the fact that it measures 10 dimensions of marital satisfaction that were found to be most important by Fournier et al. (1983). The EMS scale provides a 1-item sampling of the 10 dimensions of marital satisfaction. The item-total correlations for the EMS ranged from .52 to 0.82 with a mean of 0.65 for men and 0.68 for women which reflected that the items on the EMS are cohesive. The internal consistency of the EMS Scale indicated by Cranach's alpha revealed an internal reliability of 0.86. The test-retest reliability of the EMS scale using an interval of 4 weeks was 0.86. Concurrent validity of the EMS was expressed by the correlation that it has with the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale which was 0.73 when using individual scores and 0.81 with couple scores. The scale was translated and adopted into Persian by Soleymanian (1994). He found the internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) for EMS to be 0.92 and split-half reliability coefficient as 0.86. Also, we found the internal consistency to be 0.90 and split-half reliability coefficient as 0.86.

**RESULTS**

Demographic information including that age, level of education, length of marriage and number of children. The majority of participants had diploma and higher with a mean age of the respondents being 35.6 years (S.D. = 8.66). The respondents reported an average length of marriage of 14.2 years (S.D. = 8.9), an average age of time at marriage of 24.1 years of age (S.D. = 4.1) and the average number of children reported was 2.3 (S.D. = 1.2).

Results testing the first hypothesis of the present research suggesting that "An individual's attachment dimensions of anxiety and avoidance are inversely correlated with marital satisfaction are presented in Table 2. For the entire sample, results from the first two simple regressions indicate a significant relationship between attachment styles and marital satisfaction. Also, in the next set of simple regressions, both ECR anxiety  $F(1, 478) = 32.06, p = .001$ , and ECR avoidance  $F(1, 478) = 27.08, p < .001$ , significantly predicted marital satisfaction. Specifically, attachment anxiety was a significant negative predictor of marital satisfaction, explaining 17% of the variance. Attachment avoidance was also a significant negative predictor of marital satisfaction, explaining 22% of the variance.

Results testing the second hypothesis of the present research suggesting that "There will be difference on marital satisfaction between individual's attachment dimensions of anxiety and avoidance in male participants" are presented in Table 3. For the husbands' sample, results from the first two simple regressions indicate a significant relationship between attachment styles and marital satisfaction. For husbands, all regression analyses were significant. Attachment anxiety  $F(1, 238) = 13.05, p = 0.001$ , and attachment avoidance,  $F(1, 238) = 1.99, p = 0.001$ , were predictive of husband marital satisfaction, explaining 8% and 11% of the variance.

Results testing the third hypothesis of the present research suggesting that "There will be difference on marital satisfaction between individual's attachment dimensions of anxiety and avoidance in female participants" are presented in Table 4. For the wives' sample, results from the first two simple regressions indicate a significant relationship between attachment styles and marital satisfaction. For wives, Attachment anxiety  $F(1,238) = 13.05, p = 0.001$ , and attachment avoidance,  $F(1,238) = 1.99, p = 0.001$ , were predictive of wives marital satisfaction, explaining 12% and 16% of the variance.

**Table 1:** Mean, standard deviations, minimum and maximum of score in variables including attachment styles and marital satisfaction

Statistical indicators Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	Min.	Max.	Number
Attachment styles	89.6	15.756	38	114	480
Marital satisfaction	113.65	25.395	31	178	480

**Table 2:** Simple Regressions for Attachment Style and Marital Satisfaction

Whole sample (n = 480) Predictor	Criterion	$\beta$	$R^2$
ECR Anxiety	Marital Satisfaction	-0.39***	0.17
ECR Avoidance	Marital Satisfaction	-0.43***	0.22

\* $p = .05$ , \*\* $p = .01$ , \*\*\* = 0.001

**Table 3:** Simple Regressions for Attachment Style and Marital Satisfaction in husbands

Whole sample (n = 240) Predictor	Criterion	$\beta$	$R^2$
ECR Anxiety	Marital Satisfaction	-0.28***	0.08
ECR Avoidance	Marital Satisfaction	-0.35***	0.11

\* $p = .05$ , \*\* $p = .01$ , \*\*\* = 0.001

**Table 4:** Simple Regressions for Attachment Style and Marital Satisfaction in wives

Whole sample (n = 240) Predictor	Criterion	$\beta$	$R^2$
ECR Anxiety	Marital Satisfaction	-0.36***	0.12
ECR Avoidance	Marital Satisfaction	-0.49***	0.16

\* $p = .05$ , \*\* $p = .01$ , \*\*\* = 0.001

## DISCUSSION

Using a co relational research design, this study examined the perceived need for understanding the relationship between individual's attachment dimensions of anxiety and avoidance with marital satisfaction in married men and women.

In order to further exploration, the relationships between the variables of interest, exploratory analyses were conducted. Simple regression method with simultaneous entry method of variables was used to test the first hypothesis of the present research suggesting that "An individual's attachment dimensions of anxiety and avoidance are inversely correlated with marital satisfaction" and two components of anxiety and avoidance for attachment were considered as predictor variables to define dependent variable of marital satisfaction. The results of above tables showed that coefficient of determination is  $R^2=0.389$ , namely component of attachment styles has been able to explain marital satisfaction up to 38.9%, and the results of one-way variance analysis showed that the obtained amount of  $F=67.35$  is significant in the level of  $p<0.001$ .

This finding is consistent with previous findings from research examining the relationship between these two variables.

Also, simple regression method with simultaneous entry method of variables was used to testing the second hypothesis of the present research suggesting that "There will be difference on marital satisfaction between individual's attachment dimensions of anxiety and avoidance in male participants" and two components of anxiety and avoidance for attachment were considered as predictor variables to define dependent variable of marital satisfaction in male participants. The results of above tables showed that coefficient of determination is  $R^2=0.203$ , namely component of attachment styles has been able to explain marital satisfaction up to 20.3%, and the results of one-way variance analysis showed that the obtained amount of  $F=67.35$  is significant in the level of  $p<0.001$ .

This finding is consistent with previous findings from research examining the relationship between these two variables.

Also, simple regression method with simultaneous entry method of variables was used to testing the third hypothesis of the present research suggesting that "There will be difference on marital satisfaction between individual's attachment dimensions of anxiety and avoidance in female participants" and two components of anxiety and avoidance for attachment were considered as predictor variables to define dependent variable of marital satisfaction in female participants. The results of above tables showed that

coefficient of determination is  $R^2=0.351$ , namely component of attachment styles has been able to explain marital satisfaction up to 35.1%, and the results of one-way variance analysis showed that the obtained amount of  $F=67.35$  is significant in the level of  $p<0.001$ .

This finding is consistent with previous findings from research examining the relationship between these two variables.

Because of the support in the literature for the hypotheses, there is reason to believe that future researchers may find different results if the present study was replicated with a different sample.

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