

The Role of Self-Compassion Factors in Predicting the Marital Satisfaction of Staff at Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences

Parisa Janjani (1,2)
Lida Haghazari (3)
Farahnaz Keshavarzi (4)
Alireza Rai (1)

(1) Department of Cardiology, School of Medicine, Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences, Kermanshah, Iran

(2) PhD Student of Psychology, College of Social Sciences, Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran

(3) Department of Clinical Biochemistry, Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences, Kermanshah, Iran

(4) Department of obstetrics and gynecology, Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences, Kermanshah, Iran

Correspondence

Lida Haghazari,
Department of Clinical Biochemistry,
Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences, Kermanshah, Iran
Email: Lida-Haghazari@yahoo.com

Abstract

Introduction: Marital satisfaction is one of the effective factors in job satisfaction. Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate the role of self-compassion factors in predicting the marital satisfaction of staff at Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences.

Material and Methods: In this descriptive, correlational and analytical study, the statistical population consisted of all staff at Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences, of which 280 staff (140 males and 140 females) were selected from both morning and evening shifts through convenience sampling according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Further, for data collection, a demographic questionnaire, the Enrich marital satisfaction scale and Neff self-compassion scale were utilized. Then data were analyzed through the descriptive and inferential statistics in the SPSS Statistics Software Version 21.0.

Results: The results of the present study revealed that marital satisfaction correlated with self-kindness (0.89), common humanity and mindfulness (0.89), isolation (-0.85) and over-identified items (-0.42) ($p < 0.01$). The results of regression analysis also demonstrated that the items of self-kindness ($\beta = 0.89$), common humanity and mindfulness ($\beta = 0.45$) and isolation ($\beta = 0.37$) could predict marital satisfaction, while the over-identified items could not ($\beta = 0.04$).

Conclusion: Some effective steps can be taken towards improving marital satisfaction among staff using the results of studies and their application in relations between spouses, thereby resulting in satisfaction with life, improved quality of life, and job satisfaction.

Key words: marital satisfaction, Self-Compassion, University of Medical Sciences, Kermanshah

Introduction

Family has been introduced as a social institution or entity ensuing from the matrimonial bond between men and women. The presence of healthy and constructive interaction between humans and expressing love and intimacy to each other are the manifestations of social life. One's satisfaction with matrimonial life is regarded as one's satisfaction with family. On the other hand, one's satisfaction with family is regarded as one's satisfaction with life, thereby facilitating the growth and development of material and spiritual progress of societies. Moreover, marital relationship has been described as the most important and most fundamental human relationship since it provides a basic structure for building familial bonds and training next generations (1). Marital satisfaction is a major and intricate aspect of matrimonial relationships, that is, one of the vital aspects of marital satisfaction is the one experienced and felt by couples (2). The term 'marital satisfaction' denotes one's overall happiness and satisfaction with matrimonial life. Further, satisfied couples are normally in agreement, are satisfied with the type and level of their relationships and leisure time, and exercise good management in terms of time and financial issues (3).

On the other hand, self-compassion is related with self-kindness and common humanity and mindfulness, but it does not mean self-centeredness or preference of one's needs over other's (4). Having a compassionate attitude towards oneself, which balances one's mental outlook, is called 'mindfulness (5, 6). Mindfulness denotes one's non-judgmental and receptive attitudes towards oneself, so that one's thoughts and feelings are regarded in a way that there will be no need for them to be altered or excluded. In order for a person to experience self-compassion, it is necessary that he/she keeps his/her conscious mind in perspective. In other words, painful experiences are to be avoided because it is necessary for understanding one's feelings towards self-compassion (7). Neff (2011) proposed the structure of self-compassion in the form of self-acceptance health (4). Self-compassion, a loving and receptive stance towards one's undesirable aspects and life, encompasses three main components: self-kindness and one's understanding of difficulties, or in the event of inadequacies. Self-compassion has some shared human features in which sufferings and failures are the inevitable aspects of common human experiences. Furthermore, self-compassion encompasses balanced awareness of one's feelings. i.e. the ability to face painful thoughts and feelings instead of avoiding them without exaggeration or feeling pity for oneself (8). Not only does self-compassion protect one against negative psychological states, it also plays a vital role in positive emotional states. For instance, self-compassion correlates with feelings such as social bonds and life satisfaction (9, 7). Additionally, self-compassion helps with meeting basic needs of autonomy, competence and the need to communicate which are essential for human well-being based on the theory of Desai et al (2002)(10) and this attitude is related to many positive psychological consequences such as stronger

incentives for coping with personal and inter-personal conflicts, constructive problem solving and the stability of married life (11). The results of other studies have also indicated that self-judgment, isolation and mindfulness are directly related to reduced married life satisfaction and marriage instability (12). Neff & Beretvas (2013) found out that not only did self-compassion make people happier and healthier, it was also a good predictor of improving romantic relationships, thereby leading to the marital satisfaction of couples. Although the effects of self-compassion on personal performance have been addressed in some studies (Neff, 2009), very few studies have dealt with the role of self-compassion in inter-personal relationships and marital satisfaction (13, 14). On the other hand, in today's complex world, marital satisfaction and job satisfaction are seen as two important factors in human life, which are inextricably intertwined. Furthermore, the employees at medical universities, as custodians of improving health from the dimensions of physical, mental, improving quality and life satisfaction, have a special place. Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate the role of self-compassion factors in predicting the marital satisfaction of staff at Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences.

Materials and Methods

In this descriptive, correlational and analytical study, the statistical population consisted of all staff at Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences, of which 280 staff (140 males and 140 females) were selected from both morning and evening shifts through convenience sampling according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Further, for data collection, a demographic questionnaire, the Enrich marital satisfaction scale and Neff Self-compassion scale (Neff, 2003) were utilized (9).

Enrich Marital Satisfaction Scale (Short-Form): This 115-item scale was developed by Olson, Derankman and Forni (1978, 1987). Soleymanian (1994) provided a short form of the questionnaire with 47 questions whose reliability was calculated by a panel of 11 experts through Alpha coefficient ($\alpha=0.95$), and this 47-item scale was employed in the present study (15). The reliability of this questionnaire was reported 0.95 by Olson (1989) and Soleymanian (1994) (Hamidi, 2007)(16, 15, 17). Sanaei (2008) expressed that the Alpha coefficients for the items of this questionnaire were as follows: marital satisfaction (0.9), personality issues (0.81), couple closeness (0.72), conflict resolution (0.68), financial management (0.75), leisure activities (0.74), sexual relationship (0.76), children and parenting (0.48), and equality between men and women (0.72)(18). Moreover, the reliability of this scale was measured 0.95 in a study done by Alidadi Thaeem et al (2014)(19).

Self-Compassion Scale (SCS): This 26-item self-reporting instrument was developed and validated by Kristin Neff (2003a) to measure self-compassion. This scale consists of six subscales: self-kindness (five items), self-judgment (five items), common humanity (four items), isolation (four items), mindfulness (four items), over-

identified (four items). The results of studies performed by Kristin Neff (2003a) on a sample of 391 university students were indicative of the high reliability and validity of this scale. Moreover, the internal consistency of the scale was calculated by Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha=0.92$ for the whole scale)(9). Also, Cronbach's alpha for the subscales was as follows: self-kindness (0.78), self-judgment (0.77), common humanity (0.80), isolation (0.79), mindfulness (0.75), over-identified (0.81). Two weeks after the tests, the subjects were retested, and the test-retest reliability measured 0.93. In addition, to examine the convergent validity, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) was utilized which measured 0.59. To calculate the discriminant validity or divergent validity, the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) was employed, and no significant correlation was found between the two scales, an indication of its high discriminant validity. The concurrent validity was assessed through Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) and Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), and the results were indicative of good validity. In a study conducted by Momeni & et al (2013), four factors (common humanity and mindfulness, self-kindness, isolation, and over-identified) were extracted from the questionnaire, and the internal consistency of the scale was examined through Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha=0.70$ for the whole scale)(20). Additionally, Cronbach's alpha for the subscales were as follows: common humanity and mindfulness (0.71), self-kindness (0.75), isolation (0.72), and over-identified (0.65). Furthermore, the reliability of the whole questionnaire measured 0.72 in the present study. Then data were analyzed through the descriptive and inferential statistics in SPSS Statistics Software Version 21.0.

To commence the study, the Kermanshah-based hospitals were visited, the objectives of the study were explained to the employees of Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences, and then the questionnaires were distributed to them. According to the inclusion criteria, 280 employees were included in the study, and those who were unwilling to participate in the study as well as those who were suffering from physical diseases (heart disease, sexual disorders, etc.) were excluded from the study, and their questionnaires were given to others. To this end, the target subjects were assured that their information would be kept confidential.

Results

Of the total of 280 subjects of the present study, 140 students (50%) were male and 140 (50%) were female. The average age of the subjects was 33.41 ± 6.59 , and in terms of education, the majority of students were studying B.A. (165 or 59%), 101 subjects were doing M.A. (35.6%), and there were 14 Ph.D. students (5.3%). In addition, the majority of participants had incomes between 8000,000 Rial and 15,000,000 Rial (110 or 39.5%), and those with incomes lower than 8000,000 Rial accounted for 4.8% (14 subjects). Moreover, the majority of subjects had been married for nearly one year (47 subjects or 16.8%), and most of them had one child (101 subjects or 35.9%). Also, the spouses of the majority of subjects were clerks

(157 subject or 56.3%) and had university education (198 subjects or 70.7%).

As shown in Table 1, the mean score and standard deviation of marital satisfaction were 118.87 and 19.81, an indication that the status of the marital satisfaction of the employees of Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences was average. Further, the mean score and standard deviation of self-Compassion measured 51.52 and 21.76, indicating that the status of this feature was above average (see Table 1).

The results of Table 2 showed that there were correlations between marital satisfaction and each of self-kindness (0.89), common humanity and mindfulness (0.89), isolation (-0.85), and over-identified items (-0.42). This result was indicative of the significant relationship between the variables ($p<0.01$). The results of the correlation coefficient of self-compassion with marital satisfaction are shown in Table 2.

The results of Table 3 shows that $f=66.47$, and this value is significant at 0.0001, and the items of self-compassion can predict Marital Satisfaction

The results of regression analysis demonstrated that the factors of self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness and isolation could predict marital satisfaction with β coefficients of 0.89, 0.45, and -0.37, respectively. However, over-identified items could not predict marital satisfaction ($\beta=0.04$) (see Table 4).

Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the role of self-compassion factors in predicting the marital satisfaction of staff at Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences. The findings of the present study demonstrated that marital satisfaction positively correlated with self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness and isolation, while marital satisfaction and over-identified items were negatively related. Further, self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness, isolation and over-identified items could predict marital satisfaction. This finding was consistent with the results of studies conducted by Neff & Beretvas (2013), Baker & McNulty (2011), Yarnell & Neff (2013), and Ghezelsefloo, Jazayeri, Bahrami, and Mohammadi. (2016)(13, 11, 21, 22). To further explicate this finding, it can be expressed that self-compassion is accompanied by senses of originality, happiness, and value, and those with this feature are able to express themselves in their romantic relationships. Neff & Beretvas (2013) showed that there was a relationship between self-kindness and showing kindness to partners, and they also found out that the higher one's self-compassion would be, the higher the possibly for his/her spouse to consider him/her a protector (kind and affectionate, warm, and considerate) (13). The self-compassionate ones are able to have intimate relationships with others, thereby providing their spouses with more autonomy and independence (23). Additionally, the self-compassionate people see themselves as ones

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation of Variables in the Sample under Study

Variables		Min.	Max.	Mean	STDEV
Self-Compassion	The Total Score of Marital Satisfaction	47	235	118.87	19.81
	Common Humanity and Mindfulness	7	35	19.17	7.10
	Self-kindness	5	25	11.06	7.02
	Isolation	4	20	10.57	4.52
	Over-identified Items	4	20	12.74	5.03
	The Total Score of Self-Compassion	20	100	51.52	21.76

Table 2: The Correlation Coefficient of Self-compassion with Marital Satisfaction

Variable	Self-compassion								Total score	
	Self-kindness		Common Humanity and Mindfulness		Isolation		Over-identified Items		Correlation	Sig.
	Correlation	Sig.	Correlation	Sig.	Correlation	Sig.	Correlation	Sig.		
Marital Satisfaction	0.000	0.89	0.000	0.89	0.000	-0.85	0.000	-0.42	0.95	0.000

Table 3. The Results of Regression Analysis for Predicting Marital Satisfaction Based on the Items of Self-Compassion

Sources	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	f	R	R ²	Sig.
Regression	3739.19	1	66.47	66.47	0.89	0.80	0.0001
Remaining	91179.78	162	56.838				
Total	46517.97	163					

Table 4. The Regression Coefficients for the Prediction of Marital Satisfaction Based on the Components of Self-Compassion

Predictor Variables	B	β	t	Sig.
Self-kindness	6.81	0.89	25.77	0.0001
Common Humanity and Mindfulness	3.41	0.45	5.05	0.0001
Isolation	4.44	-0.37	8	0.0001
Over-Identified Items	0.44	-0.04	1.34	0.18

with defects, are aware of and accept their defects, can accept the limitations and defects of their spouses, and eventually have higher marital satisfaction (13). Breines & Chen (2012) showed that when the conflicts of self-compassionate people with their spouses were resolved, their self-confidence and sense of well-being would rise, while they would experience less distress in their relations, apologize to their spouses and improve the traumatic aspects of their relationships (24). On the other hand, the results of other studies have shown that the ones without self-compassion show more verbal aggression to their spouses, thereby overreacting in the event of anger or conflicts with their spouses with the aim of stabilizing their negative emotions (25, 9). Ryan and Desy (2000) were quoted by Neff & Beretvas (2013) as saying that the emotional flexibility

and balance developed by self-compassion would make one show a more constructive response, thereby resulting in the growth of cognitive health in interpersonal relations, and since self-compassion requires one's conscious awareness of emotions, he/she would avoid painful and uncomfortable feelings and approach them with kindness, understanding and common humanity, and eventually change negative emotion into pleasant states and positive emotions (26). Additionally, the results of the present study demonstrated that marital satisfaction correlated with common humanity and mindfulness. This result was concurrent with the results of studies conducted by Walsh et al, (2009) and Gambrel and Keeling, (2010) (27,28). To further explain this part, it can be expressed that self-compassionate people are more conscious

about their thoughts, feelings, and strengths and weaknesses of their married lives. As a result, according to Burpee & Langer (2005), this awareness creates a conceptual harmony for couples resulting in marital satisfaction (29). Ryan and Desey (2000) expressed that mindfulness helps one modify one's negative behavior patterns and automatic thoughts and adjust positive behaviors related to health (30). In other words, mindfulness can cause positive changes in one's happiness, wellbeing and satisfaction with life through combining liveliness and experience. The people with high levels of mindfulness develop constantly dynamic and flexible environments in their lives due to time management and no fear of changes, and these dynamic and flexible environments prevent the growth of chronic conflicts and long-term psychological and emotional distances between couples (29). Other results indicated that there was a negative relationship between isolation and marital satisfaction. In other words, the more isolated a person, the lower his/her marital satisfaction will be. To further explicate the matter, it can be expressed that one of the effective factors in marital satisfaction is communication patterns among couples, so that a healthy and constructive communication pattern is regarded as a major factor in marital satisfaction (31). Also, the type of interactions between couples within the living environment has a direct relationship with their happiness or misery. Couples who experience deep, reasonable, friendly and intimate emotional relationships are usually successful, positive and happy people. Conversely, couples without good emotional relationships are isolated, bad-tempered, have low adaptability in society, and feel miserable (32).

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