

Development of an Emotional Divorce Model in Women Using Happiness, Religious Attitude, and Marital Satisfaction

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ARTICLE INFO

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Article History:

Received: 04 Sep 2023

Revised: 01 Nov 2023

Accepted: 12 Nov 2023

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Citation:

Shakeri S, Moarefi GhR, Farahani S, Khaksari Z. Development of an Emotional Divorce Model in Iranian Muslim Women Using Happiness, Religious Attitude, and Marital Satisfaction. *Journal of Social Behavior and Community Health (JSBCH)*. 2023; 7(2): 1206-1216.

ABSTRACT

Background: This study aimed to elucidate a model of emotional divorce in Iranian Muslim women, based on factors such as happiness, religious attitude, and marital satisfaction.

Methods: This research employed an applied approach with a descriptive-correlational design. The research sample comprised 337 married Muslim women of Yazd in 2021, selected using convenience sampling. In the model developed, the variables included happiness and religious attitude (exogenous variables), marital satisfaction (endogenous mediator variable), and emotional divorce (endogenous variable). Participants completed a demographic questionnaire, the Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI), Gutman's Emotional Divorce Questionnaire (GEDQ), the Religion Assessment Questionnaire (RAQ), and the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMSS). Data analysis was performed using SPSS-21 and LISREL-8.80 software. The Sobel test was also utilized to explore the mediating role of marital satisfaction.

Results: The findings revealed that happiness has a direct and significant impact on marital satisfaction. Happiness, religious attitude, and marital satisfaction all exhibited significant and direct effects on emotional divorce ($p < 0.05$). Additionally, happiness, through its influence on marital satisfaction, was found to affect the emotional divorce of women.

Conclusion: It can be inferred that higher levels of happiness in women are associated with increased marital satisfaction. Moreover, greater happiness and marital satisfaction in women correspond to a reduced likelihood of experiencing emotional divorce in the future.

Keywords: Happiness, Religious Attitude, Marital Satisfaction, Emotional Divorce, Women.

Introduction

The family is considered the earliest and most fundamental social institution, holding a significant place in social analysis (Asay et al., 2016). While conflicts and differences are typical in couples, if these factors escalate, they can have devastating consequences on the family foundation and the mental well-being of each family member (Molgora et al., 2018). Emotional divorce, for instance, signifies a deteriorating relationship and is often the first step toward formal divorce, creating a sense of alienation between the couple. In such cases, couples may continue to coexist, but the trust and attraction between them diminish (Nikoogoftar, 2021). Emotional divorce is characterized as a psychological mechanism that couples use when they feel their marriage has lost its purpose, and their well-being is compromised. It allows them to separate their emotions and feelings from their spouse and the normal course of life (Mahoney et al., 1999). Consequently, rather than supporting one another, couples move towards failure, harassment, and damaging each other's self-esteem and personality, using every opportunity to find fault in and reject their partner (Jasa Silveira, 2016). To date, there is no official estimate of the rate of emotional divorce provided by responsible organizations in Iran, but some sources suggest that the rate of emotional divorce is twice that of legal divorce (Hajiani et al., Yazdani, 2013). In the past, emotional divorce and its consequences were less recognized, and instances of emotional divorce were fewer than today (Samak et al., 2016).

One of the primary reasons for emotional divorce in any society can be attributed to problems stemming from emotional communication and a lack of marital satisfaction among couples (Borhanizad & Abdi, 2017; Nikoogoftar, 2021). According to Sadeghi Mazji and Saemi (2017), marital satisfaction is a personal experience for each couple, influenced by individual expectations, needs, and desires in marriage, and assessed by the level of joy and happiness in life. As such, a contented marital relationship is regarded as one of the most

significant determinants of the quality of life and life expectancy between couples (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Sepehrian-Azar & Sorbi, 2018). Happiness, on the other hand, represents a positive emotional state associated with pleasure, contentment, and joy, expressed through positive beliefs and emotions about life. Happiness essentially reflects a positive and gratifying outlook on life (Heiman et al., 2011; Valizadeh & Keramat, 2019). Research indicates that successful marriages lead to happiness and a positive emotional state, as marital satisfaction is a positive and gratifying attitude couples acquire from successful marital relationships (Cohn et al., 2009; Heiman et al., 2011). In a study aimed at identifying the impact of emotional divorce and its relationship with psychological hardiness in a sample of married female students at Yarmok University, the results indicated that the level of emotional divorce among married female students was low, and the level of psychological hardiness among them was high. Additionally, there was a statistically negative relationship between emotional divorce and psychological hardiness among them (Jarwan & Al-frehat, 2020).

In this context, some researchers suggest that religious beliefs can significantly influence family cohesion and marital satisfaction. This is because religious values impact how couples perceive the purpose of marriage and the level of commitment from each partner (Khodayarifard et al., 2007; Pargament & Mahoney, 2005). Individuals with strong religious values often view their marriage as a spiritually endowed relationship that is safeguarded by God (Rezapour-Mirsaleh et al., 2013). Belief in God gives meaning to one's perspective on the entire universe, and the absence of such belief can diminish one's sense of unity and tranquility, which can contribute to numerous family disputes (Borjali et al., 2018).

Considering that Iranian society is predominantly Muslim and experiences lower levels of happiness, it becomes imperative to explore the influence of religion and happiness on family relationships.

Recognizing the importance of marital satisfaction for achieving success in life, this study endeavors to construct a model of emotional divorce in Iranian Muslim women based on the factors of happiness, religious attitude, and marital satisfaction.

Methods

This study adopts an applied research approach with a descriptive-correlational design, utilizing confirmatory factor analysis and employing the path analysis method through structural equation modeling (SEM). In accordance with the proposed model, the study considers happiness and religious attitude as exogenous variables, marital satisfaction as an endogenous mediating variable, and emotional divorce as another endogenous variable. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS-21 and LISREL-8.80. Additionally, the Sobel test was employed to calculate the effect of the mediating variable of marital satisfaction.

The statistical population for this study encompasses all Muslim women in Iran in 2021. Based on previous research, the required sample size for structural equation modeling research falls within the range of 200 to 400 individuals (Sepehrian-Azar, 2018). Consequently, the study selected a sample of 337 married women in Yazd. While a convenience sampling method was used, (Due to the ease of measurement, cost and time reduction, and greater flexibility, this sampling method has been employed), the inclusion criteria consisted of the following: 1) female gender, 2) being married with a minimum of one year of married life, 3) possessing at least a high school diploma, 4) age falling within the range of 18 to 65 years, 5) being of the Muslim faith, and 6) residing in the cities of Yazd. Exclusion criteria included: 1) failure to complete informed consent and 2) failure to complete the questionnaire.

Initially, with written permission from Shahid Sadoughi University (SSU) of Iran, an internet platform was designed for distributing questionnaires. The web address was shared with women residing in the mentioned cities via virtual networks such as Telegram, Instagram, and

WhatsApp. The online platform employed a coding system instead of using participants' first and last names to ensure anonymity. The research was conducted individually online, where each participant, upon visiting the provided link, received an explanation about the research objectives. They had the option to participate and complete the questionnaires. All participants were assured that their information would remain confidential and be securely stored. Additionally, participants were informed that they could receive the research results upon request.

A- Demographic Form: This questionnaire collected demographic information, including age, religion, marital status, place of residence, level of education, type of marriage, and the number of children.

B- ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMSS): The EMSS, originally developed by Olson, Fournier, and Drakman in 1989, consists of 115 questions and 12 subscales. In this study, a 47-item scale based on the main EMSS was used in Iran. Participants responded on a scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," with scores ranging from 1 to 5. Scores could range from 47 to 235, and individuals with scores below 150 were considered to have some degree of marital incompatibility. The questionnaire demonstrated an internal consistency coefficient using Cronbach's alpha of 0.83 in this study. Three components of Conflict Resolution, Leisure Activities, and Sexual Relationship were included in the model.

C- Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI): The OHI was developed by Hills and Argyle in 1989. It comprises 29 questions rated on a four-point scale from 1 to 4. The score range for this test is between 29 and 116, with higher scores indicating greater happiness. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the OHI was 0.76. Five components were used in the model: Life satisfaction, Joy, Self-esteem, Calm, and Control.

D- Religion Assessment Questionnaire (RAQ): This questionnaire was created in Iran by Sirajzadeh and Poyafar in 2009, based on Glock and Stark's model from 1965. It consists of 26 items assessing

various dimensions of religiosity: Belief, Emotional, Consequence, and Ritual components. Participants responded using a five-point scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," with scores ranging from 1 to 5. The questionnaire demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.86 in this study. All four components of this questionnaire were included in the model.

E- Gutman's Emotional Divorce Questionnaire (GEDQ): Developed by Guttman in 2008, this questionnaire includes 24 statements related to various aspects of life that participants may agree or disagree with, with responses given in a binary "Yes" or "No" format. A higher number of "Yes" responses indicate a greater likelihood of emotional divorce. In Iran, the questionnaire exhibited content validity, and Cronbach's alpha was reported as 0.80. The questionnaire in this study demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.83. Three components, namely Loneliness,

Need for Love, and Boredom, were included in the model.

For the purpose of conducting this study, ethical clearance was acquired from the Ethics Committee of Shahid Sadoughi University of Medical Sciences, Yazd (IR.SSU.SPH.REC.1402.029). The counseling center authorities were briefed on the research objectives, and participants were asked to fill out the questionnaires. Furthermore, participants were assured that their data would be kept confidential.

Results

Participant Characteristics

In this study, the demographic characteristics of 337 married women showed that the mean and standard deviation of age were 31.13 ± 8.79 . The other demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Variables	N	N%
Marital type		
<i>Traditional</i>	145	43
<i>Family</i>	91	27
<i>Romantic</i>	96	28.5
<i>Unknown</i>	5	1.5
Level of education		
<i>Diploma</i>	9	2.7
<i>Bachelor of sciences</i>	208	61.7
<i>Master of sciences</i>	109	33.3
<i>Ph.D.</i>	11	3.3
Number of children		
<i>No child</i>	120	35.6
<i>One child</i>	85	25.2
<i>Two children</i>	77	22.8
<i>Three children and more</i>	55	16.4

As observed, 43% of participant had a traditional marriage and 28.5% had a romantic marriage. Also, 61.7% of them had bachelor's degree and 33.3% had master degree, Table 1.

Correlation matrix between variables

Before examining the causal relationships between research variables, it is necessary to

implement a correlation matrix between the main research variables. Thus, Table 2 presents the mean (M), standard deviation (SD), and Pearson correlation relationships between happiness, religious attitudes, marital satisfaction, and emotional divorce among married women.

Table 2. Mean (M), standard deviations (SD) and correlation matrix of variables (N = 337)

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Happiness	44.47	13.53	-	0.16*	0.28*	-0.41*
2. Religious attitude	22.48	4.13		-	0.05	-0.03
3. Marital satisfaction	164.70	28.05			-	-0.55*
4. Emotional divorce	5.55	5.89				-

* P < 0.01

As can be seen, in most cases there is a significant correlation between the four main variables of the research ($p < 0.01$), Table 2.

Variable measuring models of the research

In the next stage, the measurement model will be presented to examine the hypotheses and the conceptual model. Each equation includes the path

coefficient between the observed variable and the hidden variable, the measurement error of the unobserved variable, a significance test based on t-value, and the value of R^2 ; that is, the determination coefficient or the ratio of variance is explained by the hidden variable in Table 3.

Table 3. Results of confirmatory factor analysis for variables

Variables	Observed Variables	Estimates	t-value	R^2	Error
Happiness	Life satisfaction	3.51	20.99	0.81	0.17
	Joy	3.38	20.52	0.79	0.16
	Self-esteem	2.80	20.03	0.77	0.14
	Calm	1.28	14.05	0.47	0.09
	Control	2.08	17.20	0.63	0.12
Religious attitude	Belief	4.31	17.84	0.71	0.24
	Emotional	3.18	19.43	0.80	0.16
	Consequence	2.87	13.61	0.47	0.21
	Ritual	2.29	10.44	0.31	0.22
Marital satisfaction	Conflict Resolution	3.56	-	0.74	-
	Leisure Activities	2.79	14.17	0.58	0.20
	Sexual Relationship	1.43	12.58	0.46	0.11
Emotional divorce	Loneliness	1.10	-	0.58	-
	Need for love	1.00	12.83	0.58	0.08
	Boredom	0.57	13.38	0.65	0.04

All variables had a greater t-value than 1.96. Also, the value of their determination coefficient was appropriate; therefore, none of the items were removed from the model and the analysis was continued (Table 3).

Model measuring confirmation

In general, in working with the LISREL program, each of the obtained criteria for this model is not the only reason for the model's fit or non-fit; rather, these indicators should be interpreted together. There are several fitting

criteria for evaluating a model. Initially, the values were $df = 98$ and $Chi\text{-square} = 196.61$. The ratio of $Chi\text{-square}$ to df was 2.34 and less than 3, which is a good value. The low value of this index indicates a small difference between the conceptual model of the research and the observed data. Also, the value of RMSEA is 0.063 and less than 0.08. In addition to χ^2 , the lower the RMSEA index, the better the fitting of the model. In addition, the following indicators are all greater than 0.9: Goodness of Fit Index (GFI = 0.93), Adjusted

Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI = 0.90), Normed Fit Index (NFI = 0.96), Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI = 0.97), Parsimony Normed Fit Index (PNFI = 0.76), Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.97), Incremental Fit Index (IFI = 0.97) and Relative Fit Index (RFI = 0.94); therefore, the model has shown a good fit and it was confirmed.

Structural model of research (path analysis)

After performing the confirmatory factor analysis, in this section, the research hypothesis was tested by performing structural analyzes. To test the research hypotheses, the structural equation model was used (Table 4) and its results are shown in Figure 1.

Table 4. Summary of standardized and determination coefficients, t-values, and results

Paths	Standardized Solution	t-value	Error	R ²	Results
OHI → EMSS	0.54	9.14	0.059	0.30	Confirm
RAQ → EMSS	0.05	0.81	0.056		Reject
OHI → GEDQ	-0.16	-2.39	0.065	0.47	Confirm
RAQ → GEDQ	0.17	3.18	0.054		Confirm
EMSS → GEDQ	-0.58	-7.47	0.077		Confirm
OHI → EMSS → GEDQ*	0.63	5.89	0.053	0.40	Confirm

Abbreviations: OHI, Oxford Happiness Inventory; RAQ, Religion Assessment Questionnaire; EMSS, ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale; GEDQ, Gutman's Emotional Divorce Questionnaire

* Sobel test

The determination coefficient for marital satisfaction is estimated to be 0.30 and shows that happiness and religious attitude as a whole have been able to predict 30% of changes in marital satisfaction. Considering the value of standard coefficient and t value, it can be said that the effect of happiness on marital satisfaction was significant and religious attitude did not have a significant effect on this variable. Further, it can be said that 47% of the changes in emotional divorce are explained by happiness, religious attitude and marital satisfaction and according to the value of standard coefficient and t value, it can be said that the effect of happiness, religious attitude and marital satisfaction on emotional divorce was significant. Also, t value of Sobel test (5.89) and

significance level (0.001) are less than 0.01. Therefore, it can be said that happiness is directly related to emotional divorce and through marital satisfaction can also have an indirect effect on emotional divorce. Therefore, marital satisfaction plays a mediating role in this path and its indirect effect was 0.63, Table 4.

Only in the standard estimation mode is it possible to compare the observed variables explaining the hidden variable, and the model in the standard mode indicates how much of the variance of the hidden variable is explained by the observed variable. The standard coefficients of the research model and the t value of each path are summarized in the table below (Figure 1).

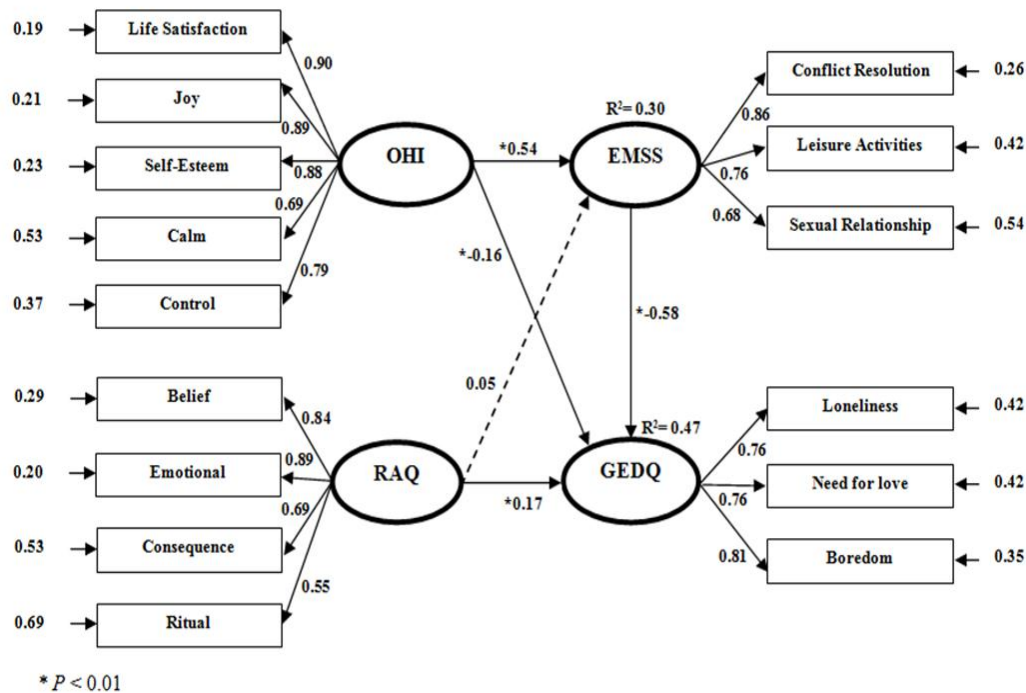


Figure 1. The structural equation model on the relationship among happiness, religion attitude, marital satisfaction and emotional divorce.

Discussion

This study developed a model of emotional divorce based on the levels of happiness, religious attitudes, and marital satisfaction in Muslim women. First, the results indicated a significant direct relationship between happiness and marital satisfaction. This implies that women with higher levels of happiness experience greater marital satisfaction. Additionally, a significant negative relationship was observed between happiness and emotional divorce. This suggests that the happier Muslim women are, the less likely they are to experience emotional divorce. These results are consistent with previous research. For instance, Flowers and Olson (1993) in Florida argued that there is a positive and significant relationship between happiness and marital satisfaction.

Valizadeh and Keramat (2019), in a systematic review and meta-analysis study conducted from 2009 to 2017 in Iran, demonstrated that all the studies found a significant positive relationship between marital satisfaction and happiness. This implies that the happier individuals are, the higher their marital satisfaction tends to be. It can be

argued that as happiness increases in life, positive emotions between couples also increase, leading them to perceive problems as positive phenomena. Consequently, through a healthy relationship rooted in positive emotions, they resolve issues between themselves and enhance marital satisfaction, thereby reducing emotional and legal divorces.

Moreover, it was noted that there was no significant relationship between religious attitudes and marital satisfaction. However, a significant direct relationship was found between religious attitudes and emotional divorce. This means that women with stronger religious attitudes are more likely to experience emotional divorce. These findings are in line with certain studies. For example, Fouji and Naderi (2016) showed a negative relationship between intrinsic religious beliefs and emotional divorce among female clients. Furthermore, intrinsic religious beliefs and social skills, respectively, predicted emotional divorce among female clients seeking counseling services to address life problems. Hunler and Gençöz (2005) also revealed in their research on

Turkish couples that religiosity has a significant impact on marital satisfaction, but it cannot necessarily resolve marital issues among couples. Satisfaction with life is the foundation of family strength and ensures individual and marital well-being. One of the ways to increase this satisfaction is to educate people about having a religious and spiritual attitude. A religious attitude is influential in preparing couples for marriage and is a suitable intervention for counseling couples facing issues in marriage and family. This intervention is designed to prevent or reduce distress and divorce in all types of marriages, regardless of their religion, race, or generation. However, marital counselors and therapists should not assume that being religious can protect couples from a decrease in satisfaction or divorce. Instead, couples should enhance their marital satisfaction by playing their religious and emotional intimacy roles (Bahnanu et al., 2019).

However, the results are inconsistent with other studies. For instance, Khodayfard et al. (2007) demonstrated a positive and significant relationship between religious attitude and marital satisfaction. Accordingly, religious beliefs can serve as a crucial factor in reducing the occurrence of marital conflicts and disputes. Call and Heaton (1997) reported that, among various dimensions of religiosity, attending church services is most closely related to marital stability, and differences between couples regarding church attendance increase the risk of separation. Additionally, couples who regularly attend church have the lowest risk of divorce. Khaleghi & Yazdkhasti (2013) found that religious attitude and moral commitment can significantly predict the likelihood of divorce in couples. Consequently, individuals with higher levels of religious attitude and moral commitment are less inclined to seek divorce. Religious attitude and moral commitment can also be regarded as two essential and foundational components in maintaining the stability of marital relationships.

Furthermore, it can be suggested that the increased awareness within Iranian society of

contemporary issues and the diminishing role of religious factors have led to a reduced emphasis on strengthening the family through religious attitudes. This is because religious attitudes and guidance no longer appear to have a substantial impact on mitigating marital problems and enhancing the emotional and marital satisfaction of couples. Therefore, it is essential to employ counseling methods to enhance life satisfaction and reduce divorce rates. The results indicated that marital satisfaction acted as a mediator between happiness and emotional divorce. In other words, the happier Muslim women are, the higher their marital satisfaction and the lower their likelihood of experiencing emotional divorce. These findings align with other research. For example, Nikoogoftar (2021) reported that intimacy between couples plays a mediating role in the connection between marital conflicts and emotional divorce, with approximately 32% of emotional divorces in Iran attributed to marital conflicts and decreased intimacy among couples. Rogers & DeBoer (2001) revealed that increasing the income of married women may indirectly boost their marital satisfaction and decrease the risk of divorce.

As the topic of emotional divorce pertains to the quality of couples' concealed relationships, one of the limitations of this study was women's cautious attitudes when responding to questions about the private aspects of their lives. The study's cross-sectional nature, convenience sampling and the use of self-report questionnaires represent other limitations. Consequently, it is recommended that future research investigate emotional divorce using qualitative, interventionist, and prospective research approaches through interviews and clinical observations. Finally, given the lack of a significant impact of religious attitude on marital satisfaction and its negative association with emotional divorce, it is advisable for psychologists and counselors to employ novel family therapy methods to raise awareness and enhance marital satisfaction among Iranian women, ultimately reducing the rate of emotional divorce.

Conclusion

The results showed that women who are happier have higher marital satisfaction. Also, more happiness in women will be associated with less emotional divorce. However, having a high religious attitude among women is also associated with an increase in emotional divorce. On the other hand, marital satisfaction plays a mediating role between happiness and emotional divorce; this means that the happier women are, the more marital satisfaction and the less emotional divorce they will have.

Acknowledgment

The authors of this paper would like to express their gratitude to all the esteemed authorities at Shahid Sadoughi University of Medical Sciences, as well as the participants who helped the researchers in the data collection process.

Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

Funding

This paper was done with the financial support of Shahid Sadoughi University of Medical Sciences, Yazd.

Ethical Considerations

For the purpose of conducting this study, ethical clearance was acquired from the Ethics Committee of Shahid Sadoughi University of Medical Sciences, Yazd. The counseling center authorities were briefed on the research objectives, and participants were asked to fill out the questionnaires. Furthermore, participants were assured that their data would be kept confidential.

Code of Ethics

IR.SSU.SPH.REC.1402.029

Author's Contributions

Z. K and S. S, contributed to performing all data analyses; G. R. M, contributed data analysis tools; S. F and S. S, contributed to creating the design of the study; S. S, data analyses and writing the manuscript; they should be regarded as the corresponding authors. All authors read and

approved the final manuscript.

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