

Association of Views about Marriage with Marital Satisfaction in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Introduction: Despite numerous studies on marriage, there is still a lack of research focusing on the relationship between views about marriage and marital satisfaction, highlighting a knowledge gap in this field. **Objective:** The aimed to investigate the relationship between views about marriage and marital satisfaction. **Methods:** This study a correlational design. A total of 187 participants were selected using a random sampling technique. Self-report data were collected using a questionnaire. Data was analyzed using hierarchical multiple linear regression techniques. **Results:** Findings showed that views on marriage (i.e., marital context, marital process, marital permanence, and marital salience) were positively associated with marital satisfaction. The study also revealed that marital salience and marital permanence positively predict marital satisfaction. This study has marital implications. **Conclusion:**The study concludes that one's views on marriage, particularly the permanence of marriage and its importance, play a crucial role in enhancing marital satisfaction. Limitations and future directions were also discussed.

Keywords: views, marital salience, marital permanence, marital context, marital satisfaction

Introduction

Marital satisfaction has been one of the most intriguing areas of research among scholars. It is well-documented that the psychological health of both individuals and families depends on marital satisfaction^{1,2}. Healthy marriage not only contributes to healthy behaviors^{3,4} but also leads to high marital quality and stability⁵. However, modern marriage is accompanied by various challenges^{6,7}. It is believed that the experience of satisfying marital relationships has been linked to one's view of marriage^{8,9}. Various views of marriage, including the notions of marital permanence, marital context, marital salience, and timing, have been associated with the overall outcome of marriages¹⁰⁻¹⁴. Despite some efforts, there is still a lack of studies on the relationship between views about marriage and marital satisfaction^{9,15}. Modern marriage is further complicated by social and cultural changes, such as the prioritization of individual goals¹⁶ and shifts in gender role expectations¹⁷, which contribute to marital dissatisfaction. Marital satisfaction refers to one's evaluation of marital quality⁵.

Studies have documented that individuals' views on marriage play a crucial role in shaping their thoughts and actions in marital relationships⁸. Views about marriage refer to a collective belief system regarding marriage¹⁵. There is a consensus in the literature that the meaning individuals assign to marriage as an institution will have diverse impacts on their daily behavior. For instance, individuals' views on marriage can influence their level of commitment, the effort they put into their relationships⁹, and their decisions to start or end relationships¹⁸. Moreover, Anderson et al. (2010) theorized that holding positive views about the relationship before marriage is likely to contribute to starting a relationship with a higher level of marital happiness and maintaining it even after marriage. Particularly, views related to marriage, such as marital salience and the belief in the lasting nature of marriage, were associated with a high level of commitment to the marital relationship²⁰. However, few have examined the association between views on marriage and marital satisfaction. Even most of those related studies were from the Western^{8,9}. Among numerous studies related to marital relationships conducted in Ethiopia^{21,22}, none of them has examined the association between views about marriage and marital satisfaction. Therefore, the main focus of the present study was to examine the association between views on marriage (i.e., marital process, marital context, marital permanence, and marital salience), and marital satisfaction in Addis Ababa.

The present study not only fills these gaps but also have the following significance. First, it adds to the existing literature and by elucidating marital satisfaction. Second, this study can contribute to the Marital Paradigm Theory (MPT) by exploring how different types of marital views (i.e., marital process, marital context, marital permanence, and marital salience) influence marital satisfaction. Overall, given the contribution of a satisfactory marital relationship, it is crucial to study marital views related to marital satisfaction.

Literature review

Views about marriage and marital satisfaction

According to Marital Paradigm Theory (MPT), individuals hold distinct views about marital relationships. These marital views encompass marital salience, marital process, marital permanence, marital timing, marital centrality, and marital context. These dimensions collectively form individuals' ideology about marriage, which subsequently influence their perspectives on marriage¹⁵. Scholars have also discussed that individuals' views about marriage play a vital role in influencing a variety of relationship behaviors^{23,24}. Moreover, views on marriage also play an influential role in determining the outcomes of marital relationships¹⁰. For instance, positive views about marriage are linked to greater levels of relationship satisfaction and well-being⁹. However, negative views about marriage can lead to marital instability and dissatisfaction⁸. Some of the views related to marriage and their role in marital outcomes are outlined below.

Marital process

One of the important dimensions of marital paradigm is the marital process, which is linked to how one views about marital roles within marriage. Scholars from various social science disciplines have been interested in individuals' views on marital roles and their association with marital satisfaction^{25,26}. Family scholars have found that views related to marital roles are associated with marital satisfaction and stability^{25,27}. Such views about marriage lead to a variety of marital behaviors, including relational effort and engagement in the relationship. For instance, couples who do not share similar beliefs about the division of household responsibilities are more likely to end up in divorce²⁸. Similarly, scholars have linked the fair division of marital roles²⁹ and gender role-sharing with high-quality marriages³⁰.

Marital salience

Marital salience, as one of the dimensions of the marital paradigm, has been associated with various marital outcomes. For instance, when couples place a high value on marriage as an institution, they are likely to engage in more positive relationship behaviors^{11,12}. The significance of marriage has been recognized as a predictor of transitioning into marriage^{31,32}. Supporting this statement, Willoughby (2014a) also indicated that couples who place a high value on marriage are less likely to engage in betraying their partner or consider divorce. The more important marriage is to a couple, the more committed they are to their marriage⁹.

Marital permanence

Scholars also discussed that couples with a view of marital permanence can handle marital problems. Because these partners are highly likely to work on repairing

their marriage instead of considering divorce^{8,33}. Similarly, scholars have linked beliefs such as marital permanence with higher levels of marital happiness^{34,35} and high-quality marriage³⁰. When individuals hold the view of marital permanence, they tend to have strong convictions about maintaining and valuing it. These, in turn, are associated with improved marital outcomes.

Marital context

Another aspect of marital paradigms is marital contexts, which encompass views regarding the readiness and preparations necessary to establish a marriage, such as education, financial stability, and psychological preparedness. Similarly, this study indicated that psychological and financial readiness contribute to marital satisfaction¹³. Furthermore, Carroll et al. (2009) discussed that views related to readiness for marriage can predict future marital happiness. Moreover, studies have highlighted the crucial roles that financial readiness and management play in enhancing marriage satisfaction³⁷.

Theoretical framework

This study utilized the Marital Paradigm Theory (MPT) as a theoretical framework. It pertains to the overall views and beliefs regarding marital relationships. According to the Marital Paradigm Theory, individuals have views and beliefs about marital relationships that will influence their behaviour within marriage¹⁵. Views on marriage can predict the success or failure of the marital relationship³⁸. Research has also linked marital views such as marital permanence⁹, marital contexts³⁹, marital salience⁹, and marital centrality¹⁴ to positive marital outcomes. Thus, the Marital Paradigm Theory (MPT) is used to understand how views on marriage influence marital satisfaction.

The present study

This study aimed to examine the association between views about marriage and marital satisfaction. Despite some efforts, no studies have been conducted thus far to examine the association between views about marriage and marital satisfaction. By addressing this research gap, this study may contribute to the existing knowledge. We expected that views about marriage would significantly contribute to marital satisfaction. Thus, the present study pursues answers to the following questions: (1) Are there significant inter-correlations among views about marriage, background data, and marital satisfaction? (2) To what extent do views about marriage predict marital satisfaction?

Methods

Samples

The study used a correlational design to examine the association between views about marriage and marital satisfaction. A total of 187 randomly selected Addis Ababa

city public servants have Participants must have been in a marital relationship for at least one year to be eligible for participation in the study. Of the total 187 samples, 98 (52.4%) were female, and 89 (47.6%) were male. The participants' average age and duration of marriage were 33.76 and 7.74 years, respectively. Regarding their educational level, a high school certificate was the minimum education level of participants in this study, with the majority of them ($N = 96$; 52.2%) holding a B.A/BSc degree. Besides, the number of children per participant ranges from 0 to 6, with a monthly average income of 9512.03 ETB ($SD=7956.032$).

Procedures

The study received approval from the ethical approval committee of the School of Psychology at Addis Ababa University. The questionnaire, originally written in English, was translated into Amharic with the assistance of language experts before being administered. Participants were assured that their private information would be kept secret. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study if they felt uncomfortable. After being informed about the study, participants provided their consent to participate in the research. Data were collected with the help of research assistants. Preliminary analyses were conducted to examine whether the data met the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity.

Measures

Marital satisfaction. Items adapted from the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS) were used to assess the levels of marital satisfaction⁴⁰. KMSS consists of three items that are relatively homogeneous and globally worded. Due to its high reliability, KMSS is consistently identified as the most reliable indicator of marital satisfaction across various studies⁴¹. The items evaluate participants' level of happiness with their marriage and partners. The scale is scored on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 = Extremely Dissatisfied to 7 = Extremely Satisfied. A sample item is: "How satisfied are you with your marital relationship?" The reported Cronbach's alpha was 0.95⁴¹. The score ranges from 3 to 21, with higher scores indicating a higher level of marital satisfaction.

Views about marriage: Views about marriage (i.e., marital salience, marital context, marital process, and marital permanence) were assessed using 20 items adapted from the Marital Belief Scale (MBS)⁴². The dimensions measured include marital salience (three items, e.g., "I believe marriage is a sacred union that should be taken very seriously"), marital context (10 items, e.g., "I believe love between spouses is enough to ensure the success of marriage"), marital process (four items, e.g., "In my belief, the best marriage is one in which the spouses take equal responsibility"), and marital permanence (four items, e.g., "I believe marriage is for life, even if the spouse is unhappy"). The overall reported internal consistency reliability for this scale was

0.79. Participants rated each item on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A higher score indicates a more positive view of marriage.

Control Variables. Background variables were included in the analyses because they may potentially impact the relationships of variables with the outcome variable. Accordingly, age, gender, duration of marriage, level of education, number of children, and monthly income level were added as control variables.

Analysis

Descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlation, and hierarchical multiple regression analysis were employed to analyze the data. Pearson product-moment correlation was used to examine the association between views about marriage (i.e., marital salience, marital process, marital context, and marital permanence) and marital satisfaction. Finally, a hierarchical regression analysis was employed to examine the predictive role of views on marriage on marital satisfaction, while controlling for background variables. SPSS 26 is statistical software used for data analysis.

Ethical considerations

To address research ethics, this study adhered to ethical protocols. First, this study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the researchers' university. Secondly, participants were informed about the study, and their consent was obtained.

Results

Correlational analysis

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations among variables. The study found a positive correlation between the participants' marital satisfaction and marital context ($r = .27, p < 0.01$), marital process ($r = .23, p < 0.01$), marital permanence ($r = .24, p < 0.01$), and marital salience ($r = .35, p < 0.01$). Moreover, the level of marital process among participants was positively correlated with being female ($r = .15, p < 0.05$). There were varying levels of inter-correlations among these variables, ranging from fairly substantial to moderate levels. Lastly, none of the background variables were significantly associated with marital satisfaction.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics and correlation for all variables (N=187)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1.Age	-										
2. Sex	-.12	-									
3. Education level	-.11	-.29**	-								
4. Marital duration	.83**	.12	-.20**	-							
5. Number of children	.56**	.06	-.00	.66**	-						
6. Income level	.17*	-.28**	.36**	.03	.09	-					
7. Marital context	-.12	.00	.08	-.09	.03	.07	-				
8. Marital process	-.01	.15*	-.01	.05	.09	.14	.29**	-			
9. Marital permanence	.11	.06	-.04	.13	.14	.01	.12	.16*	-		
10. Marital salience	-.09	.01	.00	-.01	.05	.14	.32**	.33**	.06	-	
11. Marital satisfaction	.00	.09	-.10	.03	.00	.00	.27**	.23**	.24**	.35**	-
M	35.02	-	3.63	9.95	2.20	8181.1	33.31	16.38	13.65	11.23	23.78
SD	6.46	-	1.48	5.65	1.02	596.03	4.46	2.54	2.79	2.21	4.48

Note:For sex, 2= female, 1=male; M=mean; SD=Standard Deviation; duration of marriage =number of years individuals has stayed in marriage; * $p < 0.05$ (2-tailed), ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

Hierarchical regression analyses

To examine the predictive role of views about marriage on marital satisfaction, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted after controlling for background variables. Accordingly, background variables (age, sex, marital duration, education level, number of children, and income level) were entered in Step 1, which explains 2% of the variance in marital satisfaction. None of these control variables were significant contributors to marital satisfaction. Views about marriage (marital contexts, marital process, marital permanence, and marital salience) entered at Step 2. The model explained 16% of the overall variance ($F(10, 156) = 3.13, p < .00$). Views about marriage (marital contexts, marital process, marital permanence, and marital salience)

explained an additional 14% of the variance in marital satisfaction after controlling for background variables ($\Delta R^2 = .14$, F change (4, 156) = 6.55, $p < .001$). As shown in Table 2, Model 2, only two variables were statistically significant: marital salience had the highest beta coefficient ($\beta = .26$, $p < 0.001$), followed by marital permanence ($\beta = .17$, $p < 0.05$). Table 2 presents a summary of coefficients from a hierarchical multiple regression analysis of views on marriage and marital satisfaction while controlling for background variables.

Table 2

Hierarchical multiple regression of views about marriage on marital satisfaction after controlling for background variables

Predictor	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Age	-.04	.08	-.07
Sex	1.15	.76	.13
Education level	-.20	.34	-.05
Marital duration	.02	.09	.04
Number of children	-.00	.37	-.00
Income	3.73	.00	.07
Step 2			
Age	.04	.08	.07
Sex	.84	.72	.10
Education level	-.12	.32	-.03
Marital duration	-.00	.09	-.00
Number of children	-.29	.36	-.08
income	-1.28	.00	-.02
Marital context	.10	.07	.10
Marital process	.12	.13	.07
Marital permanence	.25	.11	.17*
Marital salience	.50	.15	.26**

Note. $R^2 = .02$ (Adjusted $R^2 = -.00$) for Step 1; $R^2 = .16$ (Adjusted $R^2 = .11$) for Step 2; $\Delta R^2 = .14$; ($p < 0.00$); * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the association between views about marriage and marital satisfaction. The findings showed that no background variables were significantly associated with marital satisfaction. However, prior studies have identified a negative association between age and marital satisfaction²¹. This may be due to the cultural and time differences during the study. Moreover, in contrast to this study, previous studies have shown a negative association between marital satisfaction and the number of children²¹ as well as the duration of marriage⁴³. This contradiction might be attributed to the employment status of the present study participants, which could place them in a better economic position to support their children. The contradiction in our study regarding the association between marital duration and marital satisfaction may be due to the high social value attached to marriage and societal recognition resulting from maintaining one's marriage.

In line with the present study, prior studies have shown a positive correlation between marital context and marital satisfaction³⁶. For instance, it has been discussed that one's views on readiness for marriage are linked to marital happiness. Moreover, the present study found a positive association between marital satisfaction and the marital process. Supporting this finding, scholars have also found a positive relationship between marital satisfaction and the marital process^{25,27}. These scholars have documented that individuals' views on marital roles are linked to marital satisfaction. Furthermore, in line with the present study, previous research has also found a positive correlation between marital satisfaction and marital permanence³⁰ as well as marital salience⁹. It has been indicated that when couples place a high value on marriage, they are likely to remain committed to their marriage⁹. When couples hold more positive views of marital permanence, they are likely to experience a high-quality marriage³⁰.

In the effort to answer the second research question, we found that marital salience and marital salience positively predict marital satisfaction. In line with the present study, scholars have also identified the positive impact of marital salience on marital relationships⁹. It is believed that a high score on marital salience predicts positive marital behaviors such as high marital commitment and less thought of divorce⁹. Moreover, due to the positive contribution of marital salience on marital satisfaction, the findings of the present study also support the Marital Paradigm Theory (MPT)¹⁵. Supporting the Marital Paradigm Theory (MPT), the level of marital satisfaction is determined by how much we value marriage³⁸.

The present study also demonstrates that marital permanence positively predicts marital satisfaction. Consistent with the present study, research has shown that marital permanence contributes to positive marital behaviors^{8,30}. Marital permanence has been discussed as a crucial factor for enhancing marital quality and marital happiness^{30,34}. The positive predictive role of marital permanence on marital satisfaction in this study is also consistent with the assumptions of MPT¹⁵.

Limitations and future direction

Despite its remarkable significance, this study has some limitations. One of the limitations of this study was its reliance on self-reported data. Therefore, it would be more advisable that future studies to examine these issues using different data collection tools. Secondly, due to the cross-sectional nature of this study, drawing any conclusions about the directionality of the research findings is difficult. Therefore, future longitudinal study is required to determine the direction of the relationship among these variables.

Implications

This study has both theoretical and practical implications. Given that this is the only study examining the association between views on marriage and marital satisfaction, it makes a theoretical contribution to the existing literature by expanding knowledge in this field. The findings of this study are crucial for practitioners interested in marital rehabilitation programs. Practitioners can benefit from information on how views about marriage influence marital behaviors. Accordingly, practitioners such as counselors and social workers could work on designing intervention programs to help their clients view marriage from a positive perspective. Moreover, policymakers may also benefit from these findings.

Conclusion

Researchers have identified various factors that are associated with marital satisfaction. However, no study has examined the relationship between views on marriage and marital satisfaction. This study aimed to narrow these gaps using cross-sectional data. The findings of this study shows that views about marriage are positively related to marital satisfaction. Marital salience and marital permanence particularly play a crucial role in enhancing marital satisfaction. These views on marriage help couples practice positive marital behavior. By enhancing partners' values associated with marriage and their commitment to it, their marital relationship can be improved and sustained. This study has important implications for practitioners interested in marriage and couple counseling.

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