

Designing a Family Function Model based on the Elements of Marital Conflicts and Intimacy of the Couples Referred to Marriage Consulting Centers in Kermanshah

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Abstract: *The present study is aimed at designing a model of family function for the target population based on the elements of marital intimacy and conflict of the couples referred to Kermanshah-based marriage consultant centers. The study is a development study in nature and study population was comprised of all couples referring to marriage consultant clinics in Kermanshah city. A sample group of 500 members (250 males +250 female) was formed through simple random sampling. To measure variables Three questionnaires were used to collect data include: family assessment devise (FAD), marital intimacy questionnaire, and marital conflict questionnaire. For data analysis, inferential statistics (path analysis method) was used in Lisrel. The results showed that Fitness of the designed model was acceptable and marital conflicts and family function were predicted satisfactorily. Marital conflicts predicted family function with intimacy as a mediator factor. Moreover, marital conflicts predicted marital intimacy and the intimacy in turn predicted family function.*

Keywords: *family function, intimacy and marital conflict.*

Introduction

Family, since the beginning of history, has been considered as the most important and smallest social institute and unit in all human societies. A healthy society depends on establishment of stable, dynamic, and lively families (Omidian far, Refahe, Qaderi, Afshon, 2015). Family is the place that in which a variety of needs are satisfied. Knowledge about biological and mental needs, how they are satisfied, and being equipped with the techniques to understand biological and psychological desires are critical (Edalati, Aghamohamadian Sherarbaaf, Moarres Gharavi, Hassanabadi, 2009). Having close social relationship like the one that is formed in a marriage has to do with people's welfare and the psychological/physical health outcomes as well (Ditzen, Hahlweg, Fehm-Wolfsdorf, Baucom, 2011). Family function is one of the main factors that guarantees quality of life and psychological wellbeing of the family members. As suggested by studies, where the interactions in family are based on intimacy, dialogue, and mutual understanding, the family members enjoy more resistance and immunity to life pressures (Goldenberg, 2012). Intimacy is a critical factor in stability and

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survival of the marriage bond (Levinger & Huston, 1990). Affection is a dynamic concept in human relationships and as to marital relationship; it means openness to enter close relationship with one or more persons from emotional, rational, and functional viewpoints. Dynamism of relationship lies with fact that intimacy is an outcome of a relationship as a whole and any gap or problem in whatever aspect of interpersonal relationship might influence the whole relationship (Hotfield, Bensman & Rapson, 2012). Intimacy is critically important in stability of marital life and higher level of intimacy has profound effect on happiness felt in marital life (Saadatian, Samani, Parsani, Vikram, Anshul, Tejada, David & Nakatsu, 2014). Couples in the marriages that are on the rocks usually show lower levels of intimacy and affection toward their life partner (Halford, Sanders, Behrens, 2001). Conflicts are inevitable in any relationship as by entering intimate relationship, people let the other part to enter their private life and mutually affect each other. People find themselves, in intimate relationships, rightful to have influence on their partner and this is where people become vulnerable (Hakim, Fatehizadeh, Batheban, 2011). Conflict is the lack of agreement among two individuals so that they find it impossible to reach agreement in their viewpoints and behavioral goals (Sehat, Sehat, Khanjani, Mohebbi and siah kinShahsiah, 2014). Conflicts in marital relationship strengthen the couples' relationships with their friends and relatives so that the relatives and friends gradually replace the spouse (Somohano, 2013). With this introduction, the present study is an attempt to survey the relationship between the variables noted above while it was avoided to adopt a holistic and conceptual model. On the other hand, effectiveness of the variables on the family function is not examined, which makes this study necessary. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to introduce a model of family function based on the elements of life expectancy, intimacy, and marital conflicts of the couples referred to Kermanshah-based marriage consultant centers.

Research Method

Given that the purpose of the study is to design a model, the study is development work in nature. Study population was comprised of all couples referred to Kermanshah-based marriage consultation centers. Sample group was comprised of 500 participants (250 men and 250 women). Participation criteria were being at least one year in marital relationship, having junior high school diploma at least, no acute mental-personality disorder and experiencing marital conflicts in life. The participants were selected among the available population through simple random sampling.

Data Gathering Tools

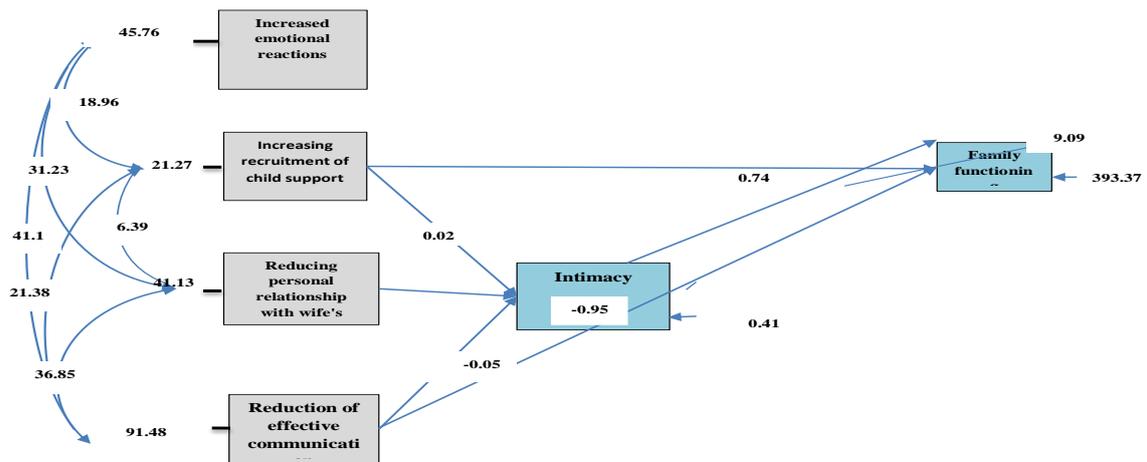
Four questionnaires were used for data gathering; a) family assessment device (FAD) designed by Natan B. Estien et al.; purpose of the test is to measure family function. The questionnaire is featured with 60 questions and measures six aspects of family function (problem solving, communication, roles, emotional solidarity, emotional engagement, behavior control, and general function). General reliability of the questionnaire was obtained 0.93; in addition, total reliability of the tool was obtained equal with 0.93 and reliability of the subscales general function, problem solving, communication, roles, emotional solidarity, emotional engagement and behavior control was (0.77, 0.78, 0.65, 0.65, 0.7, 0.73) and (0.7) respectively. b) Intimacy scales with 17 statements, which is designed to measure affection and intimacy and reliability of which is equal with (0.96). c) Marriage conflict questionnaire (MCQ) designed to measure conflicts between the husband and wife. The questionnaire is featured with 8 subscales of marital conflicts including loss of cooperative attitudes, decrease of sexual relationships, increase of emotional reactions, increase of attempts to win children's support, increase of personal relationship with relatives and friends, decrease of personal

relationship with the spouse's relatives and friends, separating financial affairs, and decrease of effective relationship (Sanaee Zakir, 2010).; and reliability of these subscales is (0.77, 0.66, 0.74, 0.6, 0.74, 0.77, 0.7 and 0.71) respectively.

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to design a model of family function. To this end, path analysis method was used in Lisrel.

Research Findings

Main hypothesis: The proposed model design to measure family function based on the elements of marital intimacy and conflicts is of acceptable fitness.



Chi- square= 7.23, df=8 , p-value=0.51154 , RMSEA=0.000

Figure (1): Path diagram for men's group

Table (1): Fitness indices of the model for path diagram of men's group

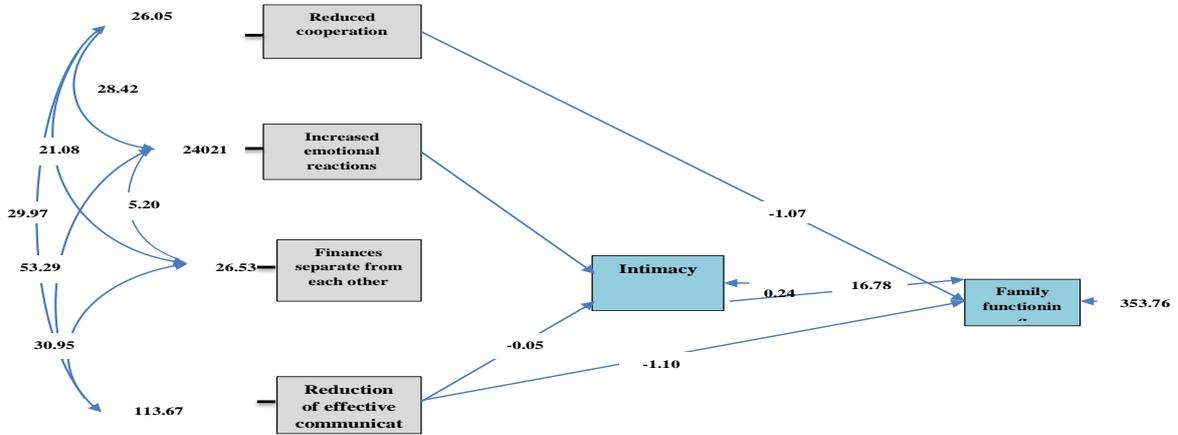
Indices	X ²	p	Df	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	CFI	NFI
Acceptable level		Insignificant		0.08≤	0.9≥	0.9≥	0.9≥	0.9≥
Estimated values	7.23	0.51	8	0.00	0.99	0.97	1	1

As listed in the table above, the main hypothesis (The proposed model design to measure family function based on the elements of marital intimacy and conflicts is of acceptable fitness) is supported.

Table (2): Fitness indices of the model for path diagram of women's group

Indices	X ²	p	Df	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	CFI	NFI
Acceptable level		Insignificant		0.08≤	0.9≥	0.9≥	0.9≥	0.9≥
Estimate	9.36	0.23	7	0.037	0.99	0.96	1	0.99

As listed in the table above, the main hypothesis (The proposed model design to measure family function based on the elements of marital intimacy and conflicts is of acceptable fitness) is supported.



Chi-square = 9.36, df = 7, p-value = 0.22764, RMSEA = 0.037

Figure (2): Path diagram for Women's group

Table (3): Direct, indirect, and total effects on the effects of marital conflicts, family function, hope to life, and intimacy

Path		Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect
T1 (decrease of cooperative attitude) → family function (women group)	Standard coefficients	-0.15		-0.15
	t-value	-3.75**		-3.75**
T8 (decrease of effective relationship) → family function (women group)	Standard coefficients	-0.33	-0.3	-0.63
	t-value	** -5.91	-7.11**	-13.25**
T4- (increase of attempt to wing the child's support) → family function (men group)	Standard coefficients	-0.14	0.04	-0.1
	t-value	-3.11**	2.16**	-2.08*
T8- (decrease of effective communication) → family function (men group)	Standard coefficients	-0.27	-0.31	-0.58
	t-value	-4.65**	-7**	-11.08*
T3- (Increase of emotional reaction) → family function (women group)	Standard coefficients		-0.07	-0.07
	t-value		-2.78**	-2.78**
T7- (separating financial affairs) → family function (women group)	Standard coefficients		-0.03	-0.03
	t-value		-3.29**	-3.29**
T8- (decrease of effective communication) →	Standard	0.33	-0.3	-0.63

family function (women group)	coefficients			
	t-value	-5.91	-7.11**	-13.25**
T3- (Increase of emotional reactions) → Family function (men group)	Standard coefficients		-0.04	-0.04
	t-value		-2.27	-2.27*
T4- (Increase of attempts to win the child's support) → family function (men group)	Standard coefficients	-0.14	0.04	-0.1
	t-value	-3.11**	2.16*	-2.08*
T3- (Increase of emotional reactions) → intimacy (women group)	Standard coefficients	-0.15		-0.15
	t-value	-2.93**		-2.93**
T7- (Separating financial affairs) → intimacy (women group)	Standard coefficients		-0.07	-0.07
	t-value		-3.55**	-3.55**
T8- (Decrease of effective communication) → intimacy (women group)	Standard coefficients	-0.58	-0.06	-0.64
	t-value	-10.86**	-3.49**	-12.05*
T3- (Increase of emotional reaction) → affection (men group)	Standard coefficients		-0.02	-0.02
	t-value		-1.83	-1.83
T4- (Increase of attempts to win child's support) → intimacy (men group)	Standard coefficients	0.11	0.01	0.12
	t-value	2.26*	0.6	2.34*
T6- (Decrease of personal relationship with the spouse' relatives) → intimacy (men group)	Standard coefficients	-0.2		-0.2
	t-value	-3.36**		-3.36**
T8 – (decrease of effective communication) → intimacy (men group)	Standard coefficients	-0.48	-0.14	-0.62
	t-value	-8.42**	-4.82**	-11.02**
Intimacy → family function(women group)	Standard coefficients	0.47		0.47
	t-value	8.79**		8.79**
Intimacy → family function(men group)	Standard coefficients	0.32		0.32
	t-value	5.69**		5.69**

Hypothesis one: marital conflicts predict family function. As listed in Table 3, the element “decrease of cooperative attitudes” has direct effect on family function ($\beta = -0.15$, $P < 0.01$). In addition, the element “decrease of effective communication) has direct relationship with standard family function with standard coefficient of ($\beta = -0.33$, $P < 0.01$). However, the direct effect of other elements on marital conflicts on family function was not significant. Therefore, hypothesis one is supported. In addition, as listed in Table 2 for men's group, the elements of

marital conflicts predict increase of attempts to win the child support ($\beta = -0.14, P < 0.01$) and decrease of effective communication ($\beta = -0.027, P < 0.01$). However, the direct effect of other elements of marital conflicts on family function is not significant; thus, hypothesis one is supported.

Hypothesis two: Marital conflicts predict family function based on intimacy as mediator factor. The results indicated that the element “increase of emotional reaction” predicts family function ($\beta = 0.07, P < 0.01$); so that, with increase of emotional reaction, family function decreases. The results listed in Table 3 indicate that the element “separating financial affairs” predicts family function ($\beta = -0.03, P < 0.01$) so that increase in the score of this element, decreases family function. In addition, the indirect effect of “decrease of effective communication” on family function was significant ($\beta = -0.3, P < 0.01$). The direct effect of this element on family function was more than that of its indirect effect; in addition, total effect of this variable on family function is significant ($\beta = -0.63, P < 0.010$). Therefore, hypothesis two is supported for the women group. Moreover, as listed in Table 3 for the men group, increase of emotional reaction has indirect effect on family function with intimacy factor as mediator factor ($\beta = -0.04, P < 0.05$). Total effect of the element “attempts to win the child’s support” was significant on family function ($\beta = -0.1$) and the direct effect of this element on total family function was more than that of its indirect effect. Moreover, this element has direct negative correlation with family function, while its direct effect on family function was positive and the total effect is negative. Additionally, the variable “decrease of personal relationship with relative of the spouse” has direct effect on family function ($\beta = -0.04$) and the element “decrease of effective communication” has indirect effect on family function ($\beta = -0.31, P < 0.01$). It is notable that the indirect effect of “decrease of effective communication” was more than its direct effect on the family function. Total effect of “decrease of effective communication” on family function is significant ($\beta = -0.58, P < 0.01$). However, the effect of other elements of marital conflicts on family function is not significant. With these finding, it can be concluded that hypothesis two is supported.

Hypothesis three: marital conflicts predict intimacy between the couple. As listed in Table 3, the element “increase of attempts to win the child’s support” has direct effect on intimacy ($\beta = 0.11, P < 0.05$). Total effect of “attempt to win the child’s support” on intimacy was positive ($\beta = 0.12$). Moreover, “decrease of personal relationship with the spouse’s relative has direct effect on intimacy ($\beta = -0.48, P < 0.01$). The element “decrease of effective communication” has direct ($\beta = -0.48$), indirect ($\beta = -0.14$) and total effect ($\beta = -0.62$) on intimacy ($P < 0.01$). Moreover, the direct effect of “decrease of effective communication” on intimacy was more than its indirect effect. The results listed in Table 3 indicate that increase of attempt to win the child’s support has direct effect on intimacy ($\beta = 0.11, P < 0.05$); however, the indirect effect of “increase of attempt to win the child’s support” on intimacy was not significant. Total effect of this element on intimacy is positive ($\beta = 0.12$). Additionally, decrease of personal relationship with the spouse’s relative is directly effective on intimacy ($\beta = -0.2, P < 0.01$) and correlation of these two variables is negative so that decrease of relationship with the spouse’s relative increases intimacy between the couple. Finally, the element “decrease of effective communication” has direct ($\beta = -0.48$) indirect ($\beta = -0.14$), and total effect ($\beta = 0.01$) on intimacy; and the direct effect of this element is more than its indirect effect. Therefore, hypothesis three is supported.

Hypothesis four: intimacy can predict family function. As listed in Table 3, intimacy has direct effect on family function ($\beta = 0.32, P < 0.01$), so that increase of intimacy between the

couple, improves family function. Therefore, the higher the intimacy and the higher the performance of family; and hypothesis four is supported.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of path analyses showed that the proposed model for the women group has acceptable fitness. Ayadatpour (2012), while showing fitness of his model, concluded that family function predicts personal resilience, spiritual beliefs, and marital pointlessness [13]. Results with regard hypothesis one showed that marital conflicts predict family function. Beliad (2014) argued that the main function of family and its elements (intimacy and independent) were significantly related to marital conflicts and differentiation of self; so that main function of spouses as family is positively related with decrease of marital conflicts and increase of differentiation of self (Blyad, et al, 2014). Hejong, Nadin and Choi (2008) reported that marital conflicts and ineffectiveness of the couples directly lead to higher depression levels and functional disorders and they also affect physical and mental health of the couple, which leads to ineffectiveness of the family (Hee Jeong, Nadine, 2008). Family function, as a variable, forms the centerpiece of the family. Strong marital relationships are essential for progress of a healthy family. Well-functioning families enable their members with flexibility to convert altercation to dialogue, tolerance, and response to their partner's needs. The more efficient the family, the lower the marital conflicts occur. Hypothesis two states that marital conflicts predict family function using intimacy as a mediator factor. Nasr Esfahani (2011) showed that there was a close and mutual relationship between family meaning and interaction; and having mutual meaning in marital life is a key to improve friendly relationships between the couples and improve family function (Naser Esfahani, 2011). Alkernavi (2010) showed that family structure is the main predictor of family function and marital satisfaction (Al-Krenawi, 2010). Worthington (1997) argued that hope-oriented marital enrichment was effective on improving marital interaction (Worthington, Hight, Ripley, Perrone, Kurusu, Jones, 1997). Marital conflicts are serious threats to marital life that challenge stability and quality of marriage and tackle happiness in life, satisfaction with life, and self-confidence. In addition, they result in problematic attachments, more psychological problems and distractions that trouble daily and normal relationships between the couple. Intimate relationships are among the emotional needs of the couple and one of the main sources of happiness, meaningfulness, and satisfaction with marital life. Respecting the life partner's needs is one of the main principles in creating intimacy among couples and the couples who experience higher level of intimacy are better in dealing with problems and enjoy higher satisfaction with their marital life. Intimate relationships with others are effective in reducing anxiety and improving psychological health. Life expectancy is a key factor in wellbeing and welfare and improves probability to reach life goals. Hope is a sense that implies possibility of a desired event or preferred behavior in the future. Beliefs and faith lead to capability so that the individual would take actual steps to remove the obstacles and achieve their goal through persistency and following plans. Couples usually do not have clear image of their needs, which lead to intimacy when the spouse pay attention to them. Awareness of one's needs and allowing the spouse to learn about them prepares the couples for higher intimacy, decrease of conflicts, and improvement of mutual relationship and family performance (Caban, 2004). It is recommended that couples should try to successfully solve their marital conflicts instead of seeking revenges. In addition, the couples need to try not to see each other's faults and forgive their partners for their mistakes. No trace of seeking revenging motivations can be found in the act of forgiving (Movahedi, Movahedi, Yazdan, Kariminejad, 2014). Hypothesis three stated that marital conflicts predict intimacy in women. Rahimpour Moradi (2015) showed that there was a negative and significant relationship

between satisfaction with marital life and marital conflicts. In addition, intimacy acts as mediator factor between marital conflicts and satisfaction with marital life (Rahimpour Mouradi, 2015). Mirgan & Kordoova (2007) show that higher levels of satisfaction improve satisfaction with marital life (Mirgain & Cordova, 2007).

One may argue that intimacy is the level of closeness, sharing values and ideas, joint activities, sexual relationships, mutual understanding, and emotional behaviors such as caressing. Therefore, intimate couples experience fewer conflicts. The higher the intimacy between the couple, the higher their ability to deal with problems and changes in their relationship (Patrick & Sells, Giordano & Tollerad, 2007). Intense conflicts and failure to solve these conflicts results in loss of intimacy. Knowing how to solve conflicts is a key factor in increase/decrease of intimacy between the couples. Hypothesis four showed that intimacy ensures family function. Intimate relationships are of the most important matters in marital life (Wilson, Charker, Lizzio, Halfird & Kimlin, 2005). Mirzaieh (2011) showed that there was a significant relationship between normal couples and those who have applied for divorce regarding attachment styles, intimacy, and family function (Mirzaee, 2010). Farid et al. (2014) showed that educating communication skills for married women improves their quality of their marital life ($P < 0.01$) (Farbod, et al., 2014). Establishment of a healthy and well-functioning relationship improves emotional intimacy among the couple. When a couple establishes relationships through healthy methods, they will enjoy higher level of intimacy (Javidi, Soleimani, Ahmadi, Samadzadeh, 2012). It is recommended that couples should improve positivism and hope through hope improvement strategies and with the help of marriage consultant. The role of hope in marital issues, clarifying marital conflicts, and intimacy among the couple must be taken into account. In addition, communicational skills education improves intimacy in the family. Practicing marital conflicts solving skills is helpful in improving marital relationship and clarifying marital conflicts. These measures improve life expectancy and intimacy between couples. As to limitations of the study, failure to control some of mediator variables such as personality, cultural, and social features of the participants is notable. Therefore, the results need to be generalized with cautious.

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