

Mutual Trust, Marital Relationship Satisfaction and Subjective Feelings of Happiness in Intimate Relationships

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Abstract

The present study examined if any significant relationship exists among mutual trust of spouses, their marital relationship satisfaction and subjective feelings of happiness. The sample comprised of 45 couples selected from Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women Univeristy, Peshawar and Hazara University, Abbottabad using convenience sampling technique. Age range of men was 24 to 68 years ($M=39$, $SD=9.25$) whereas, the age range of women was 23 to 59 years ($M=32$, $SD=6.30$). Three Scales namely Trust Scale, Relationship Assessment Scale and Subjective Happiness Scale were used to measure the three constructs (mutual trust, marital relationship satisfaction and subjective feelings of happiness). It was hypothesized that scores on all these three scales will show high correlation with each other. It was further assumed that the subjective feelings of happiness will be higher among individuals who show higher levels of mutual trust. Our findings supported the hypotheses i-e Trust and Relationship Assessment Scale are strongly correlated, ($r=0.63, p<.001$). Similarly, Relationship Assessment Scale and Subjective Happiness Scale show high correlation with each other ($r=0.68, p<.001$). The findings also confirm that high scorers on Trust scale obtained significantly higher scores on Subjective Happiness as compared to the low scorers, ($p<.003$).

Keywords: mutual trust, marital relationship satisfaction, subjective feelings of happiness

Introduction

Simpson (2007), believes that trust lies at the foundation of almost all major theories of interpersonal relationships. Kramer & Carnevale (2001), defined trust as a set of beliefs and expectations about a partner's behavior expected to contribute in a meaningful way to one's self interest especially in intimate relationships. To maintain a close relationship with the spouse, trust is not only one of the desirable qualities of the partner but is the cornerstone of an ideal relationship (Hendrick.C & Hendrick.S,1983). Trust provides a long-lasting comfortable situation to promote mutual dependability among the partners. The ability to trust in intimate relationships is acquired through experiences gained during their lifespan development. Building trust between couples requires investment in terms of time and making fruitful efforts to make the partner relaxed and happy. When such efforts are maximized and fulfilling they are rewarding, though at times challenging too. The exact meaning of trust varies across cultures but it generally refers to an individual's beliefs or expectations concerning behavior of others in a predictable manner that does not involve entirely self-interest.

Trust plays a significant role in healthy marital functioning (Campbell, Simpson, Boldry & Rubin, 2010; Van de Rijt & Buskens, 2006). According to Wieselquist (2009), trust is the most important contributory factor for success to maintain and promote relationship (Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Rubin, 2010; Simpson, 2007). Contrary to that, betrayal of one's trust has serious negative consequences for marital functioning. Usually it results in emotional withdrawal of the partner, leading to avoidance and decreased positive

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communication (Brimhall, Wampler & Kimball, 2008). The secret of healthy marital relationship is not the absence of conflict but the ways of resolving the conflict. Intelligent use of emotions is a skill aimed at handling the conflicts to maintain the marital relationship (Goleman, Boyatzis & Mckee, 2002).

Trust plays a crucial role in a happy marriage. Fatima & Ajmal (2012), conducted a qualitative study of happy marriage. The main objective of the researchers was to explore the basic factors that contribute to a happy marital life. The findings suggested that happiness and satisfaction go side by side. It is the level of satisfaction that determines one's level of happiness and it is undoubtedly a satisfied life that is a happy life. When one of the spouses either husband or wife is dissatisfied he/she would not be able to stay happy and enjoy life. Trusting loyalty of spouse guarantees a peaceful and healthy marital life. On the other hand a distressful partner can make his/her life miserable with suspicions and doubts. Spouses who love each other do their best to maintain smooth and healthy marital relationship. When people love each other they do not reject each other's demands and remain happy irrespective of the conditions in which they live. Wong & Goodwin (2009), reported that in Britain and China a permanent relationship and cooperation with the spouse is considered as one of the most important determinant of marital satisfaction.

Markman, Rhoades & Stanley (2010), believe that commitment to one's romantic relationship plays a crucial role in relationship adjustment and stability whereas lack of such commitment may result in termination of marital relationship.

Variables of the Study

Mutual Trust

It is a personality variable that relates to the degree of a generalized expectancy held by an individual that he/she can rely upon the words, promises or statements of the spouse. Thus, having trust in intimate relationship means to prove each other that the spouse is reliable, responsible and dependable. Trust is an important factor to maintain healthy relationship and get close to the other person and to rely on him/her for support.

Marital satisfaction

It refers to the extent to which an individual has a positive attitude or positive feelings towards the spouse. Hinde (1997) describes marital satisfaction as an individual's overall evaluation of the marital relationship. Durodoye (1997) believes that marital satisfaction refers to an individual's subjective assessment of the specific components describing his/her marital relationship. Several researches believe that marital satisfaction plays a significant role in the stability of marriage. (Fatehizadeh & Ahmadi, 2006). Thus, satisfactory marital relationship is the most important and crucial aspect of intimate relationships.

Happiness

Happiness in the present study is defined as the overall satisfaction and individual has with his/her life. Marital happiness is a judgment of the spouse indicating the sense of satisfaction he/she derives from marital relationship. Marital happiness is positively related to several cognitive variables for instance secure attachment morals, smaller discrepancies between partners. Memory biases reflecting negative recall of the past indicating that marital relationship has improved and self-evaluation maintenance processes that enhance communication between the couples. Thus, marital happiness reflects evaluation of the marriage in which positive features are dominant and negative features are relatively absent. Two important correlates of marital happiness identified by researchers are forgiveness and sacrifice

For interpretation of scores obtained by the respondents on all the above three scales, the cut off points were 25th and 75th Percentiles. Thus, individuals scoring equal to or less than 25th percentile were considered as low scorers, whereas those scoring equal to or above 75th percentile were considered as high scorers.

Rationale of the study

Despite the recognition by several researches that trust plays a central role in maintaining healthy, intimate relationships, the topic has not received widespread theoretical and practical attention. This lack of attention maybe attributed to the fact that trust is a complex, multidimensional concept making it difficult to operationalize, measure and interpret. Secondly, trust emerges and changes in situations that are difficult to observe and study. In the present study we will assess the degree of trust among spouses and examine its relationship with happiness of the individual and their marital satisfaction.

Objectives

The main objectives of the present investigation are:

- To study the correlation between mutual trust and marital relationship satisfaction.
- To study the relationship between marital satisfaction and subjective feelings of happiness
- To see if higher level of trust among spouses bears a significant correlation with subjective happiness of the individual.

Hypotheses

- A higher degree of mutual trust will be significantly correlated with marital relationship satisfaction.
- There will be a significant correlation between marital satisfaction and subjective feelings of happiness.
- Subjective feelings of happiness will be significantly higher among individuals scoring high on Trust scale as compared to low scorers.

Methodology

Sample

A non-probability convenience sampling technique was used for data collection. The respondents were selected from the teaching faculty of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University (SBBWU) Peshawar and Hazara University Abbottabad. The researcher approached the teaching faculty of both the universities and selected 23 married women faculty members from SBBWU who agreed to participate voluntarily in the present study. Similarly 22 men faculty members were selected from Hazara University Abbottabad who expressed their willingness to participate in the study. The spouses of all these participants were included in the sample. The educational qualification of participants selected from teaching faculty of the universities ranged from MSc to PhD. Whereas the educational level of their spouses ranged from undergraduate to Ph.D. As evident from Table 1 the whole sample consisted of 45 couples ranging in length of marital life from 1 to 27 years. The age range of female sample was 23 to 59 years whereas male sample ranged from 28 to 65 years. 22 couples were from nuclear families and 20 belonged to extended families. 3 couples didn't mention if they come from nuclear or extended families.

Instruments

Trust scale

Trust scale (1985), was developed by Rempel, Holmes & Zanna to assess levels of trust within intimate relationships. It consists of 18 items including 9 items that have to be reverse scored. It comprises three subscales viz. Predictability (6 items, eg., "I know how my partner is going to act. My partner can always be counted on to act as I expect"), Dependability (6 items, eg., "I have found that my partner is a thoroughly dependable person, especially when it comes to things that are important.") and Faith (6 items, eg., "I feel completely secure in facing unknown, new situations because I know my partner will never let me down").

Basically it is a 7 point Likert type Scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). In the present study the scale was used with a slight modification converting it into a 5 point Likert type ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This change was introduced keeping in view the experiential background of the respondents (majority of respondents were not familiar with psychological measures in the form of rating scale). The total score on Trust Scale is the sum of the scores on all the items. Individuals scoring above mean (65) are considered as high scorers, whereas those who fall below mean comprise low scorers group. The overall Cronbach alpha was .81, with subscale reliabilities of .80, .72, and .70 for the faith, dependability, and predictability respectively.

The Relationship Assessment Scale

The Relationship Assessment Scale (1988), was developed by Hendrick, S.S, Dick & Hendrick, C as a generic measure of relationship satisfaction. In the present study it was used to assess the marital relationship satisfaction. It is a 5 point rating scale ranging from 1 (low) to 5 (high). It consists of 7 items including two items that have to be reverse scored. The highest possible score is 35 which indicates maximum satisfaction. It is a unifactorial measure of relationship satisfaction with inter-item correlation of .49 and alpha of .86. Test-retest reliability was .85.

Subjective Happiness Scale

Subjective happiness scale (1997), was developed by Lyubomirsky & Lepper. It is a 4-item measure of global subjective happiness including 1 item that has to be reverse scored. It is a 7 point Likert-type rating scale ranging from 1 to 7. The low score (e.g. 1) shows that the individual is less/not at all happy. The highest score (i.e. 7) indicates that the respondent is very happy. The authors have established reliability and validity of the scale using 14 samples. In all samples, the four items showed good to excellent internal consistency. The alpha's ranged from 0.79 to 0.94 ($M = 0.86$) whereas the test-retest reliability ranged from 0.55 to 0.90 ($M = 0.72$).

Procedure

Two universities were selected for the purpose of data collection, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University, Peshawar and Hazara University, Abbottabad. Psychology, education and management studies departments were selected. The researcher contacted each faculty member and briefly explained the purpose of the research. Those who agreed to participate voluntarily were given two sets comprising three scales namely Trust Scale, Subjective Happiness Scale and Relationship Assessment Scale in an envelope. They were requested to answer each item honestly and get the other set completed by his/her spouse. Furthermore, they were assured that the results of the study will be kept confidential and will be used for research purpose only. To ascertain the confidentiality the respondents were

asked not to write their names or give any other clue about their identity except providing the demographic information. After one week the questionnaires were collected back by the researcher.

Results

Table 1: *Demographic Characteristics of the sample*

Demographic variable	f	%
Gender		
Male	45	48.90
Female	45	48.90
Education		
Under-graduate	2	2.20
Graduate	7	7.60
Masters	40	43.50
M.Phil	18	19.60
Ph.D	7	7.60
Family structure		
Nuclear	22	48.90
Extended	20	44.60

Table 1 shows that majority of respondents have studied upto MA/MSc level whereas slightly more than 19% have M.Phil degree and another 7.6% have Ph.D.

The data of the current study were analyzed through SPSS 22 version. Pearson product moment correlation was computed in order to determine the relationship between the three scales, viz. Trust Scale, Subjective Happiness Scale and Relationship Assessment Scale.

Table 2

Inter-scale Correlation between Trust, Relationship Assessment and Subjective Happiness

Scale	I	II	III
Trust	----		
Relationship Assessment	.63	----	
Subjective Happiness	.44	.68	----

An examination of Table 2 shows that Trust and Relationship Assessment Scale are significantly correlated with each other ($r=0.61, p<.001$). Further, Relationship Assessment and Subjective Happiness scale also show significant correlation with each other ($r=0.68, p<.001$). To sum up all the three scales are highly inter-correlated.

Table 3

Subjective feelings of happiness among respondents scoring high and low on Trust Scale

Variable	High Scorers on Trust Scale (n=22)	Low Scorers on Trust Scale (n=24)	t(44)	p	95%		Cohen's d
	M (SD)	M (SD)			LL	UL	
Subjective happiness	22.13(3.79)	18.20(5.36)	2.84	.003*	.20	7.64	0.84

Note. CI=Confidence interval; LL=Lower Limit; UL=Upper Limit

* $p<.01$

Findings presented in Table 3 reveal that high scorers on Trust scale obtained significantly higher scores on Subjective Happiness as compared to the low scorers ($p < .003$). In other words individuals who trust their spouses experience significantly higher feelings of happiness. These findings clearly demonstrate that mutual trust among the spouses results in feelings of happiness and vice versa.

Discussion

The present study examined the relationship between trust, marital satisfaction and subjective feelings of happiness.

Our first hypothesis assumed that a higher degree of mutual trust will be significantly correlated with marital relationship satisfaction. The data presented in Table 2 demonstrates that Trust bears a significant positive relationship with marital relationship of respondents. These findings support our hypothesis. These findings are in line with earlier evidence that has shown similar pattern of relationship. For example trust has been observed to play a significant role in marital relationships. (Cottrell et al 2007; Guttman 1992). Contrary to that lower levels of trust are linked to lower levels of marital satisfaction. (Kelly & Burgoon, 1991). A logical application of these findings may be that individuals having high trust on their spouse, perceive their partners positively. They tend to demonstrate the cooperative and caring behaviour and are less angry about spouse. Consequently they are more satisfied in their relationship. Ross (2009) demonstrated that successful marital relationships are those in which spouses trust each other, keep promises and are faithful to the commitments that are made by the partners.

Our second hypothesis postulated that there will be a significant correlation between marital satisfaction and subjective feelings of happiness. As evident from Table 2 a significant correlation ($r = 0.68; p < .001$) existed between scores on Relationship Assessment and Subjective Happiness Scale,

The results demonstrate that marital relationship satisfaction shows a significant relationship with subjective feelings of happiness. These findings support our second hypothesis. Several earlier studies reveal that marital satisfaction plays a crucial role in subjective feelings of happiness (Mohsin, Adnan, Sultan & Sabira, 2013). According to Schoen, Astone, Rothert, Standish & Kim (2002) marital satisfaction is a global evaluation of the state of one's marriage and a reflection of marital happiness and functioning. Believing that marital satisfaction plays a significant role in perceived happiness numerous researchers have conducted the studies to identify its determinants. For instance, Cottrell, Newberg and Li (2007) found that trustworthiness, cooperativeness, agreeableness, extraversion, attraction, intelligence, humor and wealth are important predictors of satisfaction of marital relationship. Several researches have undertaken to identify factors that differentiate between happy, successful and satisfying marriages and unsatisfactory ones. (Kaslow & Robinson, 1996; Halford et al 2007; Lee & Ono, 2008). Asoodeh, Khalili, Daneshpour and Lavasani (2010), identified certain factors leading to successful marriage derived from accounts of couples who described themselves as happy. The researcher reported that successful couples trust and consult each other, are honest, have a firm belief in Allah, make decisions with mutual consent, are committed to each other and are enjoying friendly relationship. The third hypothesis assumed that Subjective feelings of happiness will be significantly higher among individuals scoring high on Trust scale as compared to low scorers. Results presented in Table 3 support the hypothesis indicating that higher the trust among the respondents, the greater is the subjective feelings of happiness. These findings have substantial support from the earlier literature. According to Weiner (2009), trust is a prerequisite for happiness. Several studies have demonstrated that trust more than income or even health is the biggest feature in determining happiness. It's not just about trusting people but also the feelings of being trusted

that contributes to happiness. According to Lewandowski (2013) the secret of a happy marriage lies in trust, respect, friendship and loyalty among the spouses.

Further Findings

Analysis of data was further carried out to examine the validity of responses i-e to see if there is concurrence among the spouses about mutual trust reported by them. To achieve this objective Pearson Product Moment Correlation was computed between the two sets of scores obtained on Trust Scale. The results show a significant correlation ($r=0.63; p<.001$). We can safely assume that the respondents largely reported their true opinion about each other. Furthermore, t test was also applied to determine if there is any significant difference between the husbands and wives on reported trust. The results revealed insignificant difference ($t=1.04; p=.3$) demonstrating high similarity between the responses of the two groups.

By and large the current study has clearly highlighted a significant relationship between mutual trust of the spouses and their satisfaction of marital relationship satisfaction and subjective feelings of happiness.

Conclusion

Marriage is considered a popular institution in most countries of the world. However, even though official statistics are not available, a considerable percentage of marriages end in divorce in many countries including Pakistan. Several studies reveal that nowadays couples are less satisfied with their marriages compared to many years ago (Hall, 2006). A successful marriage is characterized by mutual interest, feelings of commitment towards each other and a decision to be together under any circumstances. The present study investigated the role of mutual trust, marital relationship satisfaction and subjective feelings of happiness in a successful marriage. Our findings show that subjective feelings of happiness among spouses and marital satisfaction seem to be important determinants of mutual trust thus, playing a significant role in psychological adjustment of individuals.

Implications

Creating awareness among the general population about the impact of mutual trust on satisfied marital life and happiness can significantly contribute towards marital adjustment. When people in intimate relationships learn to trust each other they can enjoy the benefits of mental health arising from marital satisfaction and feelings of happiness.

Limitations

Due to time constraint and unwillingness of couples to participate in the study, convenience sampling was used. The non-probability sampling reduces the generalizability of results.

The researcher personally collected data from only one spouse in each couple, who was accessible as a member of teaching faculty. He/she was further requested to administer the tests on their spouses.

Suggestions

- Future researchers can select the respondents by random sampling technique to have a representative sample to ascertain generalizability of results.
- The researcher must administer the test on both members comprising the couple to eliminate examiner bias.

- A comparison of the samples from nuclear and extended family system can be helpful to study the variations arising from different levels of trust, marital satisfaction and subjective happiness.
- Regression analysis can be applied to examine the relative effectiveness of predictor variables.

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