

Research on sexual satisfaction and marital happiness



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Nowadays, dissolution of marriage has undoubtedly become a major social predicament in America in view of the mushrooming divorce rate now at 50 percent. What is more disconcerting is that children fall victims to a host of emotional, mental, psychological, and academic maladies before and after parental separation. Because of this stark reality, investigators have been exhausting their academic energies in zeroing on its causes and ultimately concluded that divorce has a plethora of predictors covering changes in economic contributions, increase in work and family demands, age, race, religion, community characteristics, troubled background, a difficult personality, specific stressors, and substance abuse. Authors like Blumstein and Schwatz, among others reported that higher sexual satisfaction among couples improved marital relationship quality and stability strongly advocating that sexual satisfaction is a social barometer for lasting marriage. This research sought to examine the impact of sexual satisfaction on the marriage and general well-being of selected couples in America.

II. Literature Review

Researches measuring the association between sexual satisfaction and relationship quality employed either cross-sectional or longitudinal methods. The factor closely linked to sexual satisfaction is frequency of sex (Harvey, Wenzel, and Sprecher, 2004). Cheung et al (2008) admitted that while sexual satisfaction and frequency of sex are strongly related, the two are not exactly the same. They maintained that frequency constitutes an objective measure of the behavior while marital satisfaction connotes a subjective assessment of perception. According to Rahmani, Khoei, and Gholi (2009) whose respondents were 292 Iranians in Tehran found that sexual

satisfaction is a strong predictor of marital happiness though the former had no correlation with age difference of couples, length of marital life, and substance abuse. Using correlation analysis, Donnelly (1993) warned that sexual inactivity could be an indicator of an unhealthy and unhappy marriage. This was based on the interviews she conducted with 6, 029 married individuals. Morokoff and Gilliland (1993) in a cross-sectional study of 165 men and women found that a positive correlation between sexual satisfaction, perception of spouses sexual satisfaction, frequency of and marital satisfaction.

In Huston and Vangelisti (1991) a complex relationship between sex and marital relationship in 106 couples married for two years was noted and suggested further research employing other tools in measuring sexual interest and activity. Analysis of the Early Years of Marriage Project by Henderson-King and Veroff (1994) yielded positive association between sexual satisfaction and marital relationship quality during the first and third years of marriage. Likewise, Edwards and Booth (1994) determined the association between change in sexual happiness and marital well-being from 1980 and 1988, designated as Wave 1 and Wave 2, respectively.

Correlations were both positive and significant implying that variations in sexual behavior over time generally relate to psychological well-being and marital quality. Among 283 married Chinese couples, Yeh et al. (2006) revealed that over time, higher sexual satisfaction resulted in increased marital quality which led to decreased marital instability.

An influential gauge of marital quality, marital happiness is significantly linked to marital interaction, marital conflict, marital problems, and divorce
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proneness (Amato et al., 2007) and was found to follow a U-shaped curve over the years (Glenn, 1989). This review would feature studies highlighting the association between marital happiness and general happiness. Ruvolo (1998) examined marital well-being and the general happiness over the course of two years and found that during the first year, a higher marital happiness resulted in higher general happiness in the second year. For the husbands, a higher general happiness in the first year of marriage yielded higher marital well-being the next year. The meta-analysis of Proulx, Helms, and Buehler (2007) revealed that marital quality and psychological well-being had a positive correlation both concomitantly and over time. The work of Hawkins and Booth (2005) found that continuously married couples with higher mean marital happiness scores reported greater individual well-being than unhappily married spouses. Furthermore, Dush and Amato (2005) revealed that when marital happiness was one standard deviation above the mean, subjective well-being was greater compared to respondents whose scores were below one standard deviation. Dush, Taylor, and Kroeger (2008) demonstrated that respondents experiencing initially higher life happiness had an increased likelihood of attaining a higher marital happiness over time. On a similar note, respondents obtaining lowest initial life happiness most likely become unhappy with their marriages over time.

III. Hypotheses and Research Methods

The study was designed to explore the relationship between sexual and relationship satisfaction, then relationship satisfaction and general well-being of married couples. In the present study, sexual satisfaction was defined in terms of the frequency of sex; relationship satisfaction, marital happiness;

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and general well-being, general happiness. Serving as the theoretical backbone, the social exchange theory provides a clear perspective as to why sexual satisfaction might correlate positively with relationship quality (Sprecher, 1998). To some extent, sexual satisfaction in a marriage occurs when a favorable balance in the rewards and costs in the sexual aspect of the relationship is achieved. To explicate the link between relationship satisfaction and general well-being, two theoretical paradigms must be taken into account: the stress generation of Davila et al. (1997) and marital discord model of depression of Beach, Sandeen, and O'Leary (1990). The first paradigm states that low psychological well-being is a detriment to a marriage because the spouse is predisposed to encounter stressful encounters consequently leading to greater decline in psychological well-being. In the second model, low-quality marriages are at risk of depression owing to the fact that spouses are to provide each other social support which serves as a protective factor against depression. In the course of this investigation, two research hypotheses were addressed:

Research Hypothesis 1 (RH1): Sexual satisfaction is positively associated with relationship satisfaction; therefore higher sexual activity results in higher level of happiness in a marriage.

Research Hypothesis 2 (RH2): Couples who reported higher relationship satisfaction have greater perceived well being; therefore happy marriages more likely lead to happier individuals.

The analysis was based on data taken from the General Social Survey of 1972-2008. Variables were limited only to frequency of sex, marital

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happiness, and general happiness. The first variable was an interval level measurement while the last two were nominal level measurement. The respondents were asked: How often did you have sex in the last 12 months?, Taking things all together, how would you describe your marriage?, and Taken all together how would you say things are these days? Responses for marital and general happiness could be very happy which was coded as 1; pretty happy, 2; and not happy, 3. The responses were loaded to SPSS then subjected to both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. To test the research hypotheses, two Chi-Square Tests were performed.

IV. Data Analysis

Within the last 12 months, most respondents had sex two to three times a month (33. 5%), two to three times a week (26. 1%), and once a month (18. 2%). Also noted was the absence of sexual activity in 22. 2% of the sample. Therefore data leaned towards engagement of sex of two to three times on a monthly basis.

Table 1. Distribution on the frequency of sex from the General Social Survey 1972-2008

Frequency of sex

n

%

Not at all

5013

22. 2

Once a month

4127

18. 2

2-3 times a month

7566

33. 5

2-3 per week

5909

26. 1

Total

22615

100. 0

In addition, 63. 5% had very happy marriages. Moderate marital happiness was noted in 33. 5% of respondents while only 2. 9% were not too happy. Measures of central tendency in marital happiness showed a mean and median of 1. 39 and 1. 00, respectively. General happiness of most spouses was only moderate at 55. 8%. On the other hand, 31. 9% were very happy

while 12. 3% were not too happy. In this variable, mean was 1. 80 and median was 2. 00.

Table 2. Distribution of marital and general happiness from the General Social Survey 1972-008

Responses

Marital happiness

General happiness

n

%

n

%

Very happy

16147

63. 5

15399

31. 9

Pretty happy

8528

33. 5

26974

55. 8

Not too happy

749

2. 9

5945

12. 3

Total

25424

100. 0

48318

100. 0

Marital happiness: Mean= 1. 36; Median = 1. 00; General happiness: Mean= 1. 80; Median= 2. 00

Table 3 revealed that no sexual activity during the 12 months resulted to high (54. 3%), fair (40. 1%), and low (5. 6%) marital happiness. For respondents whose intercourse happens once a month, 53. 8% reported they

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were very happy with their marriages; 41. 5%, pretty happy; and 4. 7%, not too happy. In the third cluster, 63. 2% had very happy marriages; 34. 6%, pretty happy; and 2. 2%, not too happy. High marital happiness was evident at 68. 4%, although some said they were pretty happy (29. 6%) and not too happy (2. 8%) among the most sexually active group,. At $df= 6$, Pearson Chi-Square had a computed value of 156. 236 and a p-value of 0. 000.

Table 3. Chi-Square Analysis between frequency of sex and marital happiness

Frequency of sex

Marital happiness

Not at all

Once a month

2-3 times a month

2-3 per week

Total

Very happy

380 (54. 3%)

1009 (53. 8%)

2762 (63. 2%)

2026 (68.4%)

6177 (62.4%)

Pretty happy

281 (40.1%)

778 (41.5%)

1512 (34.6%)

877 (29.6%)

3448 (34.8%)

Not too happy

39 (5.6%)

88 (4.7%)

95 (2.2%)

58 (2.0%)

280 (2.8%)

Total

700 (100%)

1875 (100%)

4369 (100%)

2961 (100%)

9905 (100%)

$\chi^2 = 156.236$ (df= 6); $p = 0.000$

Cross tabulation between marriage and general happiness showed that the respondents who were happiest with their unions were very happy (57.9%), pretty happy (38%), and not too happy (4.1%) with themselves. Among those with moderate marital quality, majority (79%) were generally pretty happy, very happy (11.4%), and not too happy (9.6%). In those not satisfied with their marriages, the greater part (51.5%) rated their general well-being lowest. Moreover, in 43.2% of the distribution, general happiness was fair and very high in 5.2% of the sample. Further analysis on the data set would reveal a Pearson Chi-Square statistic of 7274.695 (df= 4) with a p value of 0.000.

Table 4. Chi-Square Analysis between marital and general happiness

Marital happiness

General happiness

Very happy

Pretty happy

Not too happy

Total

Very happy

9325 (57.9%)

968 (11.4%)

39 (5.2%)

10332 (40.7%)

Pretty happy

6117 (38.0%)

6721 (79.0%)

322 (43.2%)

13160 (51.90%)

Not too happy

665 (4.1%)

816 (9.6%)

384 (51.5%)

1865 (7.4%)

Total

16107 (100%)

8505 (100%)

745 (100%)

25357 (100%)

$\chi^2 = 7274.695$ (df= 4); $p = 0.000$

V. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the study supported the stated hypotheses and literature that sexual activity is positively associated with marital happiness and in the same way, marital happiness with general happiness. Because divorce is a reality in American society, the study would prompt policymakers to review the "healthy" marriage agenda and propose mentoring system, therapy, and other interventions. In this way, couples in America would be much happier paving the way for closely-knit families thereby improving family well-being.

A limitation in the study is its utilization of self reports based on the three questions on sexual activity, marital happiness, and general happiness from which responses were elicited. Sexual satisfaction should not only be defined primarily by the number of times sexual intercourse was engaged but also extended to include boundaries, control-power, and investment using the ISRS. Marital happiness could be determined by asking future respondents how much understanding and love they received, how happy they were with their spouses as lifetime partners and their faithfulness. Another is the

research design. Because the study employed both correlational and cross-sectional approaches, inferences on causation or direction could not be made. It is also suggested to incorporate other methods such as physiological, observational, and qualitative measures such as use of diary to significantly add depth and texture on how sexual satisfaction affects marital satisfaction. The results of the study could significantly impact couples who have busy careers and experience sexual dysfunction considering that these groups more likely do not place sexual activity very important. Thus, this study pushes for the moderating effect of communication on the relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital happiness.