MARITAL DISHARMONY IN NEUROTICS

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SUMMARY

The present study examines the hypothesis that there would be significant differences between neurotics and normals, and between spouses of neurotics and spouses of normals, with regard to marital disharmony and some of its components as measured by the Dyadic Adjustment Scale. The results supported the hypothesis, with neurotics and their spouses indicating that their marriage are disturbed in comparison with the marriages of normal couples.

Introduction

The relationship of marital status to physical and emotional illness has been extensively studied. Marital breakdown, by way of separation of divorce, it known to be associated with various types of emotional illnesses. When such illnesses do occur among the married, both partners are likely to manifest some degree of disturbance. Explanation of these findings involves role conflict, vulnerability to stress, selectively and assortative mating, and pathological interaction processes including unconscious aspects of the relationship.

To date, most research findings have been unequivocal in pointing out that marital disharmony in significantly greater in neurotics when compared with normal couples. (Ryle 1966, Kreitman, Collins, Nelson & Troop 1970, Ovenstone 1973, Sathyavathi & Seth 1975, Inciichen 1976, Trivedi, Gupta & Agarwal 1978, Subhash Chander 1980) in this connection the need to examine the different components of marital maladjustment cannot be overly emphasised.

The objective of the study was to examine marital disharmony and some of its components in a group of neurotics and their spouses, as compared to a group of normal couples. It was hypothesized that there would be significant differences between neurotics and normals, and between spouses of neurotics and spouses of normals, with regard to marital disharmony as measured by the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier 1976).

Materials and Methods

The study included an experimental and a control group. The experimental group had 30 neurotic patients (15 males and 15 females diagnosed in accordance with ICD-9 and their spouses. The control group consisted of 30 normal subjects (15 males and 15 females) and their spouses, who had been screened for neuroticism on Abraham et al. (1977) version of the Eysenck Personality Inventory. Using group matching procedures (t test or x2 test), the two groups were matched on certain variables. The sample characteristics are presented in Table 1 and 2.

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The above tables indicate that the experimental and the control groups were comparable with regard to age, occupation, number of years of marriage, number of children, number of members in the family, type of family and family life cycle. The spouses of neurotics and spouses of normals were comparable on sex, age and education.

The subjects in the two groups were briefed about the nature and purpose of the study. After collecting the relevant
sociodemographic data, the subjects were administered the Dyadic Adjustment Inventory (Spanier 1976). This scale consists of 32 items which provides a global score of marital adjustment and scores on 4 factorially derived components i.e. dyadic consensus, affectional expression, dyadic satisfaction and dyadic cohesion (Spanier 1976). A critical reevaluation of the scale has obtained confirmatory evidence for the factor structure of the scale and its component subscales (Spanier and Thompson 1982). Separate forms are available for males and females. Subjects are instructed to indicate the extent of their agreement or disagreement with the items. Scores range from 0 to 4 or 0 to 5 for the items. High scores are indicative of the better marital adjustment.

**Results**

Responses of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale were scored for the experimental and control groups. Each subject gets five scores viz total adjustment, dyadic consensus, affectional expression dyadic satisfaction and dyadic cohesion. Means and standard deviation were computed. 't' tests were carried between the scores of (a) neurotic and normal subjects and (b) spouses of neurotic and spouses of normal subjects. The obtained results are given in Table 3.

From Table 3, it could be seen that the neurotics differed significantly from normals with regard to total adjustment, dyadic satisfaction and cohesion. The two groups did not differ significantly on dyadic consensus and affectional expression though the trend of scores was in the expected direction. The spouses of neurotics differed significantly from spouses of normals on all the five variables considered.

**Discussion**

The results of the study showed that neurotics and their spouses perceived their marriages as disharmonious in comparison with normal couples, who reported good marital adjustment. This finding is in line with those of earlier studies.

Neurotics and their spouses reported less dyadic consensus in their marriage than normal couples, with disagreements arising over issues like handling family finances, ways of dealing with parents or in-laws, amount of time spent together and leisure time activities.

Neurotics did not perceive the absence of affectional expression in their marriages when compared with normals, but spouses of neurotics reported significantly less affection in their marriages than

|                | Neurotics (N=30) | Normals (N=30) | Spouses of Neurotics (N=30) | Spouses of Normals (N=30) |
|----------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| **M**          | **S.D**          | **M**          | **S.D.**                    | **M**                    |
| **DAS Total**  | 104.5            | 25.2           | 119.4                       | 21.2                     |
| **Dyadic Consensus** | 49.2            | 11.38          | 53.2                        | 11.42                    |
| **Affectional Expression** | 9.1            | 1.99           | 9.7                         | 5.72                     |
| **Dyadic Satisfaction** | 32.3            | 8.91           | 39.6                        | 1.81                     |
| **Dyadic Cohesion** | 13.7            | 5.29           | 16.2                        | 5.46                     |
| **t**          | 2.6*             | 2.05*          | 3.59*                       | 2.13                     |
|                | 101.5            | 29.5           | 118.82                      | 13.85                    |
|                | 45.7             | 14.42          | 52.3                        | 5.7                      |
|                | 8.1              | 2.63           | 9.9                         | 2.13                     |
|                | 33.9             | 8.76           | 40.6                        | 4.59                     |
|                | 13.2             | 6.11           | 15.9                        | 3.81                     |

* Significant  
NS = Not Significant.
spouses of normals. A point of interest is that while spouses of neurotics reported both lack of affection as well as marital maladjustment, the neurotics while reporting satisfactory affectional relations, still perceived their marriages as maladjusted. This throws some light on the paradoxes and discrepancies in affectional relations in the marriages of neurotics and corroborates earlier findings (Ryle 1966, Ineichen 1976, Subhash Chander 1980).

Neurotics and their spouses reported that they experienced less dyadic satisfaction in their marriages when compared with normal couples. Items of the subscale which were particularly revealing in this regard were the ones dealing with the degree of regret for having married, frequency of quarrels with spouse, extent of confiding in spouse, extent of things going well between self and spouse and opinions about the future of the relationship. In spite of the reported dissatisfaction, discussion of divorce or separation was not common. The findings on the dyadic satisfaction subscale are in line with those of other investigators (Murphy and Nendelson 1973, Synder 1979, McNamara & Bahr 1980).

Neurotics and their spouses reported less dyadic cohesion in their marriages than normal couples. This was well brought in the items dealing with engaging in outside interests together, which was lacking in the marriages of the neurotics. Cohesion is not a widely researched concept. However, it has been found (Kreitman, Collins, Nelson and Troop 1970, Owenstone 1973) that couples in distressed marriages do report less joint activities when compared with couples in stable marriages.

Taking the results of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale as a whole, the hypothesis was accepted.

The inverse relationship between neuroticism and marital harmony is a well established and documented finding, though the exact cause and effect nature of the relationship may remain clouded. Either assortative mating or pathological interaction have usually been implicated in such findings, with both partners manifesting varying degrees of emotional disturbance. Mayamma and Sathyavathi (1985a) in an earlier paper have brought out that neither of these theories was found tenable for the present study population as most of these were arranged marriages and a correlational analysis done for the neuroticism score (EPI) obtained by the neurotics and their spouses yielded a negative correlation though low suggestive of better emotional stability of the spouses of neurotics. However, the findings of the present study indicates the need for intervention as the subjects in the experimental group were neurotics and their spouses, who had brought out that their marriages were disturbed and in need of change and improvement. Sims (1975) found that marital adjustment was one of the significant predictors for outcome in neurosis, with poor adjustment associated with poor outcome. The significance of this finding cannot be overlooked as also the importance of suitable intervention strategies for helping these neurotics with respect to their marital disharmony.

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