A study of the relationship between Big-five personality traits and communication styles with marital satisfaction of married students majoring in public universities of Tehran

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Abstract

The present study was conducted to explore the effect of Big-five personality traits and communication styles on the marital satisfaction of married students majoring in public universities of Tehran. To achieve this goal, as many as 100 subjects (50 couples) were selected using multi-stage cluster sampling from among public universities of Tehran. They filled NEO, Communication Styles and Enrich Marital Satisfaction questionnaires. Findings indicated neuroticism trait, of the personality questionnaire, had a negative and significant relationship with marital satisfaction; while the four other factors, i.e., agreeableness, conscientious, extraversion and openness to experience, had a significant and positive relationship with marital satisfaction. It was also found that the Expectation-withdrawal and Mutual Avoidance communication styles had a negative and significant relationship with marital satisfaction, while for mutual constructive communication style the relationship was significant and positive. Stepwise Regression analysis revealed Neuroticism trait was the first predictive factor of marital satisfaction and agreeableness, conscientious, extraversion and openness to experience were the next factors predicting the variable, respectively. As regards communication styles, mutual constructive communication style proved to be the first, and Expectation-Withdrawal and Mutual Avoidance styles the next factors predicting marital satisfaction.

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Key words: Big-Five Personality Traits; communication Styles; Marital Satisfaction

1. Introduction

There are two views with regard to the factors that would affect the stability and satisfaction in interpersonal relationship in general, marital relationship in particular. One is intrapersonal view which considers personality dimensions to be major factors influencing marital relationship , and by contrast from the interpersonal point of view, the way men and women are matured is the major factor influencing the function of marriage(Brent Donellan,
Conger, Bryant, 2004). Regarding this, it is said that communication might have an important role in determining satisfaction in marriage and close relationship (Fletcher, 2002).

Regarding the intrapersonal view, other works suggest that the effects of personality factors such as neuroticism and some dimensions related to it (e.g. depression and anxiety) can be focused on adopting relationships and measure the extent to which couples are satisfied from marital relationship (Karney, Bradbury, 1997; Couglin et al., 2000; Watson et al., 2000).

Researchers have found that hostility and neuroticism are predictors of marital satisfaction up to 18 months after marriage, that is as hostility and neuroticism among couples increase, marital satisfaction decreases Rogge et al. (2006). Donnellan et al. (2004) found that extroversion in self measurements is associated with negative interactions in self measurements not in the interactions that are reported by the observers.

Eysenck, H.J, & Wakefield (1981) found few evidence about the significance of extroversion, while Watson et al. (2000) claimed that extroversion in self measurements and positive emotions among married couples are positively associated with marital satisfaction.

This research tends to investigate the relationship between marital satisfaction based on five personality factors (openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, adoption and neuroticism) and various prevalent communication styles among these couples.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and Procedure

50 couples (100 individuals) from the university of Tehran and Allame Tabatabayi participated in this study. They were chosen through at and sampling and comprised the sample society of the research. The research method is of correlation type.

2.2. Instruments

2.2.1. NEO Personality Inventory: it measures five personality factors: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience. It has a good validity. The consistency coefficient of the scale is calculated for various traits of men and women between 0/51 to 0/82 (Mc Crae & Costa, 1992). The validity of the first NEO-FFI has been investigated in different ways. For investigating the criterion validity of the test, the correlation between 2 self report forms S and observer evaluation of the form R has been used. Among the major factors, the maximum correlation was 0/66 for extroversion and the minimum of 0/45 for.

2.2.2. ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale: This has been applied as a reliable scale to measure marital satisfaction. Olson believes that this scale is sensitive to the changes that occur through life and also to the changes in the family. Olson et al. reported the reliability of the scale through alpha cronbach to be 0/92. Also the Chronbach alpha of the scale is 0/93 and reliability coefficient of the abridged form (47 questions) was calculated through Alpha as 0/94.

2.2.3. Communication Styles Questionnaire: this questionnaire is a relatively self measurement tool which is developed to estimate the marital communication styles among couples. It has 35 questions which includes three subscales of a) Mutual constructive communication, b) Mutual avoidance and c) Expectation withdrawal. This tool s developed by Christian & Saloy in 1984. Ebadatpour (2005) calculated the reliability of the scale through cronbach alpha in Mutual constructive communication, Mutual avoidance and Expectation withdrawal subscales respectively as 0/70, 0/71 and 0/66.

3. Results

Multivariate analysis of variance was used to compare men with women according to their total score in the five big personality factors and its five dimensions and also communication styles questionnaire and its subscales. The results suggested that based on these scales, there is no difference among couples. Thus the data were analyzed together.

Table 1 shows the correlation among the variables. According to the table, correlation coefficient between neuroticism and marital satisfaction is meaningfully negative (P<0/01, r= _ 0/410). Adoption was also
positively associated with marital satisfaction \( (P<0.01, r=0.256) \) and extroversion and conscientiousness showed a meaningful positive association. Openness is shown to be positively associated with marital satisfaction \( (P<0.01, r=0.127) \), the same is true about the association between mutual constructive communication and marital satisfaction \( (P<0.001, r=0.262) \). Moreover, the styles of mutual avoidance and expectation withdrawal are negatively associated with marital satisfaction in a significant way.

Table 1: Pearson correlation coefficients among the five personality factors, components of communication styles and marital satisfaction

| Marital satisfaction | Mutually constructive communication | Withdrawal expectation | Mutual avoidance | Neuroticism | Openness | Agreeableness | Conscientiousness | Extraversion |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------|-------------|----------|--------------|------------------|-------------|
| Marital satisfaction | -                                   | -                      | -                | -           | -        | -            | -                | -           |
| Extraversion         | 0.290                               | -                      | -                | 0.340       | 0.280    | 0.300        | 0.280            | -           |
| Agreeableness        | -                                   | -                      | -                | -           | -        | -            | -                | -           |
| Conscientiousness    | -                                   | -                      | -                | -           | -        | -            | -                | -           |
| Neuroticism          | -0.430                              | -0.400                 | -0.380           | -           | -        | -            | -                | -           |
| Openness             | 0.280                               | 0.335                  | 0.270            | -0.391      | -        | -            | -                | -           |
| Mutual constructive communication | 0.156 | 0.371 | 0.390 | -0.219 | 0.410 |
| Withdrawal expectation | 0.320 | -0.462 | -0.304 | 0.395 | -0.255 | -0.115 |
| Mutual avoidance     | 0.275                               | -0.325                 | -0.440           | 0.329       | -0.370   | -0.245       | 0.120            | -           |
| Marital satisfaction | 0.260                               | 0.256                  | 0.283            | -0.410      | 0.310    | 0.262        | -0.289           | -0.432      |

\( (P<0.01) \)

For investigating the predicting role of the five major personality factors and communication styles in the dependent variable step wised regression analysis was applied.

According to results, in the first regression analysis, 17% of the marital satisfaction variance is explained through neuroticism and in the second stage which involves adoption, 19% of the depended variable variance is explained. In the third stage, with regard to conscientiousness, 23% of the variance of marital satisfaction is explained. In the fourth and fifth stage, the variance of marital satisfaction is explained through extroversion 25% and openness 32%. These five factors can meaningfully predict marital satisfaction score, \( (P<0.001 & F=26/73 & R^2=0/32) \). Furthermore, based on the standard regression coefficients \( \beta \) it might be said that neuroticism with standard coefficient of 0.24- has the largest role in predicting marital satisfaction and after this, factors of adoption, conscientiousness, extroversion and openness to experience are placed before marital satisfaction.

According to the results, in the first stage of regression analysis, 7% of the marital satisfaction variance is explained through the mutual constructive communication style and the second stage involves expectation withdrawal style which explains 12% of the dependent variable variance. Finally, the mutual avoidance style is added and 15% of marital satisfaction is explained. Marital satisfaction score can be meaningfully explained through these three communication styles \( (P<0.001 \text{ and } F=12/88 \text{ and } R^2 =0/15) \). Moreover, based on the \( \beta \) standard regression coefficients, it is suggested that the mutual constructive communication style with standard coefficient of 0.17 has the largest share in predicting marital satisfaction.

4. Discussion

The results obtained in this study suggest that there is a meaningful negative association between neuroticism factor and marital satisfaction, that is while this personality factor increases, the marital satisfaction decreases. This is also
supported by the researchers conducted by Rogge et al (2006), Donnellane et al (2004) and Couglin et al (2000). The results also suggest a meaningful positive association of factors of adoption, extroversion, conscientiousness and openness with marital satisfaction. There are other works with similar results, such as (Heaven et al, 2006; Buss 1991; Watson et al, 2000).

As mentioned, a positive association was found between extroversion and marital satisfaction, though it is worth mentioning that although this result has been supported by some other researches, it is not similar with that of Eysenck and Wakefield (1981) and Donnellane et al (2004), thus it might be so, because few studies have benefited from all 5 personality factors to analyze that relationship between personality and marital quality measures (Bouchard, 1999, Watson et al, 2000, Couglin et al, 2000).

The results obtained from regression analysis also showed that among personality factors, neuroticism and adoption appear to be as the first and the second factors in predicting marital satisfaction. This result is supported by Botvin et al (1997), Tobin et al (2000) and Couglin et al (2000).

The results suggested a positive association between the mutual constructive communication style and marital satisfaction. The expectation withdrawal and mutual avoidance styles were also found to be negatively associated with marital satisfaction, thus these findings are consistent with that of Heaven et al (2006).

The association of personality traits and communication styles with marital adoption and satisfaction is very important, so it is necessary for psychologists and family consultants to focus more on these factors in premarriage counseling. As a result, evaluation and understanding of personality characteristics by the couples themselves who want to form a family is important, at the other hand, teaching communication styles is something that should be more focused on so that more educations would be available for couples. One of the limitations of this research is that it is done in the academic society which poses some problems in the possibility of generalizing the results, with this regard applying direct behavioral evaluations from couples beside questionnaire methods would lead to more confidence about the results.

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