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- 1 Department of Counseling, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran.
- 2 Department of Psychology, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran.
- 3 Department of Psychology, West Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.
- 4 Department of General psychology, South Tehran Branch, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran.

Corresponding author email address: FaridehZekri@gmail.com



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Investigating the Effect of Emotional Intelligence and Moral Intelligence on Marital Satisfaction among Married Students

Atena. Pourhashem Sarhammami¹, Masoumeh. Fallah Neudehi², Behnaz. Bouzari³, Nastarn. Ramezani³, Farideh Alsadat. Zekri^{4*}

ABSTRACT

Objective: Marriage is a multifaceted union that depends on numerous elements. The study aimed to examine the correlation between emotional intelligence and moral intelligence on marital contentment among married students.

Methods and Materials: This study utilized descriptive-correlational and cross-sectional research methods. The statistical population consisted of undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students enrolled at the University of Tehran between October and December of the 2023 academic year. Stratified sampling was employed as the sampling technique, resulting in a sample size of 332 individuals. The tools utilized included the Emotional Intelligence (EI) Questionnaire, the Moral Intelligence (MCI) questionnaire, and the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction (EMS) Scale. The multiple regression analysis was conducted by SPSS version 27 software.

Findings: The findings indicated that the ability to recognize emotions, one aspect of emotional intelligence, did not have a notable impact on the level of satisfaction within a marriage ($P=0.469$). However, the capacity to control emotions ($P<0.001$), interpersonal abilities ($P=0.003$), and optimism ($P=0.002$) had a notable and positive influence on the level of satisfaction within a marriage. Moreover, the impacts of moral intelligence components, namely Responsibility, and Compassion, on marital contentment were revealed to have no significant statistical importance ($P<0.05$). On the other hand, honesty ($P<0.001$) and forgiveness ($P<0.001$) were found to have a positive and significant impact on marital satisfaction.

Conclusion: The results of this research emphasize the beneficial impact of emotional intelligence and moral intelligence on individuals' satisfaction in their marriages. It is advisable to conduct similar studies in different communities and populations as broadening the range of these investigations can assist in preventing various issues and safeguarding the unity of families.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, Moral intelligence, Marital satisfaction, Married students.

Introduction

Marriage and favorable marital relationships can serve as valuable assets and resources in individuals' lives. Matrimony exerts a significant positive influence on overall well-being. Furthermore, one's marital status and positive marital quality have a beneficial impact on health and are closely linked to happiness (Surijah et al., 2023). Marital satisfaction refers to the level of contentment, fulfillment, and connection experienced by a married couple in their shared life together (Dobrowolska et al., 2020; Surijah et al., 2024). Marital satisfaction encompasses various aspects of marital relationships, including compatibility, happiness, honesty, and commitment. This mental state, however, is not attained automatically but necessitates the continuous efforts of the couple to foster its realization (Hakimi Dezfouli & Ebrahimpour, 2024; Omoboye, 2024; Sayehmiri et al., 2020). In this context, research findings have demonstrated that gender, age, religiosity, economic status, education, and cultural values exhibit varying degrees of association with marital satisfaction (Dobrowolska et al., 2020). Additionally, a study found that couples who employ positive humor experience heightened levels of marital satisfaction (Tsai et al., 2023). Moreover, the results of the Hong et al. (2023) study indicated a positive correlation between marital satisfaction and employment type, age, duration of marriage, and number of children (Hong et al., 2023).

Marriage is a multifaceted union whose prosperity is contingent upon numerous factors. Emotional intelligence stands as a vital trait essential for attaining triumph in life and cultivating harmonious interpersonal connections (Omidi & Talighi, 2017; Shareh & Foshtanqi, 2019). Emotional intelligence refers to the capacity to effectively comprehend, assess, articulate emotions, possess emotional wisdom, and manage emotions to facilitate emotional and intellectual growth (Pérez-Fernández et al., 2021). Effective relationships and communication necessitate the presence of emotional intelligence, as it encompasses a broad spectrum of skills that enable individuals to perceive and regulate their emotions, demonstrate spontaneity, discern emotions in others, and effectively navigate social interactions (Zhang & Adegbola, 2022). According to Anyamene's (2020) research findings, a significant relationship exists between the emotional intelligence of married teachers

and their level of satisfaction in their marriages (Anyamene, 2020). Similarly, another study discovered that emotional intelligence is positively associated with satisfaction in romantic relationships (Jardine et al., 2022). Navabinejad et al. (2023) concluded that emotional intelligence has a positive correlation with marital compatibility and mental well-being (Erus & Deniz, 2020). Likewise, the research conducted by Abiodun et al. (2022) on emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction among Christian couples in Nigeria revealed a positive connection between emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction (Abiodun et al., 2022).

Moral intelligence plays a crucial role in fostering honesty, responsibility, compassion, and forgiveness among married individuals, leading to heightened commitment and satisfaction within their marital relationship. This distinctive attribute prompts married individuals to prioritize moral principles as the cornerstone of their interactions (Homaei, 2019). Moral intelligence entails the capacity to differentiate between right and wrong while adhering to established behavioral norms and standards. Furthermore, it is a cultivated skill that matures throughout one's lifetime (Azkhosh et al., 2024; Dacka & Rydz, 2023). Individuals with moral intelligence possess the keen ability to exercise sound judgment and choose the most ethical and prudent course of action from alternatives. They possess a deep awareness of how their values, objectives, and conduct align with the principles of honesty, responsibility, compassion, and forgiveness (Chan, 2023). Notably, research findings have substantiated a positive and significant correlation between moral intelligence and marital satisfaction (Homaei, 2019). Additionally, studies have indicated that moral intelligence is a protective factor against infidelity, elevating overall contentment in the shared life of couples (Kamalju et al., 2017). Conversely, individuals engaged in extramarital demonstrate lower levels of moral intelligence, resulting in diminished love and satisfaction between partners (Nariman et al., 2019).

The family can be regarded as an emotional entity and a complex web of interconnected associations stemming from the marital union between a man and a woman. Finding contentment within the family unit not only brings fulfillment in life but also fosters personal growth, societal advancement, and both material and spiritual

advancement (Mohammadzadeh et al., 2019). As a result, it becomes imperative to conduct scientific investigations to identify the factors and variables that contribute to marital satisfaction within society. Despite the significance of this matter, no previous research has directly explored the association between emotional intelligence, moral intelligence, and marital satisfaction among married students. Consequently, a research gap exists in this domain, making this study one of the pioneering inquiries into the correlation between emotional intelligence, moral intelligence, and marital satisfaction among married students. The main objective of this study is to determine whether a link exists between emotional intelligence, moral intelligence, and marital satisfaction among married students.

Methods and Materials

Study Design and Participants

This study was conducted as a combination of descriptive-correlational research and cross-sectional research methodologies. The target population for this study comprised undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students enrolled at the University of Tehran during the academic year of 2023, specifically from October to December.

The research employed a stratified sampling technique. The sampling process involved creating a comprehensive list of all the faculties within Central Tehran University. Subsequently, five faculties were randomly selected, including the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Foreign Languages, Basic Sciences, Technical and Engineering, and Economics, with a total student population of 26,930.

The authors took responsibility for the process of randomization, employing the coin-tossing method to designate the faculties involved. Subsequently, research samples were chosen at random from these five faculties. The sample size, determined by Cochran's formula, amounted to 378. To meet the criteria for inclusion, students needed to exhibit satisfaction and engagement in their studies, as well as being married. Exclusion criteria involved failing to respond to over ten questions in the research questionnaires.

The research process adhered to a methodical approach, commencing with the acquisition of necessary authorizations from the university and collaborating

with the pertinent academic departments. To facilitate the investigation, students were duly informed and provided with specific research objectives. Subsequently, forty-six participants were deemed ineligible for the study because of incomplete questionnaire responses or voluntary disengagement. Ultimately, data from 332 individuals were scrutinized. The research participants were tasked with fulfilling three distinct variables: emotional intelligence, moral intelligence, and marital satisfaction.

Data Collection Tools

Emotional Intelligence (EI) Questionnaire: The self-report survey, created by Petrides and Farnham in 2001, is designed to evaluate emotional intelligence and has been validated (Petrides et al., 2007). The version 30 items of this questionnaire were utilized. This questionnaire assesses four dimensions: perceiving emotions, managing emotions, social skills, and optimism. Responses are scored on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from complete agreement (7) to complete disagreement (1). Each dimension's scores are tallied separately, with higher scores indicating greater emotional intelligence. Sample items from this questionnaire include statements such as "I empathize with the sadness experienced by others, even if they are my relatives," "I am tolerant of others' anger and disgust," and "I frequently experience worry in specific situations." (Suardi Wekke et al., 2022). Petrides & Farnham (2007) reported a high internal consistency for the questionnaire, at 86% (Petrides et al., 2007). This questionnaire has also been validated in Iran, with reliability ranging between 76% and 88% in two separate studies utilizing Cronbach's alpha (Karimzadeh et al., 2012; Yousefi & Safari, 2009). The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was determined by Cronbach's alpha, resulting in a value of 0.75.

Moral Competency Index (MCI): The questionnaire employed in this study was created and verified by Lenik and Keel in 2007 to evaluate moral intelligence (Lennick & Kiel, 2007). Consisting of 40 items and divided into four subscales encompassing honesty, responsibility, compassion, and forgiveness, respondents are required to rate each item on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "never" to "all the time." The total scale scores range from 40 to 200, with each subscale ranging from 10 to 50. The scores for each subscale are calculated

independently. A higher score on this scale signifies a greater level of moral intelligence in an individual. In previous studies conducted in Iran, the reliability of this questionnaire was found to range from 89% to 94% using Cronbach's alpha (Asefi Far et al., 2023; Sistanipour et al., 2021). For this research, the reliability of the questionnaire, as determined by Cronbach's alpha, was 0.81.

ENRICH Marital Satisfaction (EMS) Scale: In 1993, Olson, Fowers, and Olson formulated a self-report survey to assess potential areas of concern or recognize positive elements within marital relationships, thereby augmenting their overall caliber (Fowers & Olson, 1993). The original rendition of this assessment comprises 115 inquiries, encompassing dimensions and traits about communication, conflict resolution, financial matters, recreational pursuits, intimate relations, education, children, connections with significant relatives and friends, marital roles, and religious and spiritual inclinations. Due to the extensive nature of the scale's questions, multiple versions have been derived from it. Initially, Olson introduced a concise 15-item formulation, followed by a more comprehensive 47-item variant. The total score range on the scale extends from 47 to 235, with higher scores indicating a greater degree of marital contentment. Notably, research conducted in Iran yielded a reliability rate of 95% for the questionnaire

through the utilization of Cronbach's alpha (Bakhshayesh & MORTAZAVI, 2010). In the present investigation, Cronbach's alpha was employed to assess the reliability of this survey, resulting in a reliability coefficient of 0.72.

Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 27 software, employing advanced techniques such as Pearson correlation and multiple regression. The normality of the research variables' distribution was assessed through the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Furthermore, the researcher successfully ensured this underlying assumption of implementing a random sampling technique. Throughout the research, a significance level of 0.05 was deemed appropriate.

Findings and Results

In this research study, 167 married students were enlisted as participants and subsequently grouped into two distinct categories based on their male (57.2%) and female (42.8%). Furthermore, the participants were categorized according to age, with 27.1% falling between 20 and 25, 48.2% between 26 and 30, and 24.7% above 30. In terms of education, the participants were divided into two groups: 27.7% held a Bachelor's degree, while 72.3% possessed a Master's degree or higher.

Table 1

Descriptive indices and Pearson's correlation coefficient

| Variables | Mean ± SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | P-value |
|-------------------------|-------------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---|----------|
| 1. Perceiving emotions | 24.75±10.8 | — | | | | | | | | | p <0.001 |
| 2. Managing emotion | 30.06±11.7 | 0.49 | — | | | | | | | | p <0.001 |
| 3. Social skills | 32.14±12.5 | 0.57 | 0.765 | — | | | | | | | p <0.001 |
| 4. Optimism | 38.88±17.1 | 0.24 | 0.589 | 0.642 | — | | | | | | p <0.001 |
| 5. Honesty | 36.19±12.0 | 0.51 | 0.903 | 0.805 | 0.640 | — | | | | | p <0.001 |
| 6. Responsibility | 29.25±14.9 | 0.60 | 0.563 | 0.609 | 0.535 | 0.599 | — | | | | p <0.001 |
| 7. Compassion | 29.14±14.7 | 0.26 | 0.717 | 0.446 | 0.400 | 0.610 | 0.392 | — | | | p <0.001 |
| 8. Forgiveness | 29.07±14.7 | 0.03 | 0.515 | 0.451 | 0.549 | 0.594 | 0.425 | 0.377 | — | | p <0.001 |
| 9. Marital Satisfaction | 156.5±73.05 | 0.36 | 0.851 | 0.657 | 0.659 | 0.841 | 0.566 | 0.587 | 0.702 | — | p <0.001 |

According to the findings from Table 1, the correlation coefficients determined that there exists a positive and significant association (P<0.001) between the different

elements of emotional intelligence, such as perceiving emotions, managing emotions, social skills, optimism, and marital satisfaction. Moreover, there is a positive

and significant relationship ($P < 0.001$) between the components of moral intelligence, namely honesty, responsibility, compassion, and forgiveness, and marital

satisfaction. The researcher then proceeded to analyze the regression connections between the independent variables and marital satisfaction in [Table 2](#).

Table 2

Multiple regression analysis

| Dependent Variable | Model | Not Standardized coefficients | | Standardized coefficients | | | Model Summary | | ANOVA | |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------|--------|-------------|--------------------|----------------|---------|-------------|
| | | B | Standard error | Beta | t | P-value | R | R ² | F | P-value |
| Marital Satisfaction | Constant | -29.149 | 8.108 | - | -3.595 | $p < 0.001$ | 0.916 ^a | 0.840 | 103.368 | $p < 0.001$ |
| | Perceiving emotions | 0.246 | 0.339 | 0.036 | 0.726 | 0.469 | | | | |
| | Managing emotion | 3.810 | 0.546 | 0.610 | 6.980 | $p < 0.001$ | | | | |
| | Social skills | 3.837 | 0.343 | 0.657 | 11.188 | 0.003 | | | | |
| | Optimism | 0.626 | 0.202 | 0.147 | 3.099 | 0.002 | | | | |
| | Honesty | 4.760 | 0.318 | 0.783 | 14.990 | $p < 0.001$ | | | | |
| | Responsibility | 0.471 | 0.256 | 0.096 | 1.838 | 0.068 | | | | |
| | Compassion | -0.320 | 0.234 | -0.065 | -1.368 | 0.173 | | | | |
| | Forgiveness | 1.489 | 0.230 | 0.300 | 6.474 | $p < 0.001$ | | | | |

The findings presented in [Table 2](#) suggest that the Perceiving emotions aspect of emotional intelligence did not significantly affect marital satisfaction ($P = 0.469$). On the other hand, the Managing emotion ($P < 0.001$), Social skills ($P = 0.003$), and Optimism ($P = 0.002$) components of emotional intelligence had a positive and significant effect on Marital Satisfaction. Within the moral intelligence components, the Responsibility and Compassion variables did not significantly impact Marital Satisfaction ($P < 0.05$). Conversely, the Honesty ($P < 0.001$) and Forgiveness ($P < 0.001$) components of moral intelligence had a positive and significant effect on Marital Satisfaction. The F value received from [Table 2](#) to assess the regression model was 103.368, which was meaningful at a level of less than 0.001. This finding indicates the suitability of the regression model. The R square value was 0.840, indicating that emotional and moral intelligence can account for 84% of the variance in Marital Satisfaction.

Discussion and Conclusion

The main objective of the present study was to investigate the influence of emotional intelligence and moral intelligence on the level of satisfaction in

marriages involving students. The results indicated that, out of the various aspects of emotional intelligence, the comprehension of emotions did not have a noteworthy impact on marital satisfaction. However, the ability to regulate emotions and demonstrate social skills had a positive and substantial effect on marital satisfaction. On the other hand, in the domain of moral intelligence, both responsibility and compassion were found to have no significant influence on marital satisfaction. In contrast, the components of honesty and forgiveness were observed to have a beneficial and significant impact on marital satisfaction.

The finding of this study regarding the issue that the variable of understanding emotions does not have a significant effect on marital satisfaction is inconsistent with previous findings ([Heidarnajad et al., 2018](#); [Mohammadzadeh & Amirian, 2017](#)). In research, it was stated that the expression of feelings and empathic understanding is associated with an increase in marital satisfaction ([Mohammadzadeh & Amirian, 2017](#)). Another study's findings also indicated that improved comprehension among spouses leads to higher levels of marital contentment and ultimately contributes to the

stability and endurance of families (Heidarnejad et al., 2018).

The difference between the results of the present study and these studies may be because of the difference in the study population, the time and place of the study, or the sample size. Another finding of the research, which stated that the components of emotion management and social skills have a positive effect on marital satisfaction, is in line with previous research (Gomes & Sá, 2021; Işık et al., 2020). According to Işık et al.'s research, it was discovered that individuals who can differentiate themselves and effectively manage their emotions have higher levels of marital adaptation and overall life satisfaction (Işık et al., 2020). The findings of another study also showed that the set of social skills plays an essential role in creating satisfactory marital relationships (Gomes & Sá, 2021).

In elucidating this matter, individuals possessing the capacity of their emotions possess a clear sense of self-identity and firm viewpoints. They are empowered to chart their course in life and exhibit composure in highly emotive situations that often lead many others into involuntary conduct and ill-fated decisions, as they base their choices on logic and reason (Homaei & Dasht Bozorgi, 2018). Controlling one's emotions leads to better relationships and reduced conflict with others. Conversely, the outward display of affable emotions elicits positive reactions from those around them. The skillful application of emotional intelligence and mastery over negative emotions play a pivotal role in diminishing discord and elevating marital contentment between partners. Additionally, the quality of interactions before marriage holds the ability to forecast future conjugal relationships. Individuals who encounter difficulties in establishing connections and possess poor communication prowess before matrimony, particularly those prone to social detachment, withdrawal, and harboring negative sentiments, face heightened risks of marital discord and eventual divorce (Mahmoodi, 2020).

The research findings about the limited impact of the responsibility and compassion variables on marital satisfaction are incongruent with previous studies (Homaei & Dasht Bozorgi, 2018; Mahmoodi, 2020; Maleki et al., 2019). Conversely, the findings indicate a positive and substantial relationship between conscientiousness, self-compassion, and marital satisfaction (Maleki et al., 2019). Additionally, another study suggests that self-

differentiation is significantly related to both responsibility and marital satisfaction among nursing students (Homaei & Dasht Bozorgi, 2018). Furthermore, previous research has highlighted the strongest correlation between conscientiousness and marital satisfaction (Sayehmiri et al., 2020). The disparity in results between this study and prior research may be attributed to variations in study population, timing, location, or sample size. However, this research aligns with previous studies in depicting the positive and significant impact of honesty and forgiveness on marital satisfaction (Fetrus & Soetjningsih, 2020; Namvar, 2023; Nihayah et al., 2023). One research paper indicates a positive and significant association between forgiveness and marital satisfaction (Fetrus & Soetjningsih, 2020). Moreover, the findings from a study by Nihayah et al. (2023) demonstrate that forgiveness and spousal social support jointly influence marital satisfaction (Nihayah et al., 2023). Correspondingly, research results establish a correlation between honesty, conscientiousness, and marital satisfaction (Namvar, 2023).

The previously mentioned revelation can be explained by emphasizing that ethical organizations like forgiveness have a pivotal function in preventing significant conflicts that endanger satisfaction and joy within a marriage (Nihayah et al., 2023). Forgiveness is an adaptive emotional process that counters the suppression of sentiments like anger and provides an avenue for their release. Through forgiveness, individuals can express their negative emotions in a controlled manner towards the wrongdoer. Moreover, forgiveness contributes to elevating marital satisfaction by diminishing negative emotions and fostering the growth of positive ones (Namvar, 2023). Forgiveness serves as a therapeutic strategy, showcasing its practicality and profound impact in assuaging anger and bitterness arising from marital transgressions. Ultimately, it influences mental well-being and promotes greater satisfaction. Couples who exhibit pardon towards each other's errors are more likely to experience enhanced satisfaction, intimacy, and commitment. Furthermore, extending forgiveness towards oneself and others diminishes stress, blame, and antagonistic and aggressive behavior in interpersonal relationships, thus cultivating healthier connections (Izadi et al., 2022). The journey of marital fulfillment encompasses multiple peaks and valleys that require

patience and forgiveness from both individuals involved (Sayehmiri et al., 2020).

The current study also had its limitations. This research specifically looked at married individuals who had only completed university education. Therefore, the findings should be applied cautiously to couples with lower educational backgrounds. Moreover, using self-reporting to measure emotion regulation introduces the possibility of biased responses influenced by a desire to be socially accepted. Although this method allows us to gain insight into individuals' perspectives on their emotion regulation processes, it doesn't provide information on physiological and behavioral aspects of emotion regulation. However, the difficulty scale of emotion regulation has limitations, such as the inability to differentiate between various scenarios of emotion regulation. Additionally, existing self-report scales often focus on individual emotion regulation rather than examining it within the context of a couple. By concentrating on the individual, these questionnaires fail to assess aspects of emotion regulation that are unique to couple relationships, such as how spouses react to each other's methods of regulating emotions.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

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