



Original Article

# Relationship of love and marital satisfaction with pornography among married university students in Birjand, Iran

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Pornography can inflict major damages on people, insofar as the role of normal marital relationship is downplayed. This leads to a growing disenchantment in spouses. Love and marital satisfaction are among the factors contributing to the progress and achievement of one's goals in life. This study investigated the relationship of love and marital satisfaction with pornography in married university students in Birjand, Iran.

**Materials and Methods:** This descriptive-correlation study was conducted on 310 married students studying at private and public universities in Birjand, in 2012-2013 academic year using random quota sampling method. Data collection instruments included a demographic questionnaire, Enrich Marital Satisfaction Inventory, Sternberg's Triangular Love Scale and a researcher-made pornography scale. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent-t test, Pearson correlation test, multivariate regression analysis and SPSS software version 15.

**Results:** Results indicated a significant negative relationship between the components of love (i.e. intimacy, passion, commitment) and marital satisfaction ( $P<0.001$ ). In addition, religious orientation and commitment could together determine 23% of pornography variations. Other components were excluded from the equation. Findings also indicated that the mean scores of intimacy, commitment, financial management, and sexual relationship were significantly higher among female students. On the other hand, the mean scores of personality, marital relationship, and religious orientation were significantly higher in male students ( $P<0.05$ ). There was no significant gender-difference in overall mean scores of marital satisfaction ( $P>0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** It appears that pornography has a negative impact on love and marital satisfaction.

**Keywords:** Love, Marital satisfaction, Marriage, Pornography, Students

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## Introduction

Marriage is a sincere and deep social bond between husband and wife. It is developed for several reasons such as peace and comfort, the fulfillment of sexual, social, and psychological needs, reproduction, personal and social development and evolution along with health, personal and social security (1). Inspiring an appropriate feeling in them, marriage can bring physical and psychological health and happiness to couples. This great feeling is called marital satisfaction (2).

Marital satisfaction is the overall assessment of an individual's marital relationship. It is also the reflection of happiness and a combination of content for several marriage-specific factors (3).

Having an effective connection with the spouse, controlling anger, respecting the independence of each other while cooperating, valuing the demands and interests of each other, sympathy and empathy, common goals and inspiration, accepting difficulties and emphasizing positive personalities of partner, friendship, and valuing each other are among the important factors in marital satisfaction and survival (4). Experiencing more positive and deeper feelings, couples with higher marital satisfaction are healthier (5). Sprecher showed that higher marital satisfaction cultivated the sense of love and affection in partners (6). Love is a strong emotional feeling usually towards the opposite sex. It leads to partnership satisfaction and strengthens family foundation (7). There is a significant positive relationship between love and romance, insofar as marital commitment and satisfaction improves with fostering love and affection between the couples (8).

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Failure in couple satisfaction damages family foundation (4). It is also correlated with poor health, depression symptoms, personality problems, inappropriate behaviors, and weak social status (5). Marital dissatisfaction is associated with several physical and mental consequences such as depression, drug abuse, sexual dysfunction, behavioral problems, immunity decline, hypertension, violence, stress, and even divorce (9). It weakens cultural values among the couples and leads to such deviations as interest in pornography (10).

"Pornography" derives from the Greek words "pornē" meaning prostitute and "graphein" meaning to write or to record (11). Attempts to compensate for real life failure in desire satisfaction are sometimes made by tending towards immodest writings, videos, and images. Porn movies and images naturally represent abnormal and mostly unhealthy behaviors (12). Watching such movies is seriously harmful to the extent that natural marital relationships fade away, leading to a growing disenchantment in partners. In other words, this behavior causes that couples distance themselves from their earlier marital relationships. In a long term, it even afflicts them by reluctance and the lack of sexual desire in the marriage through generating false excitements. In addition, watching porn stimulates people to fantasize about their sexual partner, which damages marital relationship by weakening confidence of their partners and developing depression in them. Depressed people keep longer distance from family and society, and become less active in providing their partners with love and other positive emotions. This isolation and coldness are steps taken towards marriage breakdown and divorce (13).

Love and marital satisfaction and various dimensions of them (including sexual relationship) are very important matters due to their impact on mental health. On the other hand, no similar study was found from exploring information databases. Thus, this study was done aiming at investigating the relationship of love and marital satisfaction with pornography in married students in Birjand.

### Materials and Methods

In this correlational study, 350 out of 3,870 married students studying at the private and public universities in Birjand were selected in the academic year 2012-2013, using random quota sampling and Morgan table. After obtaining the approval of the Office of the Supreme Leader and cultural authorities of the university, married students were

listed by their educational level. Then, given the number of married students at each level and obtained sample size, the quota of that level was determined, according to which the subjects were randomly selected. Then, matters regarding research objectives, information confidentiality, and voluntarily nature of the study were explained to them. After that, the questionnaires were distributed among those who willingly participated in the study. Data collection instruments included a demographic questionnaire (including information on gender, age, educational level, number of children, age at marriage), Enrich Marital Satisfaction Inventory, Sternberg's Triangular Love Scale, and researcher-made pornography scale.

### Research instruments

*A) Marital Satisfaction Inventory:* The Enrich Marital Satisfaction Inventory was developed by Olson in 1989. It is comprised of 47 items and 9 sub-scales including: personality issues, marital relationship, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, sexual relationship, children and parenting, family and friends, and religious orientation matters items are scored based on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 "strongly agree" to 5 "strongly disagree". Olson et al. reported the reliability of this inventory as 0.92, using Cronbach's alpha (14). Noorbala et al. also obtained the same Cronbach's alpha (0.92) (15). Reliability of the questionnaire was obtained as 0.88 and 0.81 in the present study, using Cronbach's alpha and split-half coefficients.

*B) Sternberg's Triangular Love Scale:* This 45-item scale was developed by Sternberg to investigate and assess the structure of love based on the vertices of a triangle, namely intimacy, passion, and commitment, each containing 15 questions. Each scale is rated on a 9-point Likert scale (1=not at all, 9=absolutely). The minimum and maximum scores of each subject in each sub-scale are 15 and 145, respectively. Higher scores indicate greater intimacy, passion, and/or commitment. Results from using this questionnaire in various studies suggest it as a valid and reliable instrument, which is applicable in different cultures (16,17). Mashak reported the reliabilities of 0.92, 0.88, and 0.92 for intimacy, passion, and commitment, respectively, using Cronbach's alpha (18).

*C) Pornography Inventory:* This 17-item questionnaire was developed by the researcher after reviewing reliable references. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1=not at all, 5=most often). To measure the content validity of the inventory, the opinions of three instructors and experts on the

subjects were obtained. Then, the desired modifications in terms of relevancy, applicability, fitness, and evaluative capability of the items were introduced, and violating items were excluded. To measure the reliability of the questionnaire, it was administered to a sample of 30 subjects. Items with low correlation coefficient were excluded and finally the Cronbach's alpha of 0.75 was obtained for the inventory, indicating its high reliability. The factor analysis method was used to determine the internal correlation of the questionnaire. Since the Measure of Sampling Adequacy is 0.95 and Bartlett test's outcome was significant, the results of factor analysis are reliable. For factor analysis, the principal components analysis with direct rotation was used and a simple single-factor structure was obtained. The highest factor load is on the items 2, 5, and 7. Reliability of this questionnaire was obtained using Cronbach's alpha (0.87). In split-half test, the Cronbach's alpha values of the first and second halves were measured as 0.79 and 0.78, respectively, with the correlation coefficient of 0.68.

Amongst 350 students who filled in the inventory, 40 incomplete questionnaires were excluded and the remaining ones were analyzed, using SPSS software, version 15. Data was first investigated in terms of normal distribution, using Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Due to having normal distribution, independent t-test, Pearson correlation, and multivariate regression were used at significance level of 0.05.

**Results**

Out of the 310 investigated students, 154 (49.7%) and 156 (50.3%) subjects were male and female, respectively. According to Table 1, the greatest

frequencies belonged to 18-24 years age group (54.2%) and master level (66.1%). The mean ages of male and female students were 28.99±5.58 years and 22.21±3.63 years, respectively ( $P<0.001$ ).

**Table 1.** Demographic specifications pertaining to the students of Birjand universities

	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	154	49.7
	Female	156	50.3
Age	18-24 years	168	54.2
	25-30 years	86	27.7
	Over 30 years	56	18.1
Educational level	Associate degree	32	10.3
	Bachelor	205	66.1
	Master	57	18.4
	PhD	16	5.2

According to the results, 95% of the subjects had opposite-sex friends before marriage. Their relationships involved physical contact in form of touching (24.1%) and sexual (3.9%) behaviors; whereas, 32.2% of them had no physical contact, and their relationship was limited to normal conversations. In addition, 32% of these friendships ended in marriage.

According to the results (Table 2), the mean scores of intimacy, commitment, financial management, and sexual relationship were significantly higher in female students. On the other hand, the mean scores of personality, marital relationships, religious orientation, and pornography were significantly higher among male students ( $P<0.05$ ). There was not any significant difference in overall mean scores of passion and marital satisfaction, and other components of it in male and female students ( $P>0.05$ ).

**Table 2.** Comparison of love, marital satisfaction, and pornography scores in male and female students of Birjand universities

variables	Male		Female		P
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Love	Intimacy	112.98±19.70	117.79±21.61		0.04
	Passion	109.49±23.84	114.06±24.20		0.10
Marital satisfaction	Commitment	112.83±20.24	120.96±23.03		0.001
	Personality issues	9.31±3.35	8.40±3.42		0.02
	Marital relationship	88.9±87.2	8.99±2.44		0.004
	Conflict resolution	10.10±5.07	10.89±3.40		0.11
	Financial management	10.73±3.96	12.55±2.78		<0.001
	Leisure activities	10.07±2.58	10.29±5.28		0.64
	Sexual relationship	11.39±4.70	14.77±3.48		<0.001
	Marriage and children	10.77±4.10	10.90±1.79		0.71
	Family and friends	10.66±3.97	10.86±4.19		0.66
	Religious orientation	9.93±3.52	7.84±2.41		<0.001
	Marital satisfaction	97.72±11.20	98.13±12.77		0/76
Pornography	23.98±13.11	13.36±10.91		<0.001	

Results from Pearson correlation coefficient showed a negative significant relationship between the components of love (intimacy, passion, commitment) and marital satisfaction with pornography in investigated students ( $P < 0.01$ ). According to Table 3, a positive significant relationship was found between the components of love with marital satisfaction ( $P < 0.01$ ).

**Table 3.** Relationship of love and marital satisfaction with pornography in students of Birjand universities

Intimacy	1			
Passion	0.76**	2		
Commitment	0.79**	0.76**	3	
Pornography	-0.31**	-0.25**	-0.36**	4
Marital satisfaction	0.18**	0.14**	0.15**	-0.13**

\*\* $P < 0.01$                       \*\* $P < 0.05$

To determine to what extent the components of love and marital satisfaction can explain pornography, the multivariate stepwise regression test was used, in which the pornography variable was included as the criterion variable and the components of love and marital satisfaction as the predictor variables. Result showed that in the first step, the component "religious orientation", which could explain almost 15% of the variable "pornography" by itself, was included. In the second step, the "commitment" component was included, which increased the coefficient of determination from 15% to 23%. In other words, the components "religious orientation" and "commitment" can together determine almost 23% of the variable "pornography". The remaining components were excluded from the equation (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Regression coefficients pertaining to the capabilities of the components such as love and marital satisfaction in explaining tendency towards students' pornography

Variable	Non-standard Coefficient		Standard Coefficient	Correlation Coefficient	Coefficient of Determination	T	Significance level
	B	Standard error	$\beta$				
Constant	25.75	4.49				5.74	<0.001
Religious orientation	1.36	0.22	0.33	0.40	0.15	6.30	<0.001
Commitment	-0.17	0.03	-0.29	0.48	0.23	5.43	<0.001

**Discussion**

According to the results, 95% of the subjects had opposite-sex friends before marriage. Their relationships involved physical contact in form of touching (24.1%) and sexual (3.9%) behaviors; whereas, 32.2% of them had no physical contact, and their relationship was limited to normal conversations. In addition, in 32.2% of them, their relationship ended in marriage.

In a study by Shahabadi et al., 35.8% of the students had no opposite sex friend, and 36.7% and 27.5% of them had one and more than one opposite-sex friends, respectively. Their relationships involved face-to-face and telephone conversations (28.8%), spending Leisure Activities together (37.9%), and physical and sexual contacts (10.8%); in addition, 22.5% of them no relationship with opposite-sex at all (19).

Blesk-Reчек and Buss believe that men have sexual desires for beginning a relationship with opposite-sex before marriage; whereas, women mostly look for physical support a care in such relations (20).

Shahabadi states that emotional needs, poor religious beliefs, careless and imprudent familial manners, friends and peers pressures, sexual desires, marriage-intended friendship, and marriage

problems are reasons of opposite-sex relationships before marriage (as cited in Ghaffari) (19).

Findings indicate that the mean scores of intimacy, commitment, financial management, and sexual relations are significantly higher among female students; on the other hand, the mean scores of personality matters, marital relationships, and religious orientation are significantly higher in male students; whereas, there was no significant gender-difference in overall mean score of marital satisfaction. Findings of various studies show that as compared to men, women assume a more important role for intimacy in relationship and their score in this component is also higher (21,22). On the other hand, a study suggests no significant gender-difference in intimacy, passion, and commitment scores (23).

Hefazitarghabeه et al. in a study showed no significant gender-difference in the overall mean score of marital satisfaction (23). Findings of Vaghei et al. (24) and Bakhshayesh et al. (25) showed no significant gender-difference in terms of marital satisfaction, but Brezsnyal and Whisman reported higher marital satisfaction among men (26). To explain this finding, it can be said that the sense of dissatisfaction sweeps through the couples. It means that a marital dissatisfied partner negatively

affects the satisfied partner (13). Moreover, gender-difference in marital satisfaction may indicate that this factor and its subscales, including sexual satisfaction, depend on both the man and woman in a marital relationship. In other word, satisfaction and dissatisfaction of man or woman are more affected by marital texture, rather than gender, and depend more on consistency in marriage.

According to the results, the mean score of pornography was significantly higher in male students. Results of some studies suggest a greater prevalence of pornography amongst young men. A study, entitled "Exposure to internet pornography among children and adolescents: a national survey," showed that 82% of the visitors of porn sites are men and only 5% of them are women (27); whereas, some other studies indicated higher tendency of women towards pornography as compared to men (28,29).

Research reveals the expansion of pornographic experiences amongst youths in northern Europe. A study in 2005 into the Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish youths in 2005 demonstrated that 92% of the respondents had seen pornography at least once (30). Above findings are consistent with those of recent studies in northern Europe (29,31,32).

Results of the present study showed a negative significant correlation between the components of love (intimacy, passion, commitment) and marital satisfaction, in general, with pornography. In other words, the experiences of pornography decrease with increasing love and marital satisfaction. The components "religious orientations" and "commitment" could together explain 23% of pornographic changes. Other components were excluded from the study.

Results of a study by Löfgren-Mårtenson et al. entitled "Lust, love, and life: A qualitative study of Swedish adolescents' perceptions and experiences with pornography," showed a negative relationship between pornography and commitment to the partner (33).

Maltby et al. concluded that people with greater life satisfaction use more effective and appropriate coping styles, experience deeper positive emotions and feelings, and have higher general health; in addition, marital dissatisfaction is associated with lower health status, depression, personality problems, inappropriate behaviors, sexual dysfunction, and tendency towards sexual deviation and pornography (5). Safavi et al. showed that marital dissatisfaction is correlated with mental and behavioral problems amongst the couple and their children, bringing various types of social deviations

and abnormalities (34). Low sexual satisfaction leads to decrease or lack of commitment amongst the couple, which per se is associated with sexual disorders leading to greater sexual dissatisfaction. Accordingly, Stets and Hammons, consider the lack of emotional sexual behaviors, or sexuality in each partner as a reason for cheating (35).

Results of different studies show a significant negative correlation between religious beliefs, as an aspect of marital satisfaction, and pornography; in that, those with stronger religious beliefs are less active in pornography (36,37). On the other hand, religious attitude can be effective in marital relationship as religion includes guidance about life, beliefs, and values. This characteristic can affect the marital life (38).

With considering the factors that improve marital satisfaction, it is expected that several mental, emotional, and social problems of families and society in general, are solved. In addition, the improvement of marital satisfaction level provides the couples with greater peace of mind in taking their social, cultural, and economic responsibilities. This will surely benefit their family and society (39).

There are few scattered studies on pornography, aiming at developing new ways to compensate for the shortcomings and barriers to therapeutic conceptualization. This problem inhibits generalization of the results, and makes the extracted therapeutic manual in need of three research replications (according to the Sidman, 1960; cited in Barker, Pistrang and Elliott, 2002): Direct replication (repeating the same study by the same researcher), real replication (repeating the study by other researchers using the same measurement scale), and systematic replication (repeating the study with different population, using other measurement scales).

*Recommendations are as below:*

Addressing uncontrolled variables in future research

Selecting a larger sample size for greater generalization of results and findings

Guiding the subjects in filling out the questionnaire

Conducting the same study into other populations including different provinces and universities

Developing research culture among all segments of the society to facilitate the research process and prevent the researchers' problems caused by the lack of cooperation

Health & treatment centers should be provided with thesis research and findings, and the respective executive authorities should include the findings in

their research programs to develop comprehensive mental health designs.

Regarding the importance of mental health of the society, specific programs for empowering the religious beliefs of the society should be developed and implemented.

Media censorship on sexual issues is among the reasons of pornography and perversion experience in Iran. It necessitates planning for appropriate sexual health education in the media.

Increasing degree of virtual communication, which leads to vague and contradictory opposite-sex relationships, is among the causes of pornography and perversion experience in Iran. This necessitates closer monitoring of websites, chat rooms, etc.

In pre-marriage trainings, other components of a

romantic relationship such as commitment and intimacy should be emphasized. In addition, training young couples in having proper sexual relationship and gaining sexual pleasure is recommended. Along with this, the problems and consequences of experiencing pornography should be expressed.

### Conclusion

The results indicated that love and marital satisfaction had a significant negative relationship with pornography. Having acquirable skills is essential for a good marital relationship. Therefore, training, as an important step towards promoting marital satisfaction and love, can improve couples' skills and decrease their tendency towards porn.

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