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Relationship among attachment styles and coping strategies with stress by marital adjustment

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Abstract

Introduction: This study aimed to prediction of marital adjustment based on attachment styles and coping strategies with stress in housewives.

Materials and Methods: This research conducted through descriptive and correlational method. Therefore, 300 housewives who were member of Dar Al-Quran of Qom province were studied by convenient sampling method. Data analyzed by correlational coefficient and regression.

Results: Results showed the positive and significant relationship between security attachment style and marital adjustment (0.536). No significant relationship has seen between avoidant attachment style and marital adjustment, and there is a significant and negative relationship between ambivalent attachment style and marital adjustment (-0.162).

Conclusion: It seems that secure attachment style can predict marital adjustment. In addition, there is a negative and significant relationship between ambivalent attachment style and marital adjustment otherwise avoidant attachment and coping strategies don't have a significant relationship with marital adjustment.

Keywords: Attachment, Coping strategies, Marital adjustment

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Introduction

One of the areas of compatibility in human life is marital compatibility since a successful and satisfying marriage requires a stable level of compatibility between couples. Many factors are involved in the continuity of married life, and the primary condition in this important matter is an adaptation to the effects of stress-causing stimuli. Unfortunately, it is difficult to adapt to various

situations in the era of tension and rapid social changes (1).

It seems that attachment styles are among the influencing variables in marital adjustment. Attachment theory is one of the influential theories about marital relations. John Bowlby (1969) believes that the nature of the first intimate relationship (mother-infant) determines the nature of a person's intimate relationships

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throughout life. Attachment is generally defined as the emotional atmosphere governing the child's relationship with his caregiver. The fact that the child chews and clings to its caregiver, usually its mother, proves the existence of attachment between them. Attachment theory believes that attachment is a universal bond that exists in all humans, which means humans are influenced by their attachment bonds. Bowlby believes that a person needs an emotional bond for healthy development, and a child's feeling of security is the basis for his mental health (2). According to Ainsworth (1976), attachment is an emotional bond between a growing child and a mother, established from the beginning of birth, but its influence is not limited to childhood but includes all periods of life, even old age.

Three attachment styles have been specified: secure, avoidant, and ambivalent. Proponents of this theory believe that the child's attachment style will continue until adulthood based on internal action patterns of the self and the face of attachment and is reflected in the person's adult relationships (3).

Studies show that attachment styles affect marital adjustment, and spouses of insecure individuals report lower marital adjustment, whereas couples who are both secure show better adjustment compared to couples where one is secure (3). Research in the field of emotional relationships also confirms that attachment dynamics shape the emotional relationships of adults.

According to Bartholomy and Horowitz's studies, attachment styles are divided into four classes, and according to these researchers, these four styles can be placed in defined dimensions by people's representation of their relationships and others. Specifically, secure people with a positive representation of themselves (a valuable and lovable person) and a positive representation of others (responsive and kind people) and anxious people with a negative representation of themselves and a positive representation of others, and people with an attachment style are characterized by having a positive representation of themselves and negative representations about others. Finally, people with a fearful attachment style are characterized by having a negative representation of themselves and negative representations of others. In this way, each of the

four attachment styles results from a unique combination of positive and negative models of self and others. Stress coping strategies are among the other influencing variables in the degree of marital compatibility. Lazarus and Folkman have defined coping strategies as a set of behavioral and cognitive responses that aim to minimize the pressures of a stressful situation (4).

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping methods are a process of identifying internal and external demands and requirements and an active and purposeful process of responding to a stimulus perceived as threatening or requiring the use of resources. The coping method is not an individual and fixed mode but an interactive process constantly changing and modified by experience. The primary approaches to the coping process distinguish three main styles:

A problem-oriented coping style characterized by direct action to reduce pressures or increase stress management skills.

Avoidance-oriented coping style, whose main characteristic is avoiding facing the stressful factor, and emotion-oriented coping style, whose characteristic feature is cognitive strategies that delay the resolution of a stressful factor by giving it a new name and meaning (5).

Studies show that the efficient coping strategies of spouses not only reduce the amount of emotional disturbance but also increase compatibility and marital satisfaction. Therefore, it strengthens the feeling of unity in the couple's life. On the other hand, spouses' ineffective and negative coping strategies against life stress often lead to confusion, disruption of communication functions, and marital incompatibility (6).

Considering the increasing number of marital incompatibilities and, as a result, the high number of divorces in society and the negative consequences that have plagued families, and the mutual relationship between marital compatibility and attachment styles and coping strategies, the present study aims to By predicting attachment styles and ways to deal with stress in marital adjustment, it will provide a broader and clearer insight to this issue for couples and therapists in the field of family counseling to pay more attention to this issue in counseling activities and reduce the marital conflicts by using preventive programs.

Materials and Methods

The current research is descriptive-correlational. The study included 300 housewives aged 25-40, members of Darul-Qur'an in Qom province in 2014 with bachelor's and master's education. Therefore, sampling in this research was available. Also, according to the research purpose and the type of variables, correlation coefficient and then regression were used in the data analysis.

Research tool

A) *Hazan and Shiver Scale*: This scale was created in 1987 and has been standardized in Iran by Rahimian Bogar et al. Secure, avoidant and ambivalent attachment styles are assigned five items. The scoring of this questionnaire has a Likert scale from never (0) to almost always (score 4). The scores of the attachment subscales are obtained by the average of 5 questions of each subscale in such a way that to determine the attachment style of each person, the numerical values of the item are used. The relatedness of each level is added together and divided by 5. Subjects are asked to choose the questions that best describe their characteristic style in close relationships. The factor analysis of Hazan and Shiver's questionnaire (1987) by Collins and Reed (1990) led to the extraction of three factors of secure, avoidant, and ambivalent attachment, which researchers interpret as the capacity to join intimate and close relationships. Hazan and Shiver obtained the retest reliability of this questionnaire as 0.81 and reliability with Cronbach's alpha as 0.78. Collins and Reed also obtained high reliability with Cronbach's alpha as 0.78 for this instrument. Hazan and Shiver (1978) reported good face and content validity and its construct validity as favorable. Cronbach's alpha reliability of this questionnaire in the research paper of Rahimian Boger et al. Ayman was obtained as 0.75, 0.83, 0.81, and 0.77, respectively, which shows good reliability. In addition, its content and face validity were confirmed by several psychological experts (7).

B) *Spiner's Marital Compatibility Scale*: This scale was prepared by Spiner in 1976 and contained 32 questions used to evaluate marriage quality in terms of a man and a woman or both people who live together. Factor analysis shows that this scale measures four dimensions of the

relationship. These four dimensions are marital satisfaction, marital solidarity, marital agreement, and expression of affection. The scoring of this scale is from 0 to 151. A score of 101 or more indicates greater compatibility and a better relationship, and lower scores indicate less compatibility. Spiner (1976) obtained reliability of 0.96 from Cronbach's alpha coefficient method for this scale. In the research of Sharpley and Cross (1982), the reliability of the mentioned scale was 0.96. The obtained internal coefficient was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.91. Spiner calculated the construct validity of the marital adjustment scale to equal 0.86 among married people and 0.88 among divorced people (8).

C) *Lazarus Stress Coping Styles Questionnaire*: This questionnaire is based on the theory of Lazarus and contains 66 questions and examines problem-oriented and emotion-oriented coping styles in eight types of coping styles and on a four-option scale from 0 to 4 is scored. This questionnaire was created by Lazarus and Folkman (1985), and it evaluates a wide range of thoughts and actions that people use when faced with stress or internal or external pressure conditions.

The subject is asked to read the questionnaire statements to determine how much he uses each strategy in the given situation. Sometimes the researcher identifies a specific situation, such as medical treatment or a scientific test, as a stressful one.

The reliability of this test was found to be 0.79 in research by Lazarus using Cronbach's alpha. The standardization of this questionnaire used Cronbach's alpha coefficient to determine the reliability of the coping strategies questionnaire, and the resulting coefficients for the subscales ranged from 0.79 to 0.92 and reported 0.81 for the whole scale. Also, the factor analysis method was used to determine the validity of this questionnaire, and the results confirm that the validity ranges from 0.81 to 0.95 (9).

Results

According to the research findings, the most age group of the respondents is 35-45 years old, with 84 people and 51.9% frequency. People aged less than 25 years, 25 to 35 years, 45 to 55 years, and 55 years and older constitute 2.5%, 25.9%,

19.1%, and 0.6% of the total population, respectively. The research findings show that 24% of the respondents have a bachelor's degree. People with under-diploma, diploma, and post-graduate education levels and above make up 25%, 45%, and 6% of the total test subjects, respectively.

It can be seen that the highest frequency belongs to the category of single children with 34% frequency, followed by the category without children with 29.7%, two children with 17.3%, three children with 14%, and more than three children with 5%.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of research variables

| Variable | Mean | SD | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|--------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Attachment style | 33.96 | 9.116 | 0.281 | -0.630 |
| Coping with stress | 124.20 | 32.305 | 0.098 | -0.496 |
| Marital adjustment | 106.6036 | 21.76273 | -0.088 | 1.153 |

In order to investigate the relationship between secure attachment style (Pearson coefficient: 0.536, $P= 0.073$), avoidant attachment style (Pearson coefficient: -0.073, $P= 0.102$), ambivalent attachment style (Pearson coefficient:

-0.162, $P= 0.002$), and marital adjustment, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used.

A variance analysis test has been used to predict the level of marital compatibility based on attachment styles.

Table 2. Variance analysis

| Model | Total square | Degree of freedom | Mean square | F | P | R | R ² |
|------------|--------------|-------------------|-------------|-------|-------|-------|----------------|
| Regression | 3764.668 | 2 | 1882.334 | 4.056 | 0.018 | 0.163 | 0.52 |
| Remain | 137846.603 | 297 | 464.130 | | | | |
| Total | 141611.271 | 299 | | | | | |

Table 3. Impact factor of attachment styles in regression equation

| | B | Error dev. | β standardized coefficient | t | P |
|-----------------------------|----------|------------|----------------------------------|--------|--------|
| | Constant | 114.122 | 4.935 | - | 23.123 |
| Secure attachment style | 0.089 | 0.374 | 0.014 | 0.239 | 0.811 |
| Ambivalent attachment style | -0.820 | 0.295 | -0.167 | -2.778 | 0.006 |

The results of this research are based on the existence of a relationship between problem-oriented stress coping strategies and marital adjustment based on the Pearson correlation coefficient as follows:

There is no significant relationship between problem-oriented coping strategy and marital adjustment ($P=0.309$, coefficient: -0.029) and emotion-oriented strategy and marital adjustment ($P=0.372$, coefficient: -0.019).

Discussion

According to the statistical findings, it was found that attachment styles are related to marital adjustment, and marital adjustment has a positive relationship with secure style and a negative

relationship with avoidant and ambivalent styles. This result is consistent with the results of Basharat's research (10) regarding the relationship between attachment styles and marital compatibility. These findings suggest several possible explanations that a person who has a secure attachment style has much trust in himself and others, and this is one of the internal foundations of a person that makes him help and assist others and causes a healthy relationship that provides the conditions of compatibility and satisfaction in a person's married life by establishing a healthy relationship with his wife. Also, the results show that attachment style predicts marital adjustment. The more people have a more secure attachment style, the more

their marital adjustment is, and the more people with an insecure attachment style are, the marital adjustment decreases and family disorders and conflicts increase, which is consistent with the findings of the previous studies (11). There is a negative relationship between marital adjustment and ambivalent attachment style. Ambivalent, insecurely attached people have a lower level of happiness and more interpersonal problems than secure people. In addition, studies have shown that ambivalent insecure attachment style is associated with low self-confidence, loneliness, and social withdrawal, which harms married life. This result is consistent with Bowlby's research (12) regarding the negative effect of ambivalent insecure attachment style on marital relationships. Also, the research results show no significant relationship between avoidant attachment style and marital adjustment. People with an avoidant style are sensitive and easy to suffer, and they react to emotional-psychological stress more than others. It is expected that these people are constantly worried and anxious in their interpersonal relationships due to the feeling of insecurity in dealing with affairs, and are not able to create comprehensive solutions to regulate negative emotions, such as separation anxiety, and have low marital compatibility, which Mazaheri's

findings regarding the relationship between attachment styles and marital relationship are consistent (13).

Based on this study and the results of other studies, there is no significant relationship between problem-oriented stress coping strategies and marital adjustment. In emotion-oriented coping, a person has behaviors such as getting nervous, engaging in fault-finding behaviors, mental preoccupation, and fantasizing, and only makes special efforts to solve problems. In emotion-oriented coping, the person is focused on himself, and all his efforts are aimed at reducing his unpleasant feelings; he does not make special efforts to solve problems, leading to marital incompatibility.

Conclusion

The research findings showed that the secure attachment style has a positive relationship with marital adjustment and predicts marital adjustment, also, the ambivalent style has a negative relationship with marital adjustment, and avoidant attachment has no significant relationship with marital adjustment. No significant relationship was observed between stress coping strategies and marital adjustment.

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