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The keys to a good and lasting marriage: Exploration of Iranian couple's experiences

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Abstract:

BACKGROUND AND AIM: Marital satisfaction is a multidimensional phenomenon, which refers to the quality of marital relationship, or the general view of marriage status and reflection of happiness and marital performance. Repetition of certain positive behaviors can make a huge difference in the success of continued married life, and that awareness of such behaviors seems to be critical to recognizing certain warnings. Therefore, this study with qualitative approach conducted to promoting long-term marital satisfaction by exploring couple's experiences.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: This study was conducted using descriptive phenomenology method. The participants were 12 person (six couples) with a history of 20–30 years of married life expectancy and a marital satisfaction score of above 65. The data were collected by purposeful sampling and semi-structured interviews, analyzed using Colaizzi method. By categorizing the codes, subcategories, and main categories were extracted.

RESULTS: An analysis of the experiences of the participants resulted in emergence of eight subcategories, and three main categories: "Strong Foundation For Living Together," "Mutual Commitment To Protecting Marital Cohesion," and "Striving To Improve Sexual Relations."

CONCLUSIONS: A long-term marriage associated with a variety of variables, including a strong foundation for living together, a mutual commitment to protect marital cohesion, and an effort to improve sexuality. And the results showed that the type of relationship will change during the years after marriage in a way that takes on certain meanings and concepts and can be interpreted in physiological, cultural and other specific contexts.

Keywords:

Long married life, marital satisfaction, phenomenology

Introduction

The family formed by marriage and the union of men and women. As societies grow over time, families become more complex and classified, and the nature and quality of family life changes in different economic systems.^[1] Despite many changes in the era of industrialization and the originality of individualism and hedonism, the first and most important institution that has been affected is the family, Which undergone serious changes in the

process of global development, so that this long-standing human center disintegrated in many industrial societies.^[2] Although marriage as a voluntary act is subject to individual desires, and views, human social life and its complex relationships with the environment place marriage about cultural, economic, social, demographic, and even political variables.^[1] In the second half of the twentieth century, divorce replaced death as the endpoint of marriage. This new endpoint of marriage is due to the prolongation of human life, economic, social, psychological and biological improvement of women's lives and the emergence of

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new family relationships and values and laws in the Western world.^[3] Statistics show a significant increase in divorce in the world.^[4] Divorce rates varied widely from country to country in 2018, according to the Global Family Database. From 0.1 per 1000 population in Chile, which has the lowest divorce rate in world, to 2.3 divorces per 1000 population in the USA, which has the highest divorce rate in the world.^[4] and According to National Organization for Civil Registration of Iran (2016), 11% of marriages ended in divorce (by calculating the ratio of divorce to marriage in a given year), of which 6% of divorces registered in the 1st year of marriage.^[5] Iran also has the highest divorce rate among Islamic countries in the Middle East and North Africa.^[6] Given that among life events, marital change such as divorce considered the most stressful events^[7] and has led to many studies on divorce and its causes. These studies tried to understand the divorce process by understanding the factors affecting the dissolution of marriage and the consequences of divorce.^[8,9] Most psychologically oriented marital studies are focused on relatively young couples being divorced, while many marriages continue for decades.^[10] Only in recent years have the scholars started to focus on sustainable and long-lasting marriages. The benefits of marriage seem to increase over time since the couples who have lived longer together have been more efficient, wealthier, and healthier and have had a longer life span than those who have not been married or have lived together for a short period.^[3,11,12] In research as well as day-to-day life, the long-term and stable marriage is often seen as a major goal of life and a key indicator of not only marital success,^[13,14] but also of well-being and health.^[13-15] Although there are certain benefits to being together for a long time, the nature of the long time varies considerably. During this period, some participants reported a happy married life^[16] and some reported fewer good experiences.^[17] Recent studies suggest that long-term marriages are generally very heterogeneous.^[18] In the last two decades, few studies have begun to address the long-term marriage and marital satisfaction.^[19,20] Most studies have assessed the length of such relationships and the quality of the relationships has been neglected during this period.^[21] The results indicate that the repetition of certain small positive behavior can make huge differences in the success of continued married life, and that awareness of the behaviors seems to be critical to recognizing the alarms, for it may lead the couples, coaches, and counselors be informed of that which makes a marriage successful, enabling us to increase the chances of a successful marriage and its durability, and reduce the number of divorces.^[3] Therefore, more qualitative studies are needed to improve the understanding of long-term marriage.^[3] Although the qualitative and phenomenological research provides us with a rich description and interpretation of the phenomenon for those who have experienced it, the phenomenological

approach is the most appropriate method for this study.^[3] In this study, the researchers sought to further understand the phenomenon of long-term satisfaction of married life and marriage durability. Moreover, this study sought to identify the factors leading to the durability of marriage within the framework of a satisfactory marriage. Therefore, the present study was conducted for promoting marital satisfaction by exploring the couples' experiences about long-term marital life.

Materials and Methods

This study conducted using the phenomenological description method in 2016–2017. This approach is a subjective method used to describe the life experiences and understand their meanings.

Study design and setting

Pursuant to a permission obtained from the Ethics Committee at Isfahan University of Medical Sciences (No. IR. MUI. REC.1395.3.021), a purposeful sampling was conducted from the volunteered couples with a history of 20–30 years' married life experience, referred to receive Sama and Saba Services (National Iranian Men's and Women's Health Program) by Community Health Centers affiliated to Isfahan University of Medical Sciences.

Study participants and sampling

The researcher introduced herself in person explaining the purpose and importance of the research to the couples, and sought to build the confidence of the individuals willing to participate in the study. Then, she made the arrangements necessary for the time and place of the interviews. The participants expressed their consent to participate in the study and were able to voluntarily provide the information needed. First, the degree of their marital satisfaction was assessed using the short version of ENRICH marital satisfaction scale. Then, the couples with a marital satisfaction score of above 65 were admitted to the qualitative phase of the study.

The place of interviews was determined by the willingness of the participants. Furthermore, prior to conducting the interviews, a written or verbal informed consent was obtained from each participant. The researcher further observed such ethics of research as confidentiality, anonymity, allowing the participants to quit the interview in case they so desired. The interview guide questions were provided by reviewing the texts and consulting with the field experts.

Data collection tools and technique

After obtaining a letter of reference and consent of participants, the researcher conducted a semi-structured and in-depth interview individually

and privately with each of the male and female participants. In addition to digitally recording the interviews, the researcher made brief notes too. The interview opened with a general and open-ended question: "If you were to, how would you define marital satisfaction?" and then continued with such questions as: "What factors contributed to your marital satisfaction?" "What do you do to keep your partner happy and satisfied?"

Each interview lasted 30–45 min. Where necessary, the second and third interviews were conducted to verify the data and fill in the potential gaps. Data collection continued until there were no further new findings to add to the existing data (data saturation).

The data obtained from this study were analyzed using the Colaizzi method.^[22] First, data analysis opened by repeated reading and re-reading of interview transcripts to help immerse the researcher in the data and find a general perception. Then, the texts were read word by word to extract the codes. The process continued steadily from code extraction to the stage of labeling. Next, the codes were assigned to subcategories based on the differences or similarities. The subcategories were converted to the main categories. Finally, The main categories were determined. Eventually, for each concept, evidence was quoted from the data text. By having the manuscript reviewed by experts experienced in qualitative methodology and study content, the researcher was reassured of the authenticity of the data. The researcher was further reassured of the reliability by recording fully and continuously her activities in collecting and analyzing the data and providing excerpts from the texts of interviews for each category. The texts of a number of interviews, the codes, and categories extracted were made available to the co-researchers literate, but not involved in, the qualitative research, whereupon a consensus of over 80% was obtained.

Ethical consideration

This study approved by the Ethics Committee of Isfahan University of Medical Sciences, No. IR. MUI. REC.1395.3.021.

Results

Twelve participants (six couples) attended in the study. The mean age of the female and male participants was 44.7 and 47.5 years, respectively. The average duration of the married life of the couples was 24 years. Other individual characteristics of the participants are given in Table 1. The analysis of the participants' experiences yielded 18 subsubcategory divisions, 8 subcategories, and 3 main categories, "strong foundation for living together," "mutual commitment to protecting marital cohesion," and "striving to improve sexual relations [Table 2]."

Strong foundation for living together

From the couples' perspectives, appropriate beginning of marriage and couple good fit in marriage were among the most important factors for long-term marital satisfaction.

Appropriate beginning of marriage: the participants believed that easy marriage and respect for customs are among the factors that help form the proper foundation for marriage

Easy to get married

Most participants reported that the conditions should not be made difficult for marriage, and should be based on the ethical values of the couple, excessive demands, formalities, luxuries, costly customs should be minimized and the support of the couples should be attracted. However, basic resources such as having a job, income sufficient for living, independent accommodation should be available. In this context, Participant No. 7, a 46-year-old man, reports:

We started our married life in a room after a plain luxury-free wedding ceremony. It was so lovely. Unlike some other

Table 1: Individual characteristics of the participants

Number	Gender	Age	Married duration	Job	Number of children	Education
1	Female	41	20	Midwife	2	Bachelor's degree in midwifery
2	Female	53	34	Homemaker	3	High school diploma
3	Female	45	22	Homemaker	2	High school diploma
4	Female	39	21	Tailor	2	Junior high school education
5	Male	45	20	Accountant	2	Bachelor's degree in accounting
6	Male	53	34	Taxi driver	3	High school diploma
7	Male	46	22	Retired	2	Bachelor's degree in education
8	Male	46	21	Employee	2	High school diploma
9	Female	40	20	Employee	2	PhD
10	Male	43	20	Employee	2	Bachelor degree
11	Female	50	27	Homemaker	2	High school diploma
12	Male	52	27	Taxi driver	2	High school diploma

Table 2: Subsubcategory divisions, subcategories, and main categories resulting from the couples' experience analysis

Subsub category	Subcategory	Main category
Easy to get married	Appropriate beginning of marriage	Strong foundation for living together
Respect for the customs in the marriage		
Individual and family similarities	Couple good fit in marriage	
Providing informed choice for spouse		
Being influenced by the parents' relationships	Modeling from others marital relations	Mutual commitment to protecting marital cohesion
Learning from other couples' experiences		
Loving each other	Deep emotional relationships between couple	
Having a sense of belonging to each other		
Mutual respect in family relationships	Desirable interaction with each other's families	
Being accepted by each other's families		
Having respect to each other personality	Having life skills for marital issues	
Supporting each other growth and promotion		
Endurance in debates and disputes		
Talking about sexual preferences	Strengthen sexual intimacy	Striving to improve sexual relations
Trying to meet each other's sexual desires		
Make themselves attractive to each other during sexual relation		
Gaining sexual knowledge	Importance of proper sexual education	
Get sexual training for marital life		

families, I wanted to hold our marriage ceremony without the otherwise costly traditional ceremonies.

Respect for the customs in the marriage

According to the participants, observing the ethnic and family traditions, customs, and the elderly's experiences are among the factors contributing to the marital satisfaction of the couples. In this respect, Participant No. 5, a 45-year-old man, reports:

I am a traditionalist, observe family and ethnic traditions. I did my best in the early days of our married life, both when I proposed and then later, to consider the family, relatives, and the traditions.

Couple good fit in marriage: Investigation of the findings indicated that the individual and family similarities, as well as providing informed choice for spouse were the factors to which the couples referred

Individual and family similarities

Honesty, cultural and religious similarities, as well as similar class families, similar lines of thought, and mutual understanding and consensus were the most important criteria that the participants considered when choosing a partner. Faith and moral commitments were the top priorities for the participants and that beauty was not the primary criterion of choice. Participant No. 1, a 41-year-old woman, reports:

It was just his honesty that mattered to me, and as far as same class family is concerned, his family class was almost the same as mine. It was important that we did not have many cultural differences, that is, we did not differ much in our line of thinking.

Providing informed choices wife

An analysis of the results indicated that the participants sought to know each other before marriage and had acquired the knowledge and understanding either individually by talking in person to each other about their interests, priorities, and telling their biography, or through their families by socializing with the family of the other party, or by marriage mediators, or even by local investigation. Couples reported that personal goals, values, restrictions, and shortcomings should be stated explicitly for marriage so that the couples could learn well enough about each other.

Participant No. 8, a 46-year-old man, reports:

I do exactly remember writing my priorities and questions on paper. Even now, my wife still has the paper. I even got down to such details by saying "What kind of food do you like?" and "What color do you like?" At that time, in our city, perhaps no one cared for these things, but I did. I had read books about it. I asked questions and she answered.

Mutual commitment to protecting marital cohesion

This category refers to the factors associated with the couple's mutual commitment to protecting marital cohesion. The analysis of the participants' experiences indicated that modeling from others marital relations, deep emotional relationships between couple, desirable interaction with each other's families and having life skills leading to marital cohesion.

Modeling from others marital relations

According to the participants, learning was based on experience and influenced by the parents' relationships

and Learning from other couples' experiences played a crucial role in the marital cohesion.

Being influenced by parents' relationships

The participants believed that they modeled their parents' married life and their treatment of each other, and were influenced by their parents' mutual help, support, forgiveness, friendship, kindness, intimacy, positive interaction, and romantic relationships, and learned lessons from their mistakes, hardships, and living problems, trying not to repeat such mistakes as not understanding each other, ignoring their demands, not meeting their sexual needs, and comparing their partner with others'. Participant No. 6, a 54-year-old man, reports:

I learned about life and marital relations from my parents. I knew what my mother wanted and said, but my dad didn't. They couldn't understand each other. That's why I always tried to understand my wife.

Learning from other couples' experiences

The participants pointed out that they tried to acquire the experiences from the marital problems and success stories of other couples, modeling certain successful individual relatives and learning lessons from their strengths, faith, proper raising of their children, modernness, studying and caring for continued education and avoided repeating inappropriate behaviors and socializing with couples with marital problems, who were constantly fighting each other in front of others. Participant No. 4, a 39-year-old woman, reports:

Early on in our marriage, we socialized with a relative. Every time we went to their house, they were arguing with each other in front of us.. We came to an understanding that we should socialize less with them, because we thought it might have an impact on our life; so we gradually ended our relationships with them and were very pleased with the decision.

Couples' deep emotional relationships

According to the participants, loving each other and having a sense of belonging to each other lead to a deep emotional relationship between them.

Love each other

The participants perceived the love of the spouse as the factor for the stability of their life, saying that their love had not diminished or become boring over time; rather, it had even improved. They had a deep emotional relationship and did not care to verbally express their love even in front of others. Participant No. 5, a 45-year-old man, reported about verbally expressing love for his wife:

I don't get embarrassed to say to my wife in front of her father: "Come here honey!" or when I come home and find

her parents or my mom there, I don't get embarrassed to hug, kiss, or shake hands with her. Now I love her more than ever before.

Sense of belonging to each other

The participants reported that they sought to instill their sense of belonging in their partners with such romantic behavior, as by embracing, kissing, and shaking hands with them. At the same time, they found themselves beholden to their partners, but they felt a sense of ownership over them and they couldn't stand the attention of others to their partners; some women pointed out to their sense of jealousy aroused when their husband paid attention to another person, saying that they wanted their husband's attention drawn only to them. Participant No. 3, a 45-year-old woman, reports:

When a girl marries a boy, she thinks that he belongs to her and he should no longer be kind to anyone else. At that time, I was very sad because my brother had been martyred in the war. Until then, I had been in touch with no other boy. I didn't like him to be kind to others and if he was, I would become jealous...

Desirable interaction between the couples' families

Analysis of the findings suggested that the participants believed that mutual respect in family relationships and being accepted by each other's families were needed to create a favorable interaction between their families.

Mutual respect for family relationships

The results showed that, from the participants' point of view, when the families respect the couple's privacy and do not interfere in their problems, the couple mutually respects their partner's family. This was expressed in a respectful addressing and attitude. Participant No. 5, a 45-year-old man, reports:

As she had great respect for my father, she would always call him "Sir," and never by the name and would call my mother "Mother." She still calls her so.

Being accepted by each other's families

The participants reported that the bride or groom should be accepted and loved as their own children by each other's families. The parents of the couple should treat each other alike, creating an intimate relationship with each other and their families. The participants believed that the bride and groom were able to grow with their partner's family, learning a lot about education and housekeeping from the elderly. Participant No. 3, a 45-year-old woman, reports:

My father would always tell my husband that he was like his son. Whatever my father wanted to do, he would tell my husband; they felt at home with each other; they were friends. When I was alone, my sister-in-law and mother-in-law would

come over to take me to their homes. They took care of me. They were so kind.

Having life skills for marital issues

From the participants' perspective, having life skills in marital issues like, respect to each other personality, supporting each other growth and promotion and endurance in debates and disputes results in marital cohesion.

Having respect to each other personality

The participants noted that they preserved the authority of their partners in the family, supported and respected them, took their orders, avoided despising them privately or publicly, addressed them by using respectful words, welcomed them on their arrival and venerated them by devoting a special place for them in the family. Participant No. 8, a 46-year-old man, reports:

I always keep telling my kid to respect their mother. "If your mom says something, she wants the best for you." I never treat my kids in a way that makes them think I am against their mother. I will definitely protect their mother's place in the family. I have seen some men complain in disrespectful language in their family. It's terrible. I have never ever disrespected her either privately or publicly.

Supporting each other growth and promotion

Some participants noted that they cared for and encouraged the education of their partners, trying hard to downplay the effect that peripheral problems had on their family and created a relaxed atmosphere at home to help their partners better concentrate while studying. Besides, they tried to correct their improper behavioral patterns, thus supporting each other's individual growth. Participant No. 5, a 45-year-old man, reports on correcting improper patterns:

I had this inherited family pattern of improper consumption at the beginning of our married life. Fortunately, my wife, using a very tactful initiative, tried and managed to gradually change it.

Endurance in debates and disputes

The participants reported that they endured through hard times and helped each other, hard times like the days at the war front, waging war, getting wounded and sick, and then having financial problems and shortages, doing the house chores. They endured through hardships by empathizing and encouraging each other. Being patient, giving up on their demands, pacifying each other, not insisting too much on their demands, respecting each other's beliefs and opinions, and ignoring each other's faults were instances of their endurance. Participant No. 5, a 45-year-old man, reports:

In the course of life, we had the kind of failures that could have discouraged us but we didn't waver and tough as we were,

we faced problems with positive energy as though nothing had happened, and went on with renewed hope.

Participant No. 4, a 39-year-old woman, reports on ignoring each other's faults:

"The love between us is such that we see less of each other's bad qualities and we bring up each other's good works. For example, if I make a mistake, my husband will not tell me straight forward. Me, the same. We do not talk about it directly. He may tell me later what I did was wrong, that I shouldn't have done that. I may be a little less patient than my husband, but he is not like me. He never mentions my faults as they happen. He controls himself and talks about it in due course of time."

Striving to improve sexual relations

This category describes the factors that improve the sexual relations from the couple's point of view. An analysis of the participants' experiences revealed that the couple cared for the quality of their sexual relations. They tried to Strengthen sexual intimacy and sexual education.

Strengthening sexual intimacy

According to the participants, Talking about sexual preferences, Trying to meet each other's sexual desires and Make themselves attractive to each other during sexual relation would lead to improved sexual relations.

Talking about sexual preferences

Participants expressed that they shared their sexual preferences with sincerity, honesty and far from compliments, and in this regard, they expressed their satisfaction and dissatisfaction with each other and expressed their expectations from each other in sexual intercourse.. Participant No. 1, a 41-year-old woman, reports:

From the very beginning (of our married life), we expressed our sexual demands on each other. Naturally, our demands were not carried to the extreme. I think this is very important because this would make your partner take a step that's too big for them. There is no end to such demands. If your partner is to take one huge step every day, they will fall. Demands should be kept proportionate to your partner's mental and physical capacity. They should be kept normal.

Trying to meet each other's sexual desires

The participants reported that they understood and cared for each other's emotional and sexual needs. They respected their partner's sexual demands and sought to meet them. They believed that sexual relations ensured the survival, peace, and happiness of the family, minimizing the differences. They emphasized expressing your love and devoting enough time to it. They cared for their partner's satisfaction with sex and the height of

sexual pleasure (orgasm) on both sides and saw it as a factor for satisfaction in married life. Participant No. 7, a 46-year-old man, reports:

Unquestionably, when a woman is sexually satisfied, she becomes joyful. She gets up and attends further to her house and life. She would love her husband further and make the best of the opportunities that come her way. She would help realize the creativity in her genes. She would be motivated. Unfortunately, however, if she is not sexually satisfied, i. e. not reach perfect orgasm, she will be get disappointed. Even if she is provided with the best life and the best resources, she will not be happy.

Make themselves attractive to each other during sexual relation

Most of the participants reported that physical fitness, like taking a bath, putting on makeup and perfume, are effective in improving attraction during sexual relations. Participant No. 10, a 40-year-old woman, reports:

When I take a shower, dry my hair, wear a nice dress, put on makeup, I feel much fitter for sex! When my husband does the same, takes a shower and shaves, I get attracted more to him.

Importance of proper sexual education

From the participants' point of view, Gaining sexual knowledge and get sexual training for marital life are necessary for improving sexual relation.

Gaining sexual knowledge

Many participants stated that they do not have enough knowledge about sexual issues, also they have not access to valid educational resources. Some of them tried to find a sexual counselor and specialists. No. 12, a 52-year-old man, said:

"I didn't have enough information about sexual relation early in marriage and there was no where for me to go for training. I couldn't ask anyone for shame. Until I found a family counselor and got some good information from him."

Get sexual training for marital life

The participants referred to the need for proper premarital sex counseling using Iran-Islamic patterns, the necessity of sex education by studying authentic training courses and gaining information on the sex differences between men and women, learning about their attitudes, the role of hormones in the menstruation cycle of women and its effect on sexual matters, as well as the necessity of imparting proper marital education to the children getting married. Participant No. 8, a 46-year-old man, reports:

I think real education should be provided at junior or senior high school levels, informing the students besides

observing the religious aspects. I think this is something that the university should work on, offer training courses on, and teach considering the scientific, religious and other conditions.

Discussion

This study focused on the couple's experiences of long-term marital satisfaction, in which, data analysis led to the emergence of three main categories: Strong foundation for living together, mutual commitment to protecting marital cohesion, striving to improve sexual relations. In the following pages, I have discussed each factor.

From the participants' perspective, an important factor associated with long-term marital satisfaction in this project was informed marriage, including creating a proper foundation for marriage and a good-match combined with gaining adequate information that would lead to continued marital satisfaction for the couple. The participants noted that an appropriate formation of an early marriage basis would be realized following an easy marriage combined with respect for traditions.

Furthermore, for the present study, the participants believed that good-match, being well-informed about their prospective partner, honesty, cultural and ethic similarities, shared intellectuality, similar lines of thought, similar education, moral commitment, faith, and religious commitment, and the fact that beauty is not a priority in choosing a partner were among the contributing factors to continued married life. A systematic review of the studies also indicates that the similarity in their education and majors can be a positive and effective contributor to their mutual understanding because it provides sufficient motivation and the proper cultural atmosphere for their verbal and spiritual communication, creating the ground for deep cultural and intellectual convergence.^[23] Religion and religious commitment, too, lead to marital stability and satisfaction with such means as anti-divorce and sharing their religious beliefs.^[23-25]

Another important factor related to long-term marital satisfaction is mutual understanding and compatibility, which comprises modeling the marital and deep emotional relationships between the couples, as well as desirable interaction between the partners' families, harmony in the course life, and protection of cohesion of married life. The researchers suggested that the couple's similar attitudes, behavior, and beliefs could enhance the duration of marriage. Moreover, the similarity in personality traits is an important factor in the marriage stability and that such traits as neuroticism, loyalty, and agreeableness are closely linked to marital compatibility,

which are among the effective contributors to the degree of marital satisfaction and continuation.^[26,27]

From the participants' viewpoint, modeling marital relationships, which comprises modeling the parent's married life, learning from the hardships and problems of the parents' life, modeling the parents' treatment of each other were considered as contributors to marital satisfaction. In this regard, Bandura's learning theory holds that a primary way to learn is to observe the behavior of others. People have mostly learned the negative communication patterns from their parental families. People can also learn better communication skills by observing patterns.^[28] The results of some studies also indicate the relationship between the parental family health and satisfactory marital relations.^[29] Evidence indicates that the effect of the parent's marital relationships is a variable that the couple bring from the past to their marital relationship, the kind that affects their marital satisfaction and intimacy.^[30,31] Furthermore, experiencing or seeing violence and abuse at home is associated with the acceptance and further use of aggression in subsequent intimate relationships.^[32]

The participants believed that the couple's deep emotional relationship is another important factor associated with long-term marital satisfaction, which includes loving each other, having a sense of belonging to each other, and enjoying companionship. In line with the present study, the evidence shows that intimacy, too, is a factor contributing to marital satisfaction. Intimacy has been introduced as a most valuable aspect of human existence and essential to the healthy functioning of human.^[33] It is formed in the context of closeness, similarity to and a loving personal relationship with another person.^[34] What strengthens the marital relationship is the close emotional relationship and intimacy between partners.^[35]

The participants, too, believed that optimal interaction between the couple's families is another important factor associated with long-term marital satisfaction, which includes mutual respect in the family relationships and acceptance by the couple's families. The results of this study indicated that a contributor to the marriage stability is the parental families of the couple and the quality of the relationship between them. Families are an important role model for the couple in setting norms, beliefs, and values related to the relationships; therefore, they can affect the satisfaction and stability of the couple's relationships.^[36] The positive family support, on the one hand, affects the couple's satisfaction with their relationships and is essential to marriage stability.^[37] On the other hand, the negative interference of the couple's family members in the interpersonal relationships of the couple can lead to reduced family commitment, marital insecurity, and conflicts, and could have a negative

impact on the marital satisfaction.^[36] Being accepted by each other's families is another subcategory of positive interaction between the families, contributing to the couple's marital satisfaction. The evidence also indicates that non-acceptance of the bride/groom by the their families is a trauma that would disrupt the couple's and families' relationships and could lead to their mistreatment of the bride/groom and the deprivation of the couple of the emotional and social support of their families.^[38]

Another important factor associated with the long-term marital satisfaction includes harmony in the course of life, which includes compromising, accepting, and respecting each other's personalities, as well as supporting the promotion of each other's individual growth, and satisfaction with their abilities. The evidence suggests that there is a relationship between the family authority and respect for the couple and their satisfaction with the marital relationship. Men feel more powerful and more satisfied when they feel that they have love, concern, and care for their partners.^[39]

Protecting marital cohesion is another important factor related to the long-term marital satisfaction, which includes endurance and giving up in conflicts, stress and tension management, having the living skills in marital relationships, and seeking help from a counselor. The research findings confirm the fact that among the communication interventions that effectively reinforce the emotional relationship between the partners, is tolerance and forgiving the faults, the source of hard feelings, which are potentially a very powerful intervention.^[40] Therefore, one can conclude that training for living skills has been effective in increasing marital satisfaction and hopefulness.^[41] In fact, individuals espouse beliefs on successful completion of a living skill training course that helps them cope with stress and increases their awareness, coping skills, and their cognitive abilities, thus helping them reach their life goals and boosting their hopes.^[42]

An analysis of the experiences indicated that the majority of the participants believed that trying to improve sex is another important factor related to the long-term marital satisfaction, which included paying attention to desirable sex relations, physical and psychological fitness for sex relationship, and the importance of appropriate sex education. Analysis of the results of the study revealed that both in men and women, conversations about sexual preferences, trying to meet each other's sexual desires, physical and psychological fitness in sex, creating change in sexual relations, understanding the flaws in the existing sex education, the necessity of proper sex education when getting married, and trying to acquire sex education in married life increased

marital satisfaction, contributing to continued married life. According to the studies, lack of proper education and sexual skills, as well as unrealistic demands on and performance in the marital relations between the partners played an important role in the development of sexual and marital problems.^[43]

Also, most of the participants reported that physical fitness, like taking a bath, putting on makeup and perfume, are effective in improving attraction during sexual relations. A study by Johnson and colleagues on arousal-related factors in men found that one of the most common characteristics of a sexual partner that led to male arousal was the physical and physical characteristics of their sexual partner. In this study, men showed that unpleasant or pleasant odors played an important role in reducing or increasing arousal.^[44] The difference between this study and the current study was that in this study, in addition to men, these points were also very important for women. Participants in this study stated that having positive *mental imagery* and that people feel good about their bodies to play a role in their sexual desire.

A study by Eric Johnson *et al.* Also found that women's self-esteem or feelings about their bodies could affect men's sexual arousal.^[44] These findings are consistent with the results of Graham *et al.* That women who feel less aroused have unpleasant and negative feelings about themselves and their appearance.^[45]

The research conducted indicated that sex is the highest priority in marital relations and the quality of marital relationships depends on the couple's degree of sexual satisfaction.^[46] However, while sexuality is innate and involuntary, it could be said that sexual attitudes and behavior could be learned and the sexual health of individuals, too, could be improved by enhancing the education.^[47] Educational programs improve marital satisfaction and happiness, which is associated with the increased knowledge of the couple on sexual matters and making adjustment to their unrealistic sexual demands.^[48,49]

Limitations and recommendation

Given the nature of sexual and marital issues in Iranian couples, it was difficult to find couples who volunteered to express their experiences and expectations in the field of marital and sexual satisfaction. Also, some participants did not fully share their experiences and information about sex and marital life with the researcher, and the researcher tried to communicate effectively and conduct all interviews individually and respect for the privacy of individuals, to Gain the trust of the participants as much as possible. The present study was one of the first studies, that conducted in Iran in the field of long-term

married life and the factors affecting it, which conducted to explain the experiences and expectations of Iranian couples from long-term married life. And the results of this study identified the factors affecting long-term married life in Iranian culture and society.

Conclusions

This study was conducted to explore a rich picture of the factors affecting marital satisfaction in a long-term marriage. Despite the limitations of the study, factors like strong foundation for living together, mutual commitment to protecting marital cohesion, striving to improve sexual relations that affect the long-term marriage. It can be concluded from the above that marital satisfaction is associated with various variables, such that the relationship would undergo change over the years after marriage, the kind that takes on specific meanings and concepts and could be interpreted in their own physiological, cultural, and other contexts.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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