

The Questionnaire of Marital Conflicts: A Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

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Abstract

The family provides a healthy context for growth and reform. The function of the family is to support the character formation of its members while creating among them the sense of belonging. There have always been several views about the family with healthy and unhealthy functions. What is present in all these views is that a healthy family is a family in which the spouses are in a healthy and effective relationship. However, most of the couples who attend counseling centers state that their main problems are relationship problems and conflicts. So, there have been always necessary to have a tool for measuring the concept of conflict and its dimensions in every cultural context. To meet this need, the questionnaire of marital conflict has been provided which primary from involves 42 questions in 7 subscales; which, in the present research, it has been tried, to evaluate another one of the main dimensions of marital conflict, decreased effective contact, by adding 12 questions to the primary questionnaire. Then, on its confirmatory factor analysis, the present questionnaire was filled out by 270 participants. The results are indicative of optimal psychometric properties ($\alpha=0.96$), and accepted clinical and scholarly applications.

Keywords: marital conflicts, confirmatory factor analysis, questionnaire, effective relationship, healthy family

1. Introduction

In the human's world, to be joined for being in company usually means a kind of family association. The family is the prime social unit which involves sexual, social, economic, and educational functions (Gerard, Krishna-Kumar, & Buhler, 2003). The family is a natural association which employs different patterns of intercourse in the passage of time. These patterns constitute the family construct; and, besides determining the role of the family members, they also determine the field of behavior for each family members and facilitate among them the exchange of ideas.

The family is a healthy context for growth and reform which its main function is to support the character formation of its members while creating among them the sense of belonging. In fact, every character is born and brought up in the social matrix of the family; and the individual gains maturity and is proved only in this experimental framework (Ackerman, 1982). Minuchin, Montalvo, Guerney, Roseman and Shumer (quoted from Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2007) have enumerated some properties for the families with bad functions that are: the intertwined family, the discrete families, the families with a marginal man member, the families whose parents are not in an emotional relationship, and finally the families with very young parents.

However, the key point that is showing off with respect to the mentioned properties of the families with optimal and non optimal function is the complementary performance between the spouses in order to fit, and the quality of their mutual bilateral relationship. These two factors determine the satisfaction of the marital life; and, they are a key factor for the coordinated action of the family (Prochaska & Norcross, 2010).

The strength and stability of the spouses' subsystem is the key of family stability. The quality of the spouses' dialogue about the differences, and their adoption to meet each other's needs, and formation of the complementary roles, can to a great extent predict the stability and flexibility of the family on the case of changes to meet the needs the family members. Several studies been carried out about the importance of the marital subsystem; which, in all of them the conflict and disorders of marital relationships have been

accompanied by the failure in all the family (Doyle & Markewitz, 2002; Dale, Hagan, Boss, Haterington, & Clingampil, 1999; Yoshimoto, 2005; Popp, Cumming, & Goek-Morey, 2002, Gatis, 2005; Rothbaum, Rosen, Yuji, & Yuchida, 2002; Popp, Cummings, & Shermerhorn, 2004; Harold, Fincham, Asborn, & Kanger, 1997; Jenkins, Donno, O'conner, Rossbach, & O'conner, 2004; Fincham, 2003). The basic skills which are necessary for the fulfillment of the duties of this subsystem include: complementarity and mutual externalizing, i.e., the spouses should create the patterns in which each one of the spouses supports the performance of the other one in many respects. They should create the complementarity patterns which enable each one of them to surrender without the sense of being surrendered.

Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2007) regard that each relationship involves two parts: the content, which is similar to a report, and the communicative dimension, which expresses a demand. These messages determine the stable patterns of the relationships, and define the family regulations. The communicative patterns exhibit the kind of the relationship between the sender and receiver. When the relationship is established based on equality, the interactive pattern will be symmetric. These patterns can both create healthy changes of views, and cause intense competition. If the communicative context is contrastive, the pattern will be complementary. In this pattern, one person is in a superior position, while the other person is in the inferior position. The symmetrical relationships have the properties of egalitarian, and the reduction of differences between the partners; while, the complementary relationships are based on the inequality, and the increased differences between the partners (Prochaska & Norcross, 2010). If the family members change their relationships, their viewpoints about them and about others will change, too.

There are different stressful factors in our daily life. The external stressful factors are accompanied by internal reactions which are usually experienced as emotional, physical, or mental disturbances. The inability to effectively cope with the stresses usually creates conflicts between the individuals, regardless of the stability of their relationships. In the dictionary usage, the cultural conflict has been defined as "to mal-verse; cross and annoy each other, to disagree". Of course, the conflict is not negative per se, and does not necessarily result in destructive consequences (Christensen & Walkinsky, 1988). Rather, it is a process that can cause a better understanding of the differences. To keep the emotional stability and the relationships, positive and logical methods of confronting the conflict are very important (Gerard & Buhler, 2003). In the educating of confronting conflict we realize who we are. Then, we take the chance to learn the appropriate skills of confronting our stresses. The way we confront the conflict and consequences is dependent on our positive understanding of the conflict (Stewart, 2003).

Long and Young (1997) also have provided some classifications of the effective factors of the marital conflicts:

"money, sexual affairs, kindred relations, friends, children, drug use the way of spending leisure time, the religious differences, sexual infidelity, end of mutual love, emotional problems, financial problems, physical abuse, communicative problems, marriage in early Youngness, job conflicts, and etc." (p. 50)

If in the therapeutic marital relationships the emotional offense and sore is not referred to, or the emotional sores grow, particularly if they are old and chronic, the devotional relations will collapse. It means for one sore, the relations will be full of sores, or become vulnerable. In this regard, Gottman employs Cascade Mode to describe the dissolution of marriage. He says that the primary actions are: to complain, vexation and adopting a defensive stand i.e., any kind of attacks that are done via disregarding the other fellow. If the marital conflicts persist, the spouses may detach chronically, which Gottman terms it as Stone Walling. The term stone walling is the extremes way of detachment, and is indicative of that the unity of the spouses is in danger of burial, and it can not be restored even via a powerful emotional even (Long & Young, 2006). According to the systemic view, the current anxiety, the methods of confronting anxiety, and the intensity of the current stresses, or the inflammatory events which are the resonators of anxiety and its process in the system of expanded family, are the main factors of duration, intensity, and persistence of marital conflict (Sanai, 1999). It must be noted that there is always the risk of collision and friction in the system. Therefore, the system should be ready for making necessary contextual changes. In other words, it is not the availability of conflict that determines the quality of marriage; rather, it is the way of confronting the conflict situation that determines the quality of the relationship (Stewart, 2003).

Several expert definitions of conflict have been given (for more information, see Gerard & Buhler, 2003). But, here the definition by Gerard and Buhler (2003) is more emphasized:

"the conflict is a controversy between at least two persons related to each other, in which each one observes the other one as an obstacle for the fulfillment of his/her objectives." (p. 3)

As it has been already mentioned above, the conflict is defined as male-verse and annoy; but, the study by Driver and Gottman (2004) shows that the occurrence of positive emotions such as fun and jubilant in the case of conflict are good predictors of stability and satisfaction in marital relations; and, this, contrary to what was mentioned above, creates coordination. Although in the mass media, movies, books, and magazines always this message is transmitted that conflict is not good, but we had better to change our views of the concept and to see it the different way (Stewart, 2003). The marital relations influence on the partners, and make them to change; and, these all are accompanied with the changes in relations (Cummings & Davis, 2003). The beliefs, the cognizance, and the myths that are available in the mentality of the individuals, including the couples, influence on the way of their communication. The study of these beliefs and their effect on the couples, the function of the family, the marital consistency, and the persistence of their relations can not be neglected. The prologue to the separation of the couples is the marital conflicts which begin with simple arguments, and extend to disputes, fights, and sometime separation. The marital conflicts become sever when the different levels of autonomy or dependency of the couples in the course of coordination and decision making is required. The different levels of conflicts may be resulted from the sensitivity, and it may cause superficial differences or sever conflicts. When each one of the fellows feels inequality, or experiences in equilibrium in getting achievements, the conflict will occur (Long & Young, 2006). The marital conflict may be obvious or hidden, real or unreal, and conscious or unconscious; which, each kind has special consequences on the whole family (Ackreman, 1982; Long & Young, 1997).

Different views have been expressed on the marital conflicts and their dimensions based on different cultural contexts (Young & Long, 2006; Crowe & Ridely, 2000). Also, in Iran Sanai and Barati (2000) based on the systematic view and their therapeutic experiences have enumerated some dimensions for the conflicting way of communication by the Iranian couples. These conflict dimensions can be listed as the following: the reduced coordination, the reduced sexual intercourse, the increased emotional reactions, the increased children's protection, the increased individual's relations with his/her kindred, the decreased family relations with the spouse's kindred, and friends, the separated finances from each other.

Accordingly, a questionnaire was provided to measure the above 7 dimensions, and the general conflict. The questionnaire is a tool with 42 questions, which has been provided to measure the spouses' conflicts, based on the clinical experiences of its builder on working with the Iranian couples. But, since the most primary and the most obvious aspect of the conflict in the marital relations is not present, and the reduced effective relations between the couples is of the most primary occurrences of the conflict between individuals, and the lack of mutual understanding, and the communicative problems are of the most important complains of the couples attending the counseling centers (Ackreman, 1982; Long & Young, 2006; Crowe & Ridely, 2000); then, the builder decided to add to the primary questionnaire another subscale titled "the reduced effective communication".

2. Method

After studying the variables of the questionnaire, and for making its coverage much the better, 12 additional questions were distributed among its questions. The new tool is a questionnaire with 54 questions, which has been prepared by Likert Method. Only because 12 questions were added to the general previous questionnaire, the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) by using Varimax Rotation was employed.

The questionnaire was filled out by a group of 270 people, including 115 men, and 155 women. The common attributes of these couples are: having at least on child, marriage, and living a married life. The marriage here means to live a married life, not signing the marital contract. All other descriptive information of the normalization sample is presented in the table below:

Table 1. The descriptive data of the normalization sample

Descriptive data		Man	Woman	Total
Number of children	1child	77	90	167
	2children	16	28	44
	3 children	7	21	28
	4 children and more	15	16	31
Occupation	Housekeeper	-	104	104
	Civil-servant	64	51	115
	Worker	5	-	5
	Self-employed	46	-	46
Duration of marriage	1-5	31	25	56
	6-10	32	41	73
	11-15	9	29	38
	15-20	12	29	41
	20 and above	24	38	62

In the course of confirmatory factor analysis of the marital conflict questionnaire, after obtaining the letter of introduction for the counseling centers under the National Youth Organization in Tehran, the questionnaire was applied for 293 people; which, 270 questionnaires were selected from them.

3. Results

Since the questionnaire of marital conflict was already normalized (Sanai et al, 1999) for analyzing the questionnaire the confirmatory factor analysis method was employed. For this reason, the obtained data of applying the questionnaire between the participant couples were analyzed by using LISREL software V.8.50. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Confirmatory factor. Analysis of the questions of marital conflict questionnaire

Factors	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	**EV
Cron. α	.89	.61	.57	.33	.89	.57	.71	.69	-
Questions									
4	.388								.307
12	.629								.431
18	.610								.592
25	.528								.480
34	.852								.613
5		.490							.310
13		.469							.330
19		.571							.464
35		.606							.516
40		.511							.330
6			.687						.460
14			.533						.481
20			.682						.422
27			.548						.443
36			.780						.659
42			.401						.319
49			.501						.370
51			.410						.311
9				.598					.389
22				.521					.411

31	.412			.372
38	.518			.329
44	.419			.360
1		.750		.721
23		.722		.705
32		.796		.722
46		.860		.684
50		.623		.617
53		.738		.434
8			.724	.652
15			.721	.676
21			.565	.482
29			.682	.552
37			.726	.682
43			.867	.492
2				.587
10				.646
17				.832
24				.690
33				.732
39				.390
48				.720
3				.565
7				.794
16				.911
26				.930
28				.903
30				.967
41				.795
45				.960
47				.758
52				.735
54				.923

* Factor 1: The decreased coordination

Factor 2: The decreased sexual intercourse

Factor 3: The increased emotional reactions

Factor 4: The increased children's protection

Factor 5: The decreased family relations with the spouse's kindred, and friends

Factor 6: The increased personal relations with his/her own kindred

Factor 7: The separate finances from each other

Factor 8: The decreased effective relation

** Eigen Value

To perform the confirmatory factor analysis the Varimax rotation was employed (n=270). In fact, the accuracy of the factors classification was reviewed. The goodness of fit in this method was calculated with respect to χ^2 value and the variance proportionality χ^2 value shows the difference between the sample and the required matrix of the co variances. The obtained result shows the probability of the data accuracy. This value is sensitive to the non-normality of the sample, and its body.

In this study, the fitness of the model was determined by using square chi, root mean square error of approximation, Akaike information criterion non-normed fit index, goodness of fit index, and adjusted goodness of fit index by using LISREL software. To measure the fitness of the model usually several indexes are employed:

With respect to the data in the above table, and according to the calculations χ^2 value calculated DF=892.10528 in the level of P=.01 is significant. So, the sample body and calculated co variances are statistically significant.

Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) shows the mean residual of covariance-variance matrix of the model in proportion to the data co variance-variance matrix which cut off point is .05, which its value should be less than .05.

Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI) is used to compare the model to the independent model (Zero model) which domain extends from 0 to 1; and, the cut off point greater than 90% is acceptable for the fitness of the model and data; the more it is getting closer to 1, the better the model.

Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) guides the researcher to the discussions on estimating the number of the model parameters; it estimates the sample size; the less these value than the independent model, the better the model.

Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) shows the relationship between the variance and the co variance which domain extends from 0 to 1; the more it is getting close to 1, the better the fitness of the model is shown.

Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) shows the adjusted GFI which requires adjustment (The values of these indexes are shown in Table 3).

Table 3. Indexes of fit factors model in the questionnaire of marital conflict

AGFI	GFI	AIC	NNFI	RMSEA	df	χ^2
.92	.94	253	.95	.032	892	10528

In this section, the relationship between each item and each factor based on Sanai's (1999) 7 factors model has been considered, and the model fitness was determined. The indexes of the model fitness are shown in Table 3. T- Index was significant for all paths ($1.96 < T$). The values of Chi squared, RMSEA, NNFI, AIC, GFI, and AGFI were 2431, 0.26, 0.94, 387, 0.92, and 0.91, respectively. Generally, the values of the indexes are in accordance with their interpretive criteria; and, this shows the sufficiency and adequate validity of the questionnaire. Then, it can be concluded that Sanai's (1991) developed 7 factors model enjoys good fitness.

Table 4. The correlations between 8 factors of the marital conflict questionnaire

Factors	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Decreased coordination	1.00							
Decreased sexual intercourse	.58*	1.00						
Increased emotional reactions	.66*	.60*	1.00					
Increased children's protection	.38*	.43*	.40*	1.00				
Decreased family relations with the spouse's kindred	.79*	.58*	.76*	.42*	1.00			
Increased personal relations with his/her own family	.83*	.67*	.72*	.42*	.82*	1.00		
The separate finances from each other	.78*	.63*	.59*	.29*	.71*	.78*	1.00	
Decreased effective relations	.69*	.55*	.69*	.40*	.69*	.73*	.62*	1.00

*is significant in the significance level of .05.

Cronbach's Alpha for the entire questionnaire in a group of 270 people was calculated to be .96; and, for 8 subscales it is as the following: decreased coordination, .81; decreased sexual intercourse, 0.61; increased emotional reactions, .70; increased children's protection, .33; increased personal relations with his/her own family, .86; decreased family relations with the spouse's kindred and friends, .89; the separate finances from each other, .71; decreased effective relations, .69. On the analyzing step of the test, after running the pilot test, and calculating the correlation between each question and the entire questionnaire and its subscales, due to adequate correlation none of the questions were eliminated. Also, the results of confirmatory analysis show a reliable and adequate build of the questionnaire.

3.1 Validity and Reliability

In Table 3, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for each 8 factors of the questionnaire are separately calculated. The highest Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is related to decreased coordination (.89) and decreased relations with the spouse's kindred and friends (.89); while, the lowest Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is related to children's protection (.33). This shows that mean Alpha coefficient is good.

Compared to the primary confirmatory factor analysis which has reported the entire questionnaire to be .53, Alpha=.96 is much more reliable; and, this shows the more reliability of the questionnaire in the clinical applications and therapeutic activities. The lowest Cronbach's Alpha coefficient belongs to the adjusted coordination subscale (.30); which, in the present study, this has increased to .89. Also, the highest coefficient belongs to the emotional reactions subscale that was reported to be .73; which, on reevaluation decreased to .70.

The difference between the calculated Chi squares is indicative of the suitable differential fitness of the questionnaire, such that in the new questionnaire all the calculated Chi squares have been statistically significant. With respect to the significant correlation of the entire scores of the questionnaire subscales, the validity of the test build is also suitable, and the official validity is proportionate to the main factor adopted in the entire test, i.e., the marital conflict. But, what should be noted for are the specific properties of the normalization sample that are entirely from Tehran; so, the generalization of the psychometric properties of the questionnaire to other cultural positions should be done with grater care and sensitivity. It is obvious that the normalization of the questionnaire in other cultural positions can be the subject of another study on the questionnaire.

4. Conclusion

The present study was carried out after the evaluation of the psychometric properties of the marital conflicts questionnaire, and adding to it a subscale with 12 questions titled "decreased effective relations". It must be mentioned that the review of the primary questionnaire questions reaffirms the findings of the primary confirmatory factor analysis of the questionnaire, and completes its psychometric dimensions. Because the questionnaire has shown high psychometric properties (Alpha = .961) it can both be used in the related studies, and in the clinical and therapeutic applications to help the counselors and psychotherapists. The obtained results show that the questionnaire for all its factors shows high load factors.

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