



## The structure of attraction in the family life cycle, emphasizing the concept of love among married women

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### Abstract

Family, in its life cycle, is associated with changing roles, especially for couples. Compatibility with these changes has a significant effect on the attractive relationships between couples. The present paper aimed to investigate the gravity structure (love-based relationships) in the family life cycle and the effect of contextual variables (such as employment, education level, social capital of the family, and socioeconomic status) on it. Data collecting tool was a Researcher-made questionnaire on love. The statistical population of this study were estimated to be 13161 married women in Gonabad according to the 1995 census. The cluster sampling method was used and the participants were 510 individuals. The results showed the variety of love quality at different stages of family life cycle. In other words, the mean of love quality reduces in the first five steps of the family life cycle by a steady downward trend from 5.59 to 4.20, and then in the final stage of the "empty nest" it increases to 4.38. It also varied only with the arrival of family social capital as contextual variable. Therefore, it can be said that the arising problems from the birth and the growth of children is accompanied by weakening couples' romance. Although social capital can partly mitigates this negative relationship.

**Keywords:** Family, Life Cycle Stages, Love, Social Capital

### Introduction

Human life is associated with social interaction. In other words, social interaction creates group and community by itself. The family also is a social group that plays a fundamental role in the socialization of individuals as well as in the sustainability of the society. According to Forsyth [1] social groups construct and experience different forms of attraction or repulsive relationships such as love, condemnation or hatred. Family member's relationship is no exception to this pattern. These relationship patterns go beyond the family and extend to the community level. As Bernard says, "family life" is the key to understanding human society.

In addition, "family life" is the key to society progress and create a fair worthy world which assures a more secure future. Society can adopt right social policies only based on accurate information about childcare, crime backgrounds, patient care or every other thing. Having information about what "families" are actually doing (and what they cannot do), can support "families" better [2]. However, the family situation is already worrying. An ever-increasing divorce rate indicates new damages in the family. According to the registry office of Khorasan Razavi, the national divorce rate has been increased in

the past decade. This statistic has a high ratio in Khorasan Razavi province, especially Gonabad city. According to National Organization for Civil Registration marriage divorce ratio in 1396 in whole country and Khorasan Razavi province were 3.47 & 3.38 respectively [3]. According to Gonabad Registration Office the same statistics in Gonabad was 2.68 [4].

Exploratory interviews show that interruption in couples' relationships plays a fundamental role in family problems. In the network of human relationships, the inner layer is composed by those who have a lot of emotional interactions with each other, such as family members; father, mother, sister, brother, and specially spouse, who has the most emotional interactions with the person and can satisfy the one's essential needs of love, affection and belonging at the highest degree. Of course, the formation of relationship between couples is not a simple process. Usually, during many deliberations, individuals find out some commonalities by which they can meet one another needs interacting with each other. As long as couples feel that they can meet each other needs, they are satisfied. However, dissatisfaction begins when they observe or feel disruptions in meeting their needs or fulfilling their expectations. The quality of couples' relationships has many effects on themselves, their children, the structure of the family and therefore on the society. In other words, family as a system has mutual influences, either with its internal components or with other external systems [2].

One of the important aspects of couples' relationship is love which has an important impact on the quality of their relationship. When the family life enjoys of love, the satisfaction and happiness are provided to family members. In contrast, the absence of love weakens the couples' relationships day by day. Emotional divorce is one of the forms of quality and degree change of love between couples in the country which is confirmed by many studies such as Scaffai [5]. In an emotional divorce, one of couples, feels lack of love, and with the increase of this feeling, their life becomes weaker. But what is love? The answer to this

question lies in the types and dimensions of love which are presented by researchers. Hatfield and Walser [6] proposed a dual classification of love which distinguishes love with sexual pleasure from love without it. They defined intense emotions, compassion, and pleasure as "romantic love", and deep affection and affinity as "companionate love". A comparison of the theories on love shows that most theorists agree with the dual division of love into romantic and companionate forms. Although Lee [7] suggested more different types of love in their theories, Lee's concepts of "Eros" and "Storge" love, and Sternberg's concepts of "Infatuation" and "Companionate" love confirmed this dichotomy as well. In fact, Sternberg's "Consummate" love which includes all elements of love (commitment, intimacy, and passion) comes from the combination of two types of "Infatuation" and "Companionate" love. Clyde and Susan Hendric [8] found that if romantic love disappears between the couple, all links between them disappears, but if this love transforms into the moderate heat of a companionate love, it leads to couple's happiness. They also argued that romantic love as well as companionate love are correlated with the relationship's commitment and satisfaction. Hatfield and others [9] compared the sustainability of romantic love and companionate love. They concluded that romantic love is decreased relatively quickly, while companionate love remains relatively stable over time. But it should be noted that the instability of romantic love does not violate its importance. Masahiro Masuda [10] investigated and combined two statistical meta-analysis and 33 experimental studies in his research. The common feature of these studies was studying the correlation between satisfaction of the relationship and two types of romantic and companionate love which were measured based on four major theories of Rubin, Lee, Hatfield, and Sternberg. Researches have shown that satisfaction is deeply related to romantic love, but its relevance to companionate love was

unclear due to inhomogeneity of all samples in companionate love studies. In other words, it can be concluded that the romantic love is a necessary part of couple satisfaction from their common life [2].

Researchers have identified different factors correlated with love and its elements. According to the similarity theory, when people are in the vicinity of each other with relatively equal social status and no negative attitudes towards one another, it is expected to get attracted to each other and become friends [11]. Donaldson [12], has reflected the influence of family on the structure of romantic relationships as well as the impact of media on the creation of romantic elements. Kanaani and Mohammadzadeh [13] studied the characteristics and consequences of the relationship in virtual space among both genders using Sigmund Bowman's fluid love theory by qualitative approach. They concluded that dilution, simplicity and anonymity in network contacts and also freedom in the virtual space has too much attracted youth to Internet and online friendships. While aware of the negative consequences of these contacts, such as lack of trust and commitment and the instability of these types of relationships, youth often had a positive attitude toward internet relationships and friendships, and even tended to marry through these relationships. The study of Ghaffari Faresani and Moradi Pourjandani [14], regarding love and its components showed that commitment component was not significantly different, while, the components of intimacy and passion was significantly different between urban and rural families. Eslami [15] also showed that there is a significant difference between the amount of happiness and love (and its dimensions) in different periods of the family life. In other words, the mean score of marital satisfaction for women was higher than that of men and among the components of love, the mean score of intimacy in men was more than that of women [15].

Many of love-related studies have mostly emphasized on the factor of time. In fact, it can be claimed that the change of couples emotions and consequently, their behavior change is a

function of the circumstances resulting from the passage of time and the changes that have occurred to the family. Qamarani and Tabatabai [16] argued that the component of intimacy was not significantly different between the young and middle-aged couples. However, there was a significant difference in the components of commitment and passion between them. Family life theory puts the time at the heart of the various stages of family life. Using this theory, Ellson and colleagues [17], believe that the quality of love among couples is expected to be varied in different stages of family life. That is, the amount of love in the early and final stages of family life, due to parents' responsibilities and the problems caused by the presence of children is higher than the middle stages. In other words, according to this assumption, the love curve in the various stages of the family life is U-shaped. Many researchers have studied the various aspects of family life using this theory. For instance, Hanlin [18] deals with the changes and shifts of relationships quality in different stages of family life cycle, and the situation in which the parents have only one-child. Taksira and Alarco [19] also point to the changes in the family life cycle of the 21st century. In Iran, Bakhtiari [20], Abbasi et al [21], Ganbiripanah, Sharifmoustaf and Ahmad [22] have investigated the couples' relationships quality in different stages of the family life cycle. However, there is limited studies addressing only love on couple's relationships in family life cycle. Therefore, the present research was aimed to investigate the quality of love in the family life cycle and the effect of contextual variables on its changes. Based on research objectives and emphasizing the theory of family life cycle, the below hypothesis is presented:

"The love amount of couples in the first stage of family life cycle is at the highest level. It is decreased by children arrival to the family. This process is continued while growing children, and is increased when children leave their paternity home and the couple arrives at empty nest stage of family life cycle.

## Method

This research was analytical study. The unit of analysis and observation in this study was individual, thus, the analysis level of (macro, meso, micro), the present research was done at micro level. The statistical population of the present study included married women living with their husbands in Gonabad city, Razavi Khorasan province, in 2017. which was equivalent to 13161 individuals (65.1% of the population of women) according to the census of 1395. The sample size for this study was estimated to be 436 people according to the Cochran sampling formula but the researchers, selected 510 people for more confidence using cluster sampling method. Due to the research topic, cultural sensitivity and community members' unwillingness to provide private information about their relationship with their husbands, the researchers faced the challenge of obtaining the correct information and the probability of corrupted internal validity. To overcome this issue, the master students of the sociology and psychology, as trained interviewers, were asked to distribute questionnaires among those who were familiar with them to get the correct information. Although this technique increases internal validity, it can reduce the amount of external validity. To solve this problem, the number of samples was increased from 436 to 510. In order to select the study samples, first; the city was divided into 10 different regions using the geographical map. In the next step, two regions were randomly selected and equal questionnaires were allocated to each region. Then, the students were asked to announce their voluntarily cooperation for distributing the questionnaires in those regions if they knew someone eligible in there.

*The concept of love:* Previous studies have shown that most theorists of love concept agree on the dual division of love and somehow refer to romantic and companionate love. Accordingly, the authors divide love into two categories. The first is the romantic love which is associated with intense emotions companionate, and sexual pleasure according to Hatfield and

Walter. The authors believe that romantic love has a kind of selfishness due to the following: first, the person's behaviors are a response to his own emotional and innate needs, second, in the absence of companionate love, when the romantic love descends, a person gradually leaves his romantic behaviors and tends to get separated. The second quality of love is companionate love which is associated with more desire for support, more rational and less emotional altruistic behaviors.

The research tool consisted of 10 items, half of which were devoted to measure romantic love (selfishness) and the other half to measure companionate love (altruistic). The items of love questionnaire are selected and adjusted using Hatfield and Walter Love scales in a five-point scale with a score between zero and four. Therefore, each quality of love ranges from zero to twenty. The validity of this instrument was initially obtained by using expert agreement method. After a preliminary study on 50 responders, the technique of exploratory factor analysis was also used for more precision. The reliability was also calculated using Cronbach's alpha which was 0.888 and 0.881 for romantic and companionate love, respectively, indicating a high degree of reliability. the items of measuring romantic and companionate love are as below.

Companionate love items:

- I'm sure I can count on my husband's support, even if I have made a mistake.
- My relationship with my husband has been getting better and more intimate since our marriage.
- To meet my husband needs, I'm ready to ignore my own wishes.
- My husband is vary social and always is respectful to me in the presence of others.
- My husband is a hardworking man and always works to provide family members' comfort and welfare.

Romantic love items:

- My husband matches my appearance and beauty ideals.
- I enjoy sitting next to my husband or walking



alongside him and the physical proximity to him.

- I love my husband so that when he gets warm with others (man or woman), I often become jealous.

- My husband is so attractive to me that I always feel his powerful attraction in my entity.

- I have insatiable appetite for getting affection

and kindness from my husband.

In order to combine these two kinds of love and present a unit quantity of love, each type of love was converted to a three-rating scale (including high, medium, and low), ranging from 1 to 3, respectively. The quality of love, based on the responses, is arranged ascending in Table 1.

**Table 1** *The quality rates of love*

Love quality code	Love quality	Romantic love code	Companionate love code
1	No-love	1	1
2	Romantic love to fall	2	1
3	Companionate love to fall	1	2
4	Pure romance love	3	1
5	Pure companionate love	1	3
6	Balanced love	2	2
7	Desirable romantic love	3	2
8	Desirable companionate love	3	2
9	Ideal love	3	3

*The concept of family life cycle:* The theorists believe that the marital satisfaction extends over time in the form of V or U. First, the satisfaction is high because the couples have enough time for being together, then with the children arrival, the problems raises and as a result, the satisfaction decreases and eventually, when their children leave paternity home, the couples' satisfaction goes up. Because they have more time for paying attention to each other. This theory emphasizes on the importance of role change in different periods of life cycle regarding different social contexts. For example, when a child is born, its parents' actions also change; or when a person retires, he must take on new roles that affects not only himself but also his wife. Thus, the view of family life cycle [23], with the emphasis on time and period of events includes the following factors: the age of marriage, the duration of marriage and the presence of children.

In order to measure this concept, it was categorized as a six-level ranking variable, including couples without children, couples with a child or children aged 0-6, couples with children aged 7-12, couples with children aged

13-18, couples with children 19 year and above and finally, the couples at the empty nest stage (the stage at which all the children have left their paternity home). It should be noted that according to many researchers, the selection criteria of family to each level was the age of the largest child living in paternity home.

*Data analysis method:* Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and one-way analysis of variance by SPSS-21.

**Results**

*Description of findings:* About 52 percent of respondents were housekeeper, 42 percent were employed, and the rest of them were unemployed or retired. Besides, the educational level of study sample was as follows: illiterate (2.4%), elementary education (8.7%), secondary or high school (7.9) diploma (25%) associate degree (8.2%), bachelor degree (39.1%) , and master degree (8.7%). The responds to family socioeconomic class was also as the following: at very low level (1.9%) low level (8.1%). moderate level (70.2%), high level (17.3%) and very

high level (2.6%). Furthermore, the stages of the respondents' life cycle was as: without children (17.6%), children aged 0 to 6 years old (17.4%), children aged 7 to 12 years old (15.8%) , children aged 13 to 18 years old (19.2%), children aged 19 years and above (16.5%) and children left their paternity home and making nest empty (13.5%).

The findings for family social capital also were as the following:, at low level (24.5%), moderate level (39.8%) and high level (35.7%). Finally, the quality of love was as follows: love to fall (20.8%), romantic love to fall (8.9%), and companionate love to fall (12.3%). These figures reveal a social crisis. Besides, 1.8% of the respondents had pure romantic love, 2.3% of them had pure companionate love and 20.8% had balanced love. Moreover, good romantic love, good companionate love, and ideal love was responsible for 8.1%, 11.6%, and 13.5% percent of responds, respectively (only one-third of the sample population).

The test of hypothesis: According to the purpose of the study, the type of variables, their measurement levels, the results of normal test and the equivalence variance for groups, one-

way ANOVA was used to test the hypothesis of the research.

According to the variance analysis of equivalence test for groups, the significance value is higher than 0.05. In another words, the variance of the groups is equal enough, to use the analysis of variance test.

According to the variance analysis on the mean difference in the quality of love in different stages of the family life cycle, the sig value is less than 0.05; so the relationship between the quality of love and family life cycle is statistically significant. However, more tests and analysis are needed for studying the changes of love quality within family life cycle.

To detect the love score of which groups in the different stages of the family life cycle is significantly different, post-hoc multiple comparison test was needed. Therefore, Tukey's test was used. Table 2, shows that the love score difference between the stage at which couples had no child and the stage at which they had children aged 19 or above, and also the stage in which couples are at empty nest stage, is significant.

**Table 2** Multiple comparisons of love mean scores at different stages of the family life cycle

Family life cycle stages	Family life cycle stages	Mean difference	Std. error	sig.	95% Confidence interval	
					Lower bound	Upper bound
No child	0-6	0.42	0.37	0.859	-0.64	1.49
	7-12	0.61	0.38	0.616	-0.50	1.72
	13-18	0.72	0.36	0.351	-0.32	1.77
	19 and more	1.38*	0.38	0.004	0.30	2.48
	Empty nest	1.20*	0.39	0.031	0.07	2.35

Table 3, shows the mean score of love in each stage of the family life cycle and its classification, given the significance of the difference between their means. The mean score of love in the group with children aged 19 or above and the group at the empty nest in which all the children have left their paternity home were 4.20 and 4.38, respectively. Due to this significant difference with the non-child group with a mean of 59.5, that was devoted to a different group than the latter. The other three groups could be categorized in one category due to their non-significant differences from

the above groups.

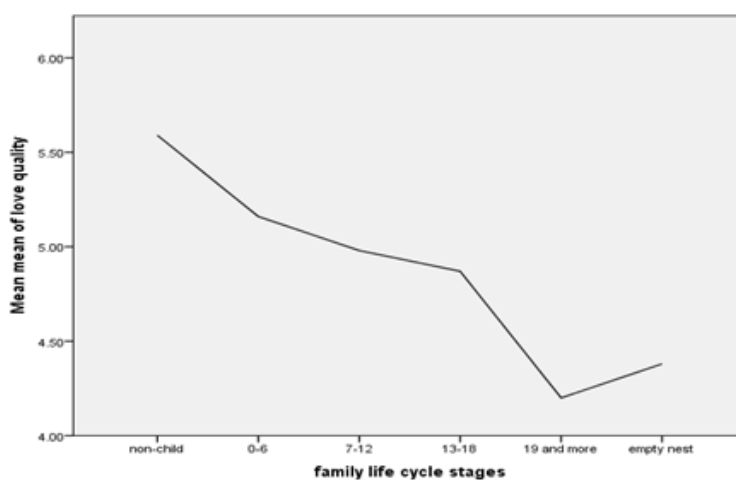
The comparison of love quality at different stages of the family life cycle shows that the mean score of love in the first stage of the above-mentioned cycle, the non-child couples, is at the highest level (5.59), but it decreases in the subsequent stages. In the stages of second to fifth of the family life cycle (couples with children aged 0-6, 7-12, 13-18 and 19 years old or above), the mean of love quality decreases to 5.16, 4.98, 4.87 and 4.20, but at the end of the family life cycle, when all the children leave their paternity home, it

slightly increases to 38.4. This increase, makes the curve of love quality in different phases of the family life cycle U-shaped and confirms

the research hypothesis. Figure 1, shows the mean of love quality in the different stages of family life cycle.

**Table 3** *The categorization of groups*

Family life cycle stages	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
19 and above	108	4.20	
Empty nest	91	4.38	
13-18	127	4.87	4.87
7-12	100	4.98	4.98
0-6	117	5.16	5.16
Non-child	120		5.59



**Figure 1** *The difference between love qualities at different stages of the family life cycle*

In this section, the effect of moderate variables such as respondents’ employment, education, subjective self-evaluation of the socioeconomic class and social capital of the family, on the relationship between the main variables of the research were studied. Regarding to the fact that employment, education and subjective self-evaluation of the social economy, neither alone nor interactively, had no significant effect on this relationship, their details are not provided here. But when social capital of the family entered the model, it revealed that although this variable does not have an interactive effect on the stages of life, it affects the quality of love by itself. The equality analysis of variances in social capital classes shows that the variance of love quality standard error is equal at different stages of the family life and there is no significant difference among them. Therefore, the analysis of variance and the comparison of means can be used.

Table 4 shows the significance of the whole model as well as the separate effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable. It not only confirms that the quality of love varies in different stages of the family life cycle ( $F=2.347$  and  $sig=0.040$ ), but also shows its significant difference among the various classes of family social capital ( $F=24.247$  and  $0.001$ ). However, the interaction of family social capital and different stages of family life cycle was not significant ( $F=1.194$  and  $sig=0.292$ ). In other words, in each phase of the family life cycle, there was no significant difference between the love mean of married women in all three categories of social capital. The R Squared at the bottom of the table shows that the two variables of the family life cycle and family social capital, can account for about 11.6% of the changes of love quality.

**Table 4** Effects between participants (Model Test)

Source	Type III sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	sig.	Partial Eta squared
Corrected model	613.97 <sup>a</sup>	17	36.11	4.88	0.001	0.14
Intercept	9203.90	1	9203.90	1245.63	0.001	0.71
different stages of life cycle	86.71	5	17.34	2.34	0.040	0.02
Family social capital	358.31	2	179.15	24.24	0.001	0.09
life cycle stages* family social capital	88.22	10	8.82	1.19	0.292	0.02

a. R Squared= 0.14 (Adjusted R Squared= 0.11)

At last Tukey's test on the mean score of love at different levels of social capital of the family show that the quality of love mean among married women with low social capital is 3.77 and it reaches to 4.80 and 6.14, when social capital increases to medium and high levels. In addition, the difference in the scores mean of love quality in all three categories of social capital levels was statistically significant at the level of 5% ( $\alpha= 0.05$ ) and thus, they devote to three different categories.

**Discussion**

According to the current study findings, the quality of love among married women in Gonabad is changing over time and during the family life cycle. This result is completely according to the theory of family life cycle. According to the study findings, before child arrival, couples experience the highest level of love and as the children grow older and reach the age of marriage, couples' love amount decreases. Because, due to parents' obligation towards caring their children and its related problems, couples have less time for showing emotional attention to each other and do their marital tasks. However,, the amount of love increases slightly as their children leave their paternity home. The results show that the love score of 46% of the respondents was 5 or less. As it is shown in Table 3, those with the score of 5 or less (in one or both types of romantic and companionate love) have serious shortcomings and consequently, their relationships would not be sufficiently stable. Additionally, only about 4% of the respondents got the score of 4 and 5. The rest of participants (42%) belong to the categories of non-love or falling love which implies a regretful result for the family institution. On the other hand, the

score of love in 54% of respondents is 6 or more which shows that fortunately their love level is balanced, desirable or ideal. The combination of this group of participants is as follows: families without children, and families having children under school age (more than 60%), families having children between 7-12and 13-18 years old (slightly more than 50%), and families with children aged 19 and above, as well as families at empty nest (slightly more than 40%). These figures clearly show that when couples enter the higher stages of the family life cycle, their amount of love decreases. So far, the results, have proved the first half of the theory of family life cycle (the descending slope of the U-shaped curve). According to figure 1, the mean score of love from the first stage of the family life cycle (couples without children) to the fifth stage of the family life cycle (families with children aged 19 and over) has a descending slope, and the mean score of love for families at empty nest is increased only 0.18 point compared with the previous group. This indicates that the second part of the theory of the family life cycle (in which by children leave, the couples' love and marital satisfaction must be increased) is less true for the studied society. In other words, the love curve is not increased with that intensity that the theory emphasizes on it. Probably, this is due to the dependence of the children to their parents, even after leaving their paternity home. This phenomenon, which itself could be due to the lack of supportive institutions for young couples, prevent couples from devoting themselves to each other in complete peace and obligate them to bear the responsibilities of their parenthoods, while their children have left their paternity



home. This finding is also supported by Islami's research in which, there was a significant difference between the qualities of love in different periods of the family life cycle. This difference in the amount of love was observed in couples without children versus couples with preschool children, in couples with children less than 30 months versus couples without children, in couples with school children versus couples having adolescents, as well as between couples with preschool children and couples with adolescent children. In other words, generally speaking, results show that there is a significant difference in the amount of love between the early-life couples who either have no children, or their first child is at early age, and the couples whose children are teenager or young.

Another key point of this research is that the mean score of love in the studied society has increased along with the couples' social capital. The findings showed that the mean score of love in families with low, medium and high social capital was 3.77, 4.80 and 6.14, respectively. This finding can be a supplement to previous one. Because, usually couples lose their parents during time, or do not consider them any more as a social capital to get benefit from them when needed ( of course, not intellectual capital) due to their parents' old age. On the other hand, couples' relationship with their sisters and brothers is also diminished due to the children grow and their emerging problems. Given the fact that the family's social capital is focused on trust and mutual trust to parents and siblings, clearly young couples can benefit more from this capital. Therefore, the more a young couple benefits from social capital, the more they are relied on their parents and if they face a problem, their parents' responsibilities, as couples at higher stages of the family life cycle, would be increased. This is the reason of low sense of happiness and satisfaction or less amount of love among older couples.

### **Conclusion**

Regarding the issues discussed in the previous section, two main results are obtained. First, the more social pressures and social tensions

are existed in a society, the less young couples would have the chance of achieving social and economic stability. The high rates of unemployment, inflation, social harms, and judicial cases in courts, all indicate the harmful pressures on young people mostly as well as the elderly couples, who as the parents also suffer from these pressures. This leads to psychological pressure on individuals and consequently, the weakness and destruction of their relationships with others, including their spouses. Second, older couples can no longer be a good model for their children in the face of social and psychological problems. The inappropriate behavior that children experience during their growth, hinder their personality and intellectual development. As a result, they are not capable to manage their families properly after marriage. Planners' lack of attention to the social atmosphere, educational system (both formal and informal) and economic structures can lead to the repetition of this cycle over continuous generations.

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### **Contribution**

Research design: HS, BS

Data collection: SSH

analysis and article preparation: SSH

### **Conflict of Interest**

"The authors declare that they have no competing interests."

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