

# Research Paper: Comparison of Marital Satisfaction, Marital Intimacy, Sexual Satisfaction and Marital Adjustment of Married Persons (Various Age Difference,) with age and duration of marriage control



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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Marital satisfaction is the correspondence between the expectations a person has of marital life and what one might experience in his life. The present study seeks to compare the marital satisfaction, marital intimacy, sexual satisfaction, and marital adjustment of married persons (various age difference) with age and duration of marriage control.

**Methods:** It is a causal-comparative design and the research population consists of all married students at Ahwaz Islamic Azad University in 2016 - 2017. This sample size consists of 276 subjects who were selected by convenience sampling method. A sample size of at least 30 people per group is recommended in a casual comparative study. Data have been collected via questionnaires. The data have been analyzed using SPSS software version 20 and Levene's Test, MANOVA, MANCOVA tests.

**Results:** The results show that there is no significant difference between marital satisfaction, marital intimacy, sexual satisfaction, and marital adjustment in married people with various age differences. Furthermore, the results also show that there is no significant difference between marital satisfaction, marital intimacy, sexual satisfaction, and marital adjustment in married people (various age differences) with age and duration of marriage control.

**Conclusion:** It should not be assumed that any marriage with the age difference is at risk. The common interests and aspirations, high education, and other similar issues will have such an impact on other changes in many cases that will make the marriage very comfortable.

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## Introduction

Satisfaction with marital life is a very important and complex aspect of a marital relationship. In other words, one of the vital aspects of a marital system is the satisfaction that spouses feel and experience in their relationship [1]. Marital satisfaction is in fact the correspondence between the expectations a person has of marital life and what one might experience in his life. This evolutionary process results from the adaptation of tastes, the recognition of personality traits, the creation of behavioral rules, and the formation of new patterns throughout life [2].

Intimacy among married couples is among the important factors in satisfying and endearing marriages. Intimacy is a dynamic concept in human communication, especially in the marital relationships [3]. Intimacy has emotion nature and includes feeling of closeness and affection. This structure is an interactive process, and the centerpiece of this process is the understanding, acceptance and empathy with the other's feelings [4]. Sexual satisfaction is also a key factor in the sexual health of the individual and is now recognized as a suitable variable for marital stability. In general, couples who have less sexual satisfaction are seeking divorce by themselves [5].

One of the most important factors which affects the survival and growth of the family and the satisfaction of marriage is a healthy relationship based on couples' adjustment that allows them to avoid or solve the conflict in an appropriate manner. So that both are happy with the marriage and their relationship [6]. All couples become step by step aware that marriage will never meet all their expectations; therefore, they will inevitably resort to a range of compromises to achieve maximum satisfaction and minimum frustration by changing their behavior and relationships [7].

Age difference is among the topics of interest in a marriage. The age difference of couples is a feature that has always been considered and various results have been obtained in multifarious studies. In a study by Zhang, Ho and Yip (2012), it was concluded that husbands who were 2 to 4 years older than their spouses, had more satisfaction with their marriage [8]. The results of another study concluded that, after 6-10 years of marriage, reduced marital satisfaction was high for males and females with different age differences than the same age couples [9]. In the study of Kippen, Chapman, Yu (2010), entitled "Homogamy and dyadic approaches to understanding marital instability", through a longitudinal study found that homogeneous and heterogeneous marriage is closely relat-

ed to marital stability [10]. It has been evidenced that there is a significant relationship between the quality of marital life and the age difference, as well as increasing the level of participation of husbands at home and reducing marital problems and better management of life among older women than the rest of the groups [11]. Li and Fung found no mediate the curvilinear age differences in marital quality [12]. One study reported that there is no significant difference between age difference of couples and the tendency to divorce [13]. The other study found that there is no significant difference between age difference and sexual satisfaction among couples [14]. The results of the study by Gustafson and Fransson entitled "Age Differences in couples, social change, given the demographic data in Sweden," were that most men and women with little or no age difference have higher education and non-immigrant economic status and social status, while men and women with a higher age differences and older age of men, have a high degree of education and income, and immigrants. As a result, couples' age differences is effective in quality of life and marriage satisfaction [15]. Hyun, Cheol, and sang Gyu in a study entitled "The Effect of Couples Age Difference on Depression Symptoms in a Longitudinal Study Over the Period 2006-2012 in South Korea", found that peer-to-peer couples compared to couples with differences age show fewer symptoms of depression [16].

Considering the different results of the previous studies, the aim of the present study is to compare the marital satisfaction, marital intimacy, sexual satisfaction and marital adjustment of married persons (various age difference) with age and duration of marriage control.

The following hypotheses have considered to fulfil this aim.

1- There is a significant difference between marital satisfaction, marital intimacy, sexual satisfaction and marital adjustment of married persons with various age differences.

2- There is a significant difference between marital satisfaction, marital intimacy, sexual satisfaction and marital adjustment of married persons with various age differences together with age and duration of marriage control.

## Methods

The present study is a causal-comparative study and the statistical population of this study includes all married students of Ahwaz Azad University in the academ-

ic year of 2016-2017. Using a convenience sampling method, 276 married students were selected as a statistical sample. This sample size consists of 276 subjects who were selected by convenience sampling method. As the aim of the study was to compare the different age spans between the spouses and the participants were the students of Islamic Azad University, it was almost impossible to use the random method and the convenience sampling method was used. A sample size of at least 30 people per group is recommended in an experimental study and casual comparative study [17]. We also had three groups with the sample size of 80 to 110 people. The variables studied included marital satisfaction, marital intimacy, sexual satisfaction and marital adjustment as dependent variables, various age differences as an independent variable, age, and marriage duration have been considered as control variables. In order to analyze the data, descriptive statistics and inferential statistics have been used including Levene's Test, MANOVA, MANCOVA (has been used to control age and marriage duration variables) and SPSS software version 20. Meanwhile, a meaningful level in this the research is  $\alpha < 0.05$ . 300 questionnaires were provided to married students in the academic year 2016-2017 for one week, along with the explanations required by the researcher.

#### The following instruments have been used in this study.

The Enrich Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire has been developed by Olson, Draconman and Forney in 1989. This questionnaire is used as a valid research tool for measuring satisfaction in marital relationships. This questionnaire consists of two sub-scales of 10 and 5 questions. 10 questions evaluates marital relationship, and 5 other questions consist of the idealistic deviant questions. In the present study, the form of 10 questions is used without using diversion questions. The 10-question form has 10 marital satisfaction questions. The scale used is Likert and the answers range from "completely agree" to "completely disagree". In order to obtain the validity and reliability of this questionnaire, a study was conducted on 300 men and women. Cronbach's alpha method and item-scale correlation method were used to calculate reliability. The comparison method between known groups, three methods of convergent validity and factor validity were used to assess the construct validity of the questionnaire. The result of the Cronbach's alpha was 0.74, while the marital satisfaction score in the divorce group was significantly lower than the general population ( $P < 0.001$ ), and the correlation coefficient between Enrich questionnaire with the Enrich questionnaire with 47 was

82.2. In this study, Cronbach's alpha method was used to assess the reliability of the questionnaire. The alpha coefficient of the total marital satisfaction scale was 0.84 [18].

The Marital intimacy questionnaire has been developed by Thompson and Walker in 1983 and contains 17 items. Scoring this tool in a Likert spectrum is 7 degrees from never to always, which is given a score of 1 to 7, respectively. Getting a high score on this scale indicates having more marital intimacy. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of this scale is at 0.97. The result of the study in Iran reported the Cronbach's Alpha at 0.96. The validity has measured using simultaneous performance and it has reported at 0.82 [19]. In this study, the Cronbach alpha method has used to assess the reliability of the scale, and the total alpha coefficient of infertility was 0.98.

Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire (by Yavari Kermani) has used to assess the sexual satisfaction of married people. The developer of the questionnaire used the content validity and construct validity to measure the validity. For the reliability of the questionnaire, a halving method was used which the correlation coefficient was 0.75. This questionnaire has made according to the cultural conditions of Iran and includes 17 questions. The scoring of this tool in a Likert spectrum is 5 degrees from very high to very low, with a score of 5 to 1, respectively. In this study, the Cronbach Alpha method has used to assess the reliability of the scale. The alpha coefficient of the total sexual satisfaction questionnaire was 0.92 [20].

Marital adjustment questionnaire by Locke Wallace (LWMAT) has used to measure marital adjustment. This 15-item tool is one of the first shortest measures to measure marital adjustment. The questions of this questionnaire are multi-choice and the numerical value of the questionnaires varies in different scales. The total scoring range of the questionnaire is from 2 to 158, a score of 100 or less is considered to be a cutoff score, indicating an inconsistency in marital relations. Darabi, Kazemi Asl and Masoudi (2014) determined the reliability of the questionnaire using Cronbach's Alpha at 0.78 and 0.93. In this study, Cronbach's alpha method has used to assess the reliability of the scale. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the marital adjustment questionnaire is 0.84 [21].

## Results

Descriptive findings of this study include frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. Participants

of the study consist of 143 (51.8%) women (49 persons with 0-2, 51 persons with 2-7 and 43 persons with 7-14 years age difference) and 133 (48.2%) men (33 persons with 0-2, 57 persons with 2-7 and 43 persons with 7-14 years age difference).

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics indexes related to the first and second hypotheses of research

Variable	Age difference	Mean	SD	Number	Lowest score	Highest score
Marital Satisfaction	0-2	38.59	7.50	82	13.0	50.0
	2-7	39.11	6.62	108	22.0	50.0
	7-14	37.47	7.50	86	18.0	50.0
Marital intimacy	0-2	95.08	26.76	82	19.0	119.0
	2-7	97.43	22.84	108	23.0	119.0
	7-14	90.69	25.30	86	18.0	119.0
Sexual satisfaction	0-2	63.53	13.41	82	17.0	85.0
	2-7	64.62	11.98	108	34.0	85.0
	7-14	60.75	11.59	86	27.0	82.0
Marital adjustment	0-2	110.54	34.64	82	15.0	158.0
	2-7	115.28	31.86	108	21.0	158.0
	7-14	104.58	34.18	86	17.0	158.0

According to Table 1, marital satisfaction in the group with age difference of 0-2 years, showed the mean of 38.59, the group with age difference of 2 to 7 years, mean of 39.11, and the group with age difference of 7 to 14 years, received the mean 37.47.

The first hypothesis of the study indicates as follows: There is significant difference between marital

satisfaction, marital intimacy, sexual satisfaction and marital adjustment of married persons with various age differences.

Levin’s test for observing the homogeneous assumption of the variance of research variables for the first hypothesis is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Levin test results for homogeneity analysis of variances for conducting tests related to first hypothesis

Variable	Levin test (F)	df (1)	df(2)	P
Marital satisfaction	0.525	2	273	0.592
Marital intimacy	1.679	2	273	0.188
Sexual satisfaction	0.739	2	273	0.478
Marital adjustment	0.786	2	273	0.457

According to Table 2, the significance level of the Levin test for each of the four dependent variables

is greater than 0.05. As a result, homogeneity of the variables has assumed for the research variables.

**Table 3.** Multivariate analysis of variance analysis (MANOVA) on marital satisfaction, marital intimacy, sexual satisfaction and marital adjustment of married persons with various age difference

Exam	The amount	F	df	df of Error	p
Piley effect	0.024	0.806	8.0	542.0	0.597
Wilks Lambda	0.977	0.807	8.0	540.0	0.597
Hoteling effect	0.024	0.808	8.0	538.0	0.596
The biggest root on	0.023	1.537	4.0	271.0	0.192

According to Table 3, the significance level of each of the test is greater than 0.05 ( $p > 0.05$ ) and it has shown that there is no significant difference between the various difference age groups for the dependent variables. Therefore, the first hypothesis of the researcher has rejected and it can be concluded that

there is no significant difference between marital satisfaction, marital intimacy, sexual satisfaction and marital adjustment of married people with various age differences.

The second hypothesis is listed as follows: there is

significant difference between marital satisfaction, marital intimacy, sexual satisfaction and marital adjustment of married persons with age and duration of marriage control.

**Table 4.** Levin test results for homogeneity analysis of variances for conducting tests related to the second hypothesis

Variable	Levin test (F)	df(1)	df(2)	P
Marital satisfaction	0.377	2	273	0.686
Marital intimacy	1.562	2	273	0.212
Sexual satisfaction	0.645	2	273	0.525
Marital adjustment	0.506	2	273	0.604

According to Table 4, the significance level of the Levin test for each of the four dependent variables is greater than 0.05. As a result, homogeneity of the variables has assumed for the research variables.

**Table 5.** The results of MANCOVA on marital satisfaction, marital intimacy, sexual satisfaction and marital adjustment of married persons with age and duration of marriage control

Exam	The amount	F	df	df of Error	p
Piley effect	0.027	0.909	8.0	538.0	0.509
Wilks Lambda	0.973	0.911	8.0	536.0	0.507
Hoteling effect	0.027	0.913	8.0	534.0	0.505
The biggest root on	0.027	1.802	4.0	269.0	0.129

According to Table 5, the significance level of each of the test is greater than 0.05 ( $p > 0.05$ ) and it is shown that there is no significant difference between the various difference age groups with age and duration of marriage control for the dependent variables. Accordingly, the second hypothesis of the researcher has rejected and it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between marital satisfaction, marital intimacy, sexual satisfaction and marital adjustment of married people with various age differences with age and duration of marriage control.

## Discussion

Marriage has different dimensions. Choosing a spouse is a different option. Apart from the close proximity of cultures, geography and education, one of the characteristics of interest is the difference in age. The age difference of couples of all ages has showed that a man is older than woman. The generalization of this norm has seen in most of the eastern and western societies, but in the amount of this difference, multifarious societies are different and even the single society changes over time; in Iran, the phenomenon of choosing a spouse and the difference in age has had a special dispersal.

The present study seeks to compare the marital satisfaction, marital intimacy, sexual satisfaction and marital adjustment of married persons (various age difference) with age and duration of marriage control. Both of the hypotheses are rejected and there are no

significant difference between the marital satisfaction, marital intimacy, sexual satisfaction and marital adjustment of married persons (various age difference) with age and duration of marriage control. Examining the findings in line with the results of the research hypotheses is as follows:

Our results are in consistence with these findings. One study reported that there is no significant difference between age difference of couples and the tendency to divorce [13]. Another study found that there is no significant difference between age difference and sexual satisfaction among couples [14].

The findings are contradictory to numerous findings in the extant literature. One study concluded that reducing marital satisfaction after 6 to 10 years of marriage was higher for couples with age differences than couples with same age [9]. The highest marital satisfaction is for both men and women of marriage with younger spouses [22]. The result reported that the most satisfaction is for men and women having same-age wives [23].

The difference in age of couples is one of the demographic factors, and there is no consensus on determining the boundary for age differences. The issue of age difference between a husband and wife is not something that can be generalized, in other words, it is impossible to give a ruling in all people and expect the woman to always be younger than her husband. The age difference of couples in different

societies and even in a particular society has not been constant over time; in Iran, the mean age difference of 6.6 years in the census of 1966 reached less than half of it in 2016. Therefore, the change in the age difference of couples is non-biological, and social, demographic and economic developments over the past half century in Iranian society can be changed through the weakness of traditions and the spread of new values, individualism and modernization in society and, consequently creating new forms of social norms for family formation, marriage age and couples age intervals.

But the question posed by many researchers in the area of family and health is whether the age difference between spouses can affect their marital satisfaction?

According to the results of various researches, it is difficult to conclude accurately and precisely these various ideas and information. But what is happening is that if age difference of couples is greater, the probability of understanding is greater; because many investigators in the field of family and marriage explained that as many men and women are more fit and affiliated, they have stronger bonding and marriage. Because two people with a very different age will live in two different stages of life, and their needs and characteristics are different and as the age difference between men and women is lower, they will achieve a better understanding of each other.

## Conclusion

There is no universal norm about age differences. The question also arises whether age differences always reduce marital satisfaction and the fragmentation of common life?

The answer is that the definition of the difference in age and its acceptance depends entirely on the culture and education of the family. In the issue of marriage, if basic needs are provided and mutual recognition cannot be considered, the age difference is not one of the main elements of life's durability. Because family life consists of several elements that are the age of couples and the age difference of one, therefore, necessarily as a result of one factor, this family life is not endangered, and there are many who have a large age gap with their spouse. But they have a successful marital life. It can only be said that other elements on this factor can be considered as a threat to family life. It should not be assumed that any marriage with age difference is at risk. The common interests and aspirations, high education and other similar issues, will have such an

impact on other changes in many cases that will make the marriage very comfortable.

One of the limitations of this research, which is one of the most important limitations of psychological research, is the use of convenience sampling method and the limited statistical community of students that should be considered for the generalization of the results. Another limitation is the involvement of married people in answering marital-related questions, which refers to some aspects of the private life of couples. This is also one of the reasons why using the convenience sampling method. Thus, it is suggested to conduct the study with another sampling method and various sample to compare the results.

## Ethical Considerations

### Compliance with ethical guidelines

The research plan was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz branch with code 1313 date 18 April 2020.

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### Authors' contributions

Study design: Maryam Gholamzadeh Jofreh; Data collection and analysis: Neda Roshani; Manuscript preparation: Neda Roshani, Maryam Gholamzadeh Jofreh, Somaieh Salehi.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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